Word Order in Job Interviews: The Malaysian Perspective

Selvajothi Ramalingam[1], Isai Amutan Krishnan[2*], Puspalata C. Suppiah[3], Elanttamil Maruthai[4]

[1]Faculty of Languages and Linguistics
University of Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur
selvajothi@um.edu.my
[*2]Faculty of Languages and Linguistics
University of Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur
amuthan.isai@gmail.com
[3]Academy of Language Studies,
UiTM Shah Alam, Selangor
puspalata@uitm.edu.my
[4]Faculty of Languages and Linguistics
University of Malaya, 50603 Kuala Lumpur
elanttamil@um.edu.my
[*]Corresponding Author

Abstract The present study was conducted to analyse the use of word order in job interviews. The data was collected from participants in an organisation in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Ten candidates of different races between the ages of 23 and 25 participated in the study. Radford's syntactic theory of word order was employed to qualitatively analyse the data. It was found that positive sentences were predominantly used by the selected (n = 10; 47.4%) compared to the not selected (n = 10; 44.0%) and keep in view (KIV) (n = 23; 39.0%) job candidates. The findings further revealed that the types of word order used in utterances by the selected candidates were different compared to those who were not chosen for interviews. Selected candidates used more negative sentences, subordinate clauses, and time expression in sentences, whereas those who were not selected utilised adverbs of manner in negative sentences, subordinate clauses, and time expression in sentences, while the not selected candidates only used the position of adverbs. On the other hand, the KIV candidates used positive sentences, subordinate clauses and word order in questions in their utterances. The study can provide important contributions to knowledge on the use of English when developing employment course modules emphasising word order as an essential element in portraying good English language proficiency in job interviews.

Keywords: Malaysia, fresh graduates, job interview, word order

1.   Introduction and Background of the Study

The English language is globally recognised as an important medium of communication and often plays an instrumental role in job interviews. In addition, The Ministry of Education (Malaysia) has been trying to improve the standard of English among the students. For instance, there has been an increasing number of trained and qualified English teachers to enhance the teaching and learning process (Boo, Ai, & Voon, 2019). Employers are particularly concerned about the level of English spoken by interviewees as it enhances their employment opportunities. Employers have indicated that most jobs require not only knowledge and specific technical competencies but also a certain level of language proficiency (Vincent, 2020). It is not surprising that Malaysian employers rate proficiency as the most critical soft skill that is

lacking among fresh graduates of higher education institutions because English language is considered one of the most important languages of communication in Malaysia for specific purposes, especially in the private sector (Majid, 2019; Kunagaratnam, 2018). Generally, Malaysian employers have expressed their dissatisfaction at the level of preparedness of fresh graduates as prospective employees. It is widely known that English language proficiency (hereafter proficiency) for entry-level employment has emerged as a complex issue that demands immediate attention (Krishnan, Hee, Ramalingam, & Maruthai, 2017; Malaysian Employers Federation, 2019).

The issue of employability of fresh graduates has invited many intense discussions in print and electronic media, especially following a survey report appearing in JobStreet (2014) that reported 60,000 graduates were unemployed (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (2016, 2017). At the same time, employers have lamented that poor proficiency has hampered the ability of fresh graduates to communicate effectively at their workplaces. A national study commissioned by the Ministry of Higher Education (2017) found that more than 54% of fresh graduates from six universities in Malaysia possessed limited proficiency in their use of grammatical patterns, particularly with regard to word order. Fifty-eight percent of them were considered unable to carry out meaningful interactions in job interviews due to poor knowledge of word order, while 77% were unable to display their employability skills due to poor proficiency. Chiara and Magali (2019) also commented that fresh graduates were unable to present their ideas and explain issues while speaking in group discussions, meetings, presentations and when conveying ideas in planned and impromptu situations due to limited proficiency.

Furthermore, many Malaysian employers have drawn attention to discrepancies between graduates' proficiency represented by their SPM (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia) and MUET (Malaysian University English Test) scores or grades in university language courses and their actual performance in job interviews. Generally, an excellent score in SPM and/or MUET English (A or A-) would clearly imply the capacity for excellent performance in proficiency during a recruitment exercise. In reality, however, the reverse situation is exposed when candidates with good scores in SPM and MUET do not perform well in job interviews. Therefore, the present study was conducted to analyse the use of word order in job interviews among fresh graduates under the categories of selected, keep in view (KIV) and not selected job applicants.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of Language Proficiency

Language proficiency consists of grammar (sentence structure and word order), vocabulary (lexis) and pronunciation covering four core components: speaking, listening, reading and writing. Research has been conducted on language proficiency, and the findings of the earliest discovered in the literature review, Lado (1961), were similar to those of Canala and Swain (1980, 1983), Kramsch (1986), Celce-Murcia (1988), and Bachman and Palmer (1996), similarly defining language proficiency and language ability in interaction. The above views were reiterated by Celce-Murcia (1995) and Bachman and Palmer (2010), who added that language abilities (i.e., language proficiency) refer to communicative competence comprising abilities, knowledge or skills that pertain to language proficiency. These research studies establish that scholars of applied linguistics have arrived at an understanding that a proficient language user should have language proficiency or the ability and skill to use the language to communicate either in a professional context or in a social context, such as in job interviews (Bachman & Palmer, 2010).

