

TOP TEN MOST PROBLEMATIC GRAMMATICAL ITEMS FOR INDONESIAN TERTIARY EFL LEARNER WRITERS

by

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Abstract:

Errors are almost inseparable from learning process, including learning new languages. Though, it is not always considered as negative, instead, it is a part of learning process. This study was conducted to assess students' mastery of grammar in writing, to find what grammatical errors they make, to be an evaluation to overcome the problem in the future. In this study, samples were taken from EFL students of English Education Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto. The grammatical errors were identified under the theory of Politzer-Ramirez which classify errors into two types: morphological and syntactic error. In the end of the study, ten types of grammatical errors were identified as the most common grammatical errors made by the students. Three of them belong to morphological error, while the remaining fall into syntactic error. Those ten errors are: The use of prepositions (75 %), redundancy (75 %), simple past tense incorrect (62.5 %), determiners (58.3 %), number confusion (45.8 %), omission of verb (45.8 %), verb construction (41.67 %), derivatives/wrong part of speech (41.67 %), nominalization (33.3 %), and errors in the use of pronoun (29.2 %).

Keywords: *Problematic, Grammatical Items, Tertiary, EFL, Learner's Writers*

INTRODUCTION

Learning English as a foreign language can be a big problem for some learners. As a foreign language, it means that learning English is just like learning a language which is completely

different from learners' first language. This fact is supported by Lado (as cited in Yuan, 2017) who stated that difficulties in acquiring a new language can be due to the differences between the new language and the learners' first languages. Language as communication tool means more than just a tool to convey ideas or to express our feelings but it is also related to the background culture of the language. In term of language teaching, it also means teaching a complex system of cultural custom, values, and ways of thinking, feeling, and acting (Brown, 2001). Hence, learning new language can be a big difficulty since it is not just about learning language as a science, but also a complex system of some components. It can also be inferred that learning new language is not as simple as it sounds because it includes that complex system.

Those difficulties and complexity may lead to some problems for the learners. One most inevitable experience during the learning process is indeed, making errors. However, making errors cannot be considered as negative. Ma'mun (2016) and Turmudi (2019) even stated that making error is one part of learning and no one can learn without making errors.

In term of knowledge especially English, errors often occur in term of grammar. Hence, there are many researchers who conducted research about grammatical errors. For instance, there are some previous studies which are similar with this study. A study entitled "Grammatical Errors Made by Second Semester Students in Writing 2 Subject in The English Education Department of Yogyakarta State University in The Academic year of 2012/2013" took students of English Education Department of Yogyakarta State University as the samples in the academic year of 2012/2013 using Politzer-Ramirez taxonomy. The result of the research showed that omission of articles was the biggest grammar problem for the students. Ranked in the first place, omission of the article shares the highest percentage (61,82 %).

Another research, entitled "Common Grammatical Error Made by Indonesian Advanced English Learner" was done by Dr. Suwartono in 1999 which took place in Muhammadiyah University of Purwokerto, to examine the most common grammatical error made by the 8th semester students of the department. The data analysis method used in this research was also following the theory of Politzer-Ramirez. The result of this research showed 22 kinds of grammatical errors. Though, half of them are not exist in the error taxonomy of Politzer-Ramirez. In this research, the researcher found that agreement of subject and verb got the highest percentage (76,31 %).

Regarding to the explanation above, this research was conducted to answer question: What types of grammatical errors were commonly made by the students of 7th semester students of English Education Department of Purwokerto Muhammadiyah University in the academic year 2018/2019 in their writings? Hence, the aim of this research was to identify the types of grammatical errors that were commonly made by the students of 7th semester students of English Education Department of Purwokerto Muhammadiyah University in the academic year 2018/2019 in their writings.

Writing is one of four main skills of language beside listening, speaking and reading. It belongs into productive skill. As a productive skill, writing is not like speaking skill or the other receptive skills. Writing, which is one of the most complicated skills to be mastered, does not only need lots of vocabulary in arranging a paragraph, but also grammatically correct in order to be comprehensible besides other writing rules (Tarigan, et. al, 2019).

Among the four skills above, writing is the most difficult one to be learnt by students. Writing needs broad knowledge and deep thinking process to produce words, sentences, and paragraphs at the same with good English grammar (Kumala et al, 2018). This is in accordance with Suwarni et al (2016) who said that writing needs complex process, involves the mastery of all elements in