2.2 Theoretical Framework

It is relevant to define word order based on the language that is being used in the context of this study. Radford's (1990, 1997) theory of word order was selected for analysis. He is known for generative grammar, principles and parameters of language development, structure building model of child language acquisition and his research on the transformational grammar of English, hence his definition and views on word order are appropriate for spoken and written analysis. Table 1 presents the different types of word order and their definitions derived from Radford's theory of word order.

Table 1. Definition of Word Order

Word Order	Definitions and Sample Sentences
1. Positive Sentence	A positive sentence refers to subject, verb and an object (Subject + verb+ object) of a sentence. After the object verb can be added to complete the time information. e.g. I will share the tips with you at school tomorrow. Subject-I Verb(s)-will share Indirect object-you Direct object-the tips Place-school Time-tomorrow
2. Negative Sentence	A negative sentence refers to something false by adding the word 'not' after the verbs or, helping verbs and auxiliary verbs. e.g. I will not share the tips with you at school tomorrow. Subject-I Verb(s)-will *not* share Indirect object-you Direct object-the tips Place-school Time-tomorrow
3. Subordinate Clause	**A subordinate clause that begins with a subordinate conjunction or relative pronoun that consists of relative pronoun and both a subject and a verb.** e.g. I will share the tips with you at school tomorrow because I am not free now. Subject-I Verb(s)-will *share* Indirect object-you Direct object-the tips Place-school Time-tomorrow Conjunction-because

4. Position of time expression	A position of time expression refers to putting the time statement at the end of the sentence. The time statement also can be at the beginning of the sentence as it is not the main focus. e.g. I will not share the tips with you at school tomorrow. Verb(s)-will *not* share Indirect object-you Direct object-the tips Place-school Time-tomorrow (adverb of time always put at the end of sentence If you do not want to emphasise time, you can put the adverb at the beginning of the sentence. Tomorrow I will share the tips with you at school. Adverbs of frequency (always, never, usually) should be put before the main verb He always plays football. We usually go for vacations during the summer She has never been abroad.
5. Position of Adverb of manner	The position of an adverb refers to the front, middle or at the end of a clause. The front position of the clause is the first item in the clause which comes after the main verb to be. e.g. She drives the car carefully Subject - she Verb - drives Direct object - the car Adverb – carefully
6. Word order in questions	Word order in a question refers to subject + verb + subject as in affirmative sentences which interrogative is always in the beginning of the sentence. e.g. What would you like to do? Interrogative-what Auxiliary verb-would Subject-you Other verb(s)-like to do

Source: *Transformational Grammar and Syntactic Theory and Structure of English (Radford, 1990; 1997)*

Word order is important in English language interaction as it can impact the meaning of what one is trying to express. Proper and correct formulation of word order is an important element in professional interactions (Scrivener, 2015). For instance, 'The duck crossed the road' and 'The road crossed the duck' have two different meanings as the subjects and objects are reversed. The same would be true if the verb was used incorrectly as in 'Crossed the road the duck'. Therefore, correct word order affects the meaning of any sentence. Radford (1990, 1997) explained that the presence of subject and object agreement in a sentence in English determines the progression involved in agreement in any social context or professional interaction. However, for professional interactions, word order is of utmost importance as Radford (1990, 1997) has emphasised that word order expresses a speaker's knowledge of language as it gives the intended meaning in the interaction. Apart from that, Halliday (2014) has mentioned that when communicating in English, word order determines the sequence of sentences that gives impact to the meaning of what one is trying to say, otherwise, expressions will be unclear and confused. Therefore, word order consists of the syntactic elements in any interaction (Halliday, 1985, 2014; Radford, 1990, 1997). The use of word order creates significant meaning in any interaction and portrays the proficiency of speakers. As for the purpose of the present study, Radford's word order framework is used to analyse the proficiency of job applicants in interviews.

2.3   Past Studies

The issue of proficiency is not confined to Malaysian graduates only but also involves graduates of other countries like Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. These countries have taken proactive measures to overcome the declining standards of English. A survey conducted on the banks in Hong Kong, reported that almost half of the graduate employees had poor proficiency related to spelling mistakes, poor expression and grammatical errors (Christina, 2018).

In 2019, the Japanese government proposed two strategies to boost the Japanese students' command of the English language, and almost 1,000 senior high school students were sent abroad to participate in an immersion programme to help them to speak the language. About 6,000 Japanese teachers working in public schools had to undergo a special training programme to improve their English during the summer holidays over a period of five years. Japanese universities have undertaken proactive measures to improve the English competency of their graduates to enhance their job opportunities (Daily Yomiuri, 2020). Keio University, for example, offered scientific technology courses, and lectures were conducted in English. The Science and Engineering departments at Waseda University in collaboration with the University of Michigan introduced a course to teach engineering in English. Similarly, Seijo University introduced a student-exchange program with the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (Daily Yomiuri, 2020). In Korea, steps ranging from drastic reform in the English education system to the creation of an environment conducive to practicing the use of English have been suggested. The Taiwanese government, on the other hand, introduced a nationwide evaluation examination in English for those with a junior high school education in an effort to encourage the population to improve their English competency and compete in the global economy.

Kenayathulla, Ahmad and Idris (2019) conducted a study on competence in employability skills and proficiency and found there existed a gap between the two that had widened. Consequently, unemployment of graduates was expected to increase, and the efforts to transform the nation into a high-income economy would be impeded. In view of the seriousness of the issue, Mohamad Zuber Abd Majid, Muhammad Hussin, Muhammad Helmi Norman, and Kasavan (2020) conducted a market survey to investigate the needs of industries for graduates competent in English in entry-level employment. The objectives of their survey were to investigate the extent of proficiency among Malaysian university graduates in the recruitment process as well as the inclination towards the use of vocational English competency testing for employment. Further, Rahmat, Buntat and Ayub (2015), Ahmad, Kenayathulla and Idris (2017) and Azmi, Hashim, and Yusoff (2018) conducted studies on employability skills in general and revealed that most of the fresh graduates were unable to portray their employability skills due to poor proficiency. Furthermore, the Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia (2016, 2017), Malaysian Employers

Federation (2019), Chiara and Magali (2019), and Vincent (2020) have highlighted that many fresh graduates were not hired because of poor language proficiency.

The brief review of literature has shown different findings on proficiency indicating that proficiency is of utmost importance in job interviews. Although proactive measures have been undertaken by companies, institutions of higher learning and even the federal government, employers have drawn attention to the widening gap in proficiency, particularly in the use of word order. This element is required for employment in the current workforce, and if it is integrated, it can contribute significantly in job interviews. The reviews show that while research has been conducted on various aspects of employability skills, little research has been attempted on word order in job interviews. Hence, the current study attempts to provide specific answers regarding the objective indicated in the study.

3.   Methodology

Data was collected from one of the Small to Medium Enterprises situated in Kuala Lumpur City Centre, Malaysia. This organisation provided customer services and technical support to vendors. The organisation had a walk-in-interview session for ten vacancies for the posts of officers and executives. There were 56 candidates who attended the job interviews. However, only ten recordings were given to the researchers, with certain restrictions. The selected ten fresh graduates were aged between 23 and 25 years old, were of different races and genders, and were from public universities in Malaysia. The fresh graduates had obtained their bachelor's degrees from various courses such as marketing, management, business administration and economics. They were required to sit for an internal placement test and situational questions that dealt with customer services based on their English proficiency. As Creswell (2018) noted, for any studies in which the data is collected from spoken settings and the analyses are on the utterances, qualitative methodology is suitable. Therefore, for the present study, a qualitative method was employed. The job interview data was recorded and transcribed in the premise by the researcher. The study was not focused on conversation analysis, stressed patterns, prosody or any phonological aspects. Therefore, transcription notation symbols were not used for the present study. The data was categorically analysed based on the word-order theory by Radford (1990; 1997) for linguistic forms such as positive sentences, word order in negative sentences, subordinate clauses, position of time expression in sentences, position of adverbs of manner and word order in questions (see Table 1). Finally, the data was verified by three experts in languages and linguistics to ensure the correct excerpts had been chosen for the analysis. For the purpose of the present study, only selected excerpts were used as Wodak (2013) noted, for a spoken data, even one excerpt is essential for qualitative studies. Abbreviations were used for interviewer (IR) and Candidate (C) in the analysis, as can be seen in the excerpts.

4.   Finding and Analysis

The word order analysis is divided into three sections. They are selected, kept in view (KIV) and not selected. There are six types of word order, namely, word order in positive sentences, negative sentences, questions and position of time expressions in sentences, subordinate clauses, and position of adverbs of manner. Table 2 shows the word order used in the utterances of selected (S), keep in view (KIV) and not selected candidates (NS).

Table 2. Utterances of word order of selected, KIV and not selected candidates

Candidates	Total Sentences	Number of Positive Sentences	Number of Negative Sentences	Number of Subordinate Clauses	Number of Position of time expression Sentences	Number of Position of Adverbs of manner	Number of Word order questions
S1 (C13)	80	30 (47.4%)	5 (5.6%)	22 (32.4%)	8 (12.7%)	6 (8.5%)	7 (1.4%)
S2 (C14)	65	13 (25.0%)	11 (27.3%)	10 (25.0%)	4 (2.3%)	9 (13.6%)	6 (6.8%)
S3 (C7)	57	28 (44.8%)	8 (8.6%)	18 (24.1%)	1 (1.7%)	12 (10.3%)	6 (10.3%)
KIV1 (C6)	64	23 (39.0%)	5 (13.2%)	11 (16.2%)	7 (10.3%)	4 (7.4%)	7 (2.9%)
KIV2 (C5)	55	17 (35.3%)	6 (15.7%)	6 (7.8%)	5 (9.8%)	6 (7.8%)	12 (23.5%)
KIV3 (C25)	48	22 (30.7%)	4 (5.4%)	10 (32.4%)	4 (8.1%)	- (0 %)	8 (2.7%)
NS1 (C19)	30	15 (44.0%)	4 (14.3%)	4 (14.3%)	7 (7.1%)	4 (17.9%)	3 (10.7%)
NS2 (C22)	25	11 (37.0%)	5 (14.8%)	7 (25.9%)	4 (3.7%)	3 (11.1%)	2 (7.4%)
NS3 (C21)	28	12 (38.5%)	3 (11.5%)	4 (19.2%)	4 (11.5%)	3 (11.5%)	2 (7.7%)

The word order of positive sentences was predominately uttered by the selected candidates (n = 30; 47.4%) followed by the not selected candidates (n = 15; 44.0%). The KIV candidates were least predominant in the use of word order in positive sentences (n = 23; 39.0%). The word order in negative sentences was mostly uttered by the selected candidates (n = 11; 27.3%). This was followed by the KIV candidates (n = 6; 15.7%). The word order in negative sentences was least predominantly uttered by the KIV candidates. Subordinate clauses were mainly used by both the selected (n = 22; 32.4%) and the KIV (n = 10; 32.4%) candidates, whereas subordinate clauses were least used by the KIV candidates. The

position of time expressions in sentences was mostly utilized by the selected candidates (n = 8; 12.7%) followed by the not selected candidates (n = 4; 17.9%). Time expressions in sentences were least used by the selected candidates. Adverbs of manner were most predominantly uttered by the not selected candidates (n = 3; 11.5%). This was followed by the selected candidates (n = 9; 13.6%). Adverbs of manner were least predominantly uttered by the KIV candidates. Word order questions were mostly uttered by the KIV candidates (n = 12; 23.5%) followed by the not selected candidates (n = 3; 10.7%). Question word order was least predominantly uttered by the selected candidates (n = 6; 10.3 %).

The sample excerpts of word order utterances by the selected, KIV and not selected candidates are shown below. There were word errors found in the interactions of the selected, the KIV and the not selected candidates, as shown in the excerpts below, in the positive and negative sentences, subordinate clauses, the position of time expressions, the position of adverbs and question word order. The next analysis is on utterances of word order of the selected candidates, namely, IE7, IE13 and IE14, shown in Excerpt 1.

Selected Candidates

Excerpt 1

Examples of word order error found in C7

Types of word order error	Examples of Error	Correction of Error
Positive sentence	IR: Why did you choose this company to apply for a job? C: I am **very much** interested.	I am very interested *or I am very much interested in working for your company*
Negative sentence	IR: what are your goals or objectives in the near future? C: **Sorry sir, for time being I do not have**.	*Sorry sir. I don't have any for the time being.*
Subordinate clause	IR: Why do you think you are suitable? C: My great strength is… I can teach students and motivate them well so they **are confident** after their training course.	They *will be* confident after their training course.
Position of time expression	N/A	N/A
Position of adverbs	N/A	N/A
Question in words order	N/A	N/A

In Excerpt 1, errors can be found for C7, especially in the positive and negative sentences and subordinate clauses. C7 made mistakes in the positive sentence as s/he wrongly arranged the phrase "very much." The sentence should be 'I am very interested' or 'I am very much interested in working for your company'. C7 had a grammatical error in the subordinate clause, using 'are' instead of 'will'. This was due to the context of the sentence in the scene, "I can teach the student…," meaning C7 had not executed the

activity but C7 used the verb 'are'. In this context, the most suitable word is 'will'. Lastly, C7 made an error in the use of prepositions. As can be seen in Table 2, C7 used 'in' when referring to receiving complaints. To be precise, 'to' is more accurate for receiving things. For other parts, C7 did not make errors in the position of adverbs or question word order.

Excerpt 2

Examples of word order error found in C13

Types of word order error	Examples of Error	Correction of Error
Positive sentence	IR: Please introduce yourself? IE: My name is XXX. I am XXX years old…from XXX. **I currently** pursuing my master degree of Master in Public Administration.	My name is XXX. I am XXX years old…from XXX. *I am currently* pursuing my master's degree in Public Administration.
Negative sentence	N/A	N/A
Subordinate clause	IR: What is your greatest weakness? C: I get overly excited with new assigned works that I slipped off things **the** I should be aware of.	I get overly excited with new assigned works that I slipped off things *which* I should be aware of.
Position of time expression	N/A	N/A
Position of adverbs	N/A	N/A
Question in words order	N/A	N/A

In Excerpt 2, C13 made general mistakes in the context of word order. There was an error in the positive sentence as s/he omitted 'am'. Originally there was 'am' right after 'I'; however, C13, being careless, portrayed poor proficiency in the utterance as s/he only cared about the message of the speech being successfully delivered but was not concerned about grammar. Besides that, C13 wrongly expressed the negative sentence as s/he used a wrong word as a clause to utter correctly. Therefore, C13 should have used 'which' to complete the proposition. To express the position of time, C13 used an incorrect preposition to indicate a place. Using 'in' as the preposition is not wrong, but 'at' is more appropriate.

Excerpt 3

Examples of word order error found in C14

Types of word order error	Example of Error	Correction of Error

Positive Sentence

IR: How do you handle stress and pressure? IE: have a break, listen to music, analyse **what the matter is about** and pray for strength to overcome …and for the pressure…face it and try to accomplish the job needed to be done accordingly…**then** no stress and pressure.	C: have a break, listen to music, analyse ***the problem*** and pray for strength to overcome ***it*** and for the pressure, face it and try to accomplish the job needed to be done accordingly. ***There will be*** no stress and pressure.
IR: Ok…what are you passionate about? IE: I am crazy of **what**…music arts and crafts and facilitating or participating **study circles**.	C: I am crazy ***about*** music arts and crafts and facilitating or participating in study circles.

Negative Sentences

IR: I see…well please tell me what did you like or dislike about your internship? C: Well…a lot to tell you **Mr**…frankly speaking I was not really **enjoying** but I always grateful to them...**How to say**…some honest and some not and I could not do much it is ok… just leave it.	C: Well ***Mr, there is*** a lot to tell you, frankly speaking I ***did not*** t really ***enjoy it*** but I ***am*** always grateful to them…***as*** some ***were honest and some were not*** and I could not do much, it is ok… just leave it.

Subordinate clause

IR: Ok…that sounds good to me…give a specific answer for this why should we hire you? C : Mr. …if it pleases you to hire me, I will try **be to** one of those who can be an asset to the company that you are looking for…	C : Mr. …if it pleases you to hire me, I will try ***to be*** one of those who can be an asset to the company that you are looking for…

Position of time expression	N/A	N/A
Position of adverbs	N/A	N/A
Question in words order	N/A	N/A

Excerpt 3 shows errors found for C14, especially in the positive and negative sentences, and subordinate clauses. The mistakes made were grammatical errors, for example, wrong usage of continuous tense and in inversion cases. Compared to other selected candidates, the complexity of English of C14 was the highest. The answer was long and detailed instead of short and simple, just to be safe. For this reason, the errors committed by C14 show the importance of using correct word order in interactions as stated by Radford (1990, 1997).

For the negative sentence, C14 made a mistake in the continuous tense, where he used 'enjoying' when he should have used 'enjoy'. Lastly, in the subordinate clause, C14 made an error in the sentence as C14 used words in the wrong order, which were "I will try be to one of those who can…" The next section (Excerpt 4), presents the analysis of KIV candidates C5, C6 and C2.

KIV Candidates

Excerpt 4

Examples of word order error found in C5

Types of word order error	Examples of Error	Correction of Error
Positive sentence	IR: hmm. Can you tell us in details? C: Well. IT. Job experience. I'm quite new in IT. I was in Marketing **and** for three months. I like auditing job.	Well. IT. Job experience. I'm quite new in IT. I was in Marketing for three months. I like auditing job.
Negative sentence	IR: What do we do? C: As I mentioned, **must be auditing I guess**, certification and recognition like SIRIM and also for customer services. Well, I did not go through the website in details but I am interested in joining.	As I mentioned, I guess it must be auditing, certification and recognition like SIRIM and also for customer services. Well, I did not go through the website in details but I am interested in joining.
Subordinate clause	N/A	N/A
Position of time expression	IR: What do you know about our operation? C: Hmm… as I checked the computer last night … **this is…certification body for food company I guess** and … …auditing..	Hmm…as I checked the computer last night…*I guess this is certification body for food company and auditing…*
Position of adverbs	N/A	N/A
Question in words order	IR: It is okay…then how do you describe your skill set person…shall I say that…ya.	Well sorry; I think I am a skill set person. Why ***don't you not*** give me an opportunity to work in your organisation

C: Well sorry; I think I am a skill set person. Why **did not you** give me an opportunity to work in your organisation?

Excerpt 4 shows the word errors found for C5. The errors were in positive and negative sentences, and the position of time expressions and word order in questions. For positive sentences, C5 used the word 'and' in the wrong place. The conjunction is important to show the relationship between nouns and pronouns, but it must also be placed correctly in a sentence. For the position of time expression, C5 did not arrange his negative sentences correctly. Lastly for word order in questions, C5 did not make any grammatical error while constructing the questions.

Excerpt 5

Examples of word order error found in C6

Types of word order error	Examples of Error	Correction of Error
Positive sentence	IR: Why do you think you are suitable? C: I like to listen to the complaints **but sometime terrible**	I like to listen to the complaints but *it is terrible sometimes.*
Negative sentence	IR: Say something about you. A little bit about you. C: Currently, I am working in Telekom as a customer service but **not it is a not** permanent job.	Currently, I am working *at (in)* Telekom as a customer service but *it is not a* permanent job.
Subordinate clause	IR: Why do you think you are suitable? C: Customer **(?)** always right even though they do mistakes.	Customer *is* always right even though they *make* mistakes
Position of time expression	IR: Say something about you. A little bit about you. IR: Currently, I am working **in** Telekom.	Currently, I am working *at* Telekom.
Position of adverbs	IR: Hello! You are XXX? C: **(?)**So sorry for **the** late sir.	*I'm* so sorry *for being* late, sir.
Question in words order	N/A	N/A

In Excerpt 5, the errors found for C6 were in positive and negative sentences, subordinate clauses, positions of time expressions, and adverbs. C6 made mistakes in the construction of sentences, tenses, and

prepositions. Firstly, in positive sentences, C6 said, "I like to listen to the complaints but sometime they are terrible." This sentence is incorrect as she/he used the word 'terrible' to refer to 'complaints' but she/he has used 'sometime' in the middle. She/he should have used 'sometimes' as the word 'complaints' is plural. Secondly, in a negative sentence, C6 used the wrong preposition, 'in', when she/he should have used 'at' to denote a particular place. Other mistakes that s/he made were in sentence construction. Thirdly, in a subordinate clause, C6 left the word 'is' between the words 'customer' and 'always'. S/he utter the correct clause in the sentence, which is 'even though'. Next, in the position of time expressions, C6 used the word 'currently' to show the time in the statement. However, she/he made a mistake by using 'in' instead of 'at'. For the position of adverbs, C6 used the word 'late', which is both an adverb or an adjective. Nevertheless, she/he used phrases inappropriately, such as 'so sorry' without using 'I am'. I think it is an inappropriate way to clarify yourself when you are late on the day of the interview. Lastly, C6 did not use the correct question word order, as there is no obvious use of this particular word order. Generally, C6 made a few mistakes, but they were not obvious. Therefore, s/he could have avoided these grammatical errors and her chances of being hired for the position could have been better.

Excerpt 6

Examples of word order error found in C25

Types of word order error	Examples of Error	Correction of Error
Positive sentence	IR: Can you introduce yourself… please? C: I have graduated from **UiTM Chemical Engineering**.	I have graduated from UiTM in Chemical Engineering.
Negative sentence	IR: What are the actions will you take to stop this argument with customers? C: We…first of all…I will apologise to the customer **first** and ask the customer **tell me** about the reason to return the product…since the customer does not have the receipt about the product or any evidence that demonstrates the product was bought **in** our company.	First of all, I will apologise to the customer and ask the customer the reason they want to return the product…since the customer does not have the receipt *for* the product or any evidence that demonstrates the product was bought from our company.
Subordinate clause	N/A	N/A
Position of time expression	N/A	N/A
Position of adverbs	N/A	N/A
Question in words order	N/A	N/A

The errors found in positive and negative sentences are shown in Excerpt 6. In the positive sentences, C25 did not use complete sentences when answering questions. C25 did not include the preposition in the sentence, thus making it grammatically wrong. C25 should have added 'in' in her/his sentence to make it complete. In negative sentences, C25 repeated the word 'first' twice, which seemed

strange. Lastly, s/he also used the wrong preposition in his/her sentence. S/he used the preposition 'from' instead of 'in' in the sentence.

Not Selected Candidates

Excerpt 7

Examples of word order error found in C19

Types of word order error	Examples of Error	Correction of Error
Positive sentence	IR: hmm why are you leaving or have left your job? C: I am not but I **want work** and study…oh yaa…looking for a full time job.	I am not but ***I want to work*** and study …oh yaa…looking for a full-time job.
Negative sentence	IR: I see…what was the biggest accomplishment or failure in this position? C: Honestly…I have not experienced **both** sir (laughs)…right?	Honestly…I have not experienced ***either*** sir (laughs)…right?
Subordinate clause	IR : ok then…how do you evaluate success? C: …well...yes…if it makes me feel good and I **learn thing** from it **and** it is a success…	…well…yes…if it makes me feel good and I learn things from it, then it is a success…
Position of time expression	N/A	N/A
Position of adverbs	N/A	N/A
Question in words order	N/A	N/A

Excerpt 7 shows the word errors found for C19. The errors were in positive sentences and negative and subordinate clauses. C19 made numerous mistakes in the use of prepositions, verbs and conjunctions. In a positive sentence, C19 forgot to include the preposition 'to', thus making it grammatically wrong. The preposition is included to show the relationship between nouns and pronouns. Next, in the negative sentence, C19 did not make any grammatical error while constructing it. He/she used the negative sentence correctly without grammatical errors. He/she answered the interviewer's question by including the word 'not', making it recognisable as a negative sentence. Besides that, in a subordinate clause, C19 made mistakes in the use of the conjunction and plural verb, respectively. For the plural verb, C19 did not utter the plural inflection with an 's' added to 'thing', making it grammatically wrong. As for conjunctions, C19 used the wrong conjunction, 'and'. It should have been replaced with the word 'then' because s/he wanted to state the conclusion to the question asked by the interviewer and complete the sentence more accurately. Hence, C19 did not make many grammatical errors, overall. S/he used simple sentences to answer the interviewer's questions.

Excerpt 8

Examples of word order error found in C21

Types of word order error	Examples of Error	Correction of Error
Positive sentence	IR: So (.) Are you working currently? C: I am jobless…and looking for a job…but I worked for **two months** in handling…complaints department in one of the electronic service companies. C: Ok…what is your long term objective? IR : My long-term objective is **must** get a car ↓.	I am jobless…and looking for a job…but I worked for two months in handling…complaints department in one of the electronic service companies. My long-term objective is to get a car.
Negative sentence	IR: Ok and what about from 10 years from now… what are your career objectives? C: 10 years (.) if I stay here (.) maybe… (laughs) I do not know what to say…sorry.	
Subordinate clause	IR: Two years? What do you mean…tell me in details? C: If there is no promotion…if the **person not** promoted to another Level.	*If there is no promotion…if the person is not promoted to another level +* *(something to complete the sentence).*
Position of time expression	N/A	N/A
Position of adverbs	N/A	N/A
Question in words order	N/A	N/A

Excerpt 8 shows the three-word order category errors found for C21 for positive sentences, negative sentences and subordinate clauses. C21 made mistakes in plural verbs and prepositions. In a positive sentence, C21 may forget to utter the plural inflection with an 's' at the end of the word 'month' to denote more than one month. Moreover, C21 used the word 'must' for emphasis about getting a car. However, the

use of the word is not suitable in the sentence. The word 'must' should have been replaced with 'to' in order to make the sentence grammatically correct. He/she could have used the word 'must' but needed to add a few more words to the sentence to construct a correct sentence. In a negative sentence, C21 used correct negative sentence syntax in answering the interviewer's question. S/he constructed a simple negative sentence and used simple words in the sentence. Hence, there were no mistakes made by C21. C21 used a subordinate clause in his/her sentence without the main clause in the sentence. Thus, in this interview, C21 added some information to complete the sentence. For the other three-word order expressions, which were regarding the position of time expressions, position of adverbs and word order in questions, C21 did not use these three in the interview. Overall, C21 used only three-word order categories, which were positive sentences, negative sentences, and subordinate clauses, during the interview session. Out of these three-word orders categories, the negative sentences were used correctly. The two-word order categories were used correctly but had some grammatical errors in the use of the parts of speech. In conclusion, C21 could have done better if he/she had used the correct parts of speech in sentences uttered.

Excerpt 9

Examples of word order error found in C22

Types of word order error	Examples of Error	Correction of Error
Positive sentence	IR: Hmm…how do you spend your time when you free? C: Hmm... I think **I answered already** and of course I have a boyfriend (laughs).	Hmm…I think ***I have already answered*** and of course I have a boyfriend.
Negative sentence	IR: So (.) what are your goals for the future? C: Mr…frankly speaking I do not have **once**	Mr…frankly speaking I do not have ***one***
Subordinate clause	IR: Can you explain the philosophy of good customer service? IE: Well…sure (.) Customers are always right (.) so maintain the good reputation with them.	Well…sure (.) customers are always right (.) so maintain a good reputation with them.
Position of time expression	IR: How do you handle your stress then… C: I **always managed** stress by listening to the music and…yaar it works.	I always manage stress by listening to music and…yaar it works.
Position of adverbs	N/A	N/A
Question in words order	N/A	N/A

As for C22, the mistakes can be found in the positive and negative sentences, subordinate clauses, and position of time expressions that are shown in excerpt 79. The positive sentence is the second most frequently uttered by the not selected candidates (n=14; 50%), so they are prone to making mistakes. Basically, the errors in the positive and negative sentences are typical errors, such as missing words, root words, etc. Compared to successful and KIV candidates, C22 used simple sentences that only contained subject (S), verb (V), and object (O) syntax. They avoided using complex sentences that could have had higher chances of errors in inversion cases, wrong placement of adverbs and negations. For example, a negative sentence is as follows:

ERROR: *"To be honest, I think **shouldn't be taken** these actions"*
CORRECTION: *"To be honest, I think these actions **shouldn't be taken**"*
This is what is meant by wrong placement of negations.

For 'clause', C22 used the correct clause with 'so' as he/she wanted to continue the sentence with more specific details. The same applies to a time expression when C22 used "always" before the word "manages." However, C22 made a mistake by using 'the' instead of 'a' in the clause, while not using the root word in a time expression as the word should have been 'manage', yet C22 used 'managed'.

5. Discussion

The current study on word order has found that the proper use of word order can make sentences in interaction sound interesting and relevant. Indeed, word order plays an important role in interaction whether in positive or negative sentences. The errors that were found from selected candidates fall into six categories, as can be seen in Figure 4 below.
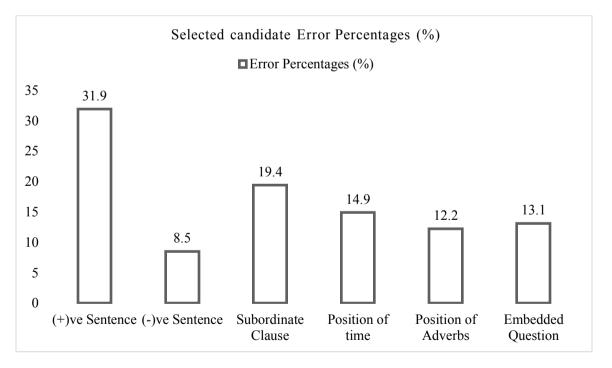

Fig 4. Word order errors by selected candidates

Selected candidates made mistakes in positive sentences (31.9%), followed by subordinate clauses (19.4%) and position of time expressions (14.9%). It can be deduced from these findings that the candidates tried hard to deliver their messages, which made them careless. They ignored the simple rules of grammar

that form the basis of any interaction. The second most frequently made mistake was in the subordinate clauses as a result of limited knowledge of the clauses used in the sentences, and clauses need to be used to complete a sentence that separates articles attached together.
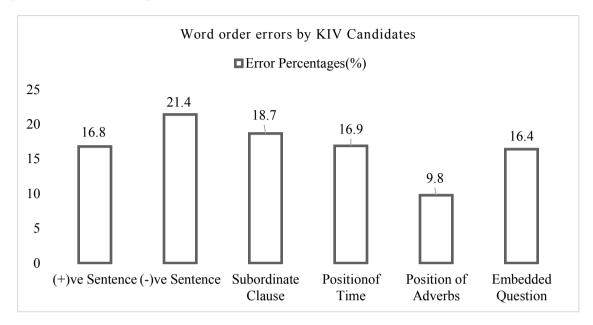

Fig 5.. Word order errors by KIV candidates

Figure 5 shows word order errors by KIV candidates. They made mistakes in negative sentences (21.4%) followed by subordinate clauses (18.7%). Based on the analysis, it has been found that KIV candidates preferred to make themselves clear with their words. They liked to argue about things that were inappropriate. That is why the most errors were found in negative sentences as they tried to defend themselves from misunderstanding or tried to correct wrong words or statements. In the end, they made mistakes through their justifications. Next, the KIV candidates improperly used subordinate clauses.
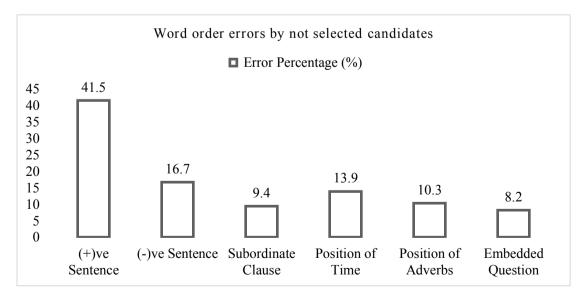

Fig 6. Word order errors by not selected candidates

Figure 6 shows word order errors found for the not selected candidates. The mistake with the highest number of occurrences was for positive sentences (41.5%) followed by negative sentences (16.7%) and position of time expressions in sentences (13.9%). The cause of these errors could have been their carefree attitude as they repeatedly made the same mistakes.

Word order is an important aspect of speech, and the main objective is to make people understand what we are thinking and saying as well as our stand if there is any disagreement. As such, word order plays a major role in interviews as the candidates want to justify their opinions. However, word order does not seem to be the key to success in speech (Halliday, 2014). As can be seen from the interaction of selected candidates, most mistakes were in positive sentences in comparison with other candidates like the selected candidates, who made fewer mistakes because of carelessness. This shows the importance of understanding English grammar and word order rules when they are considered as criteria in selecting employees as such word order errors prevent messages from being completely understood.

From this research, it is evident the selected candidates had good interactions as they attempted to answer most of the questions. On the other hand, the KIV and the not selected candidates answered their questions respectfully, but their answers were inappropriate, and at times their friendly interactions were inappropriate for a professional situation. Employers seek employees who are capable of executing the required tasks, but those who are good communicators. To sum up, defective word order is a common syntactic error that candidates commit due to L1 transfer (Ellis, 1997), which leads to poor proficiency. This is certainly evident in the present study as Radford (1990, 1997) confirmed that candidates often ignored using word order correctly during interaction.

6.   Conclusion

The findings of the present study have met the intended objectives. These findings reveal that word order and other aspects of grammar are of fundamental importance in job interviews. One conclusive finding that seemed obvious was that the selected candidates displayed the best level of word order compared to KIV and not selected candidates. Higher learning institutions have practical expectations for undergraduates either in private or public universities and colleges in Malaysia. For this reason, all levels of education in Malaysia have embarked on a constructive objective to enhance students' proficiency in employment (Krishnan et al., 2019) by offering language courses for undergraduates who are about to complete their studies. Grammar patterns, especially those regarding word order usage, are integrated into the existing course modules. However, the course modules should be constantly monitored and evaluated based on the current job market demands (Singh, 2019). A word order module could also be developed with the help of language experts and instructors. Another way of approaching this problem is by incorporating word order modules into the school curriculum to give students an early start as they progress toward gaining greater confidence at the tertiary level where more advanced forms of the modules could be introduced. Their constant exposure to these forms of language exercises would make them confident either in interviews or daily interactions with people.

The present study is also subject to several limitations. Firstly, there were a few conditions imposed on the researchers. The name of the organization was not to be disclosed in the article, only 10 recordings were allowed for analysis, and the transcription process was required to be carried out within the premises. Secondly, conducting this study was time consuming as the researchers had to wait for about six to 10 months to obtain consent because access to authentic data in Malaysia is bound by terms and conditions. Thirdly, the organisations did not grant permission to the researchers to discuss matters pertaining to the interviewer or the interviewed candidates. Based on these limitations, further studies can be conducted from two standpoints. Firstly, research can be conducted using different types of sentence structures such as simple, compound, complex and compound-complex sentences and parts of speech. Secondly, research on pre- and post-interview questions to candidates can be done to evaluate their preparedness for job interviews. This would be helpful for preparing undergraduates to meet the demands of the job markets.

The present study has proven that word order, particularly in its language or linguistic aspects, plays a very significant role in job interviews. This is shown by the fact that by changing the word order in

a sentence, the syntactic relationships between the elements are changed, and the sentence has a whole new meaning making the interaction more or less meaningful. The present study has further confirmed Radford's assertion (1990, 1997) that since the word order of utterances is different from one language to another, this is manifested in the candidates' proficiency when interacting, either in formal or informal settings. Radford's (1990, 1997) view is supported by Halliday (2014), who said that word order is important in interaction to avoid confusion to a listener. In most linguistic studies, word order always follows either the written or spoken pattern of subject + verb + object (Radford, 1990, 1997). As noted by Halliday (2014), "there is not a solitary measurement of effectiveness but several contradictory ones" (p. 16), which is why "there is no single winner in the world-wide digits for O, S and V" (p. 67). Therefore, word order is one of the essential parts of portraying proficiency in job interviews. Considering the importance of word order in securing employment, it is hoped that more studies will be carried out on linguistic competence which would be helpful for undergraduates to meet job market demands.

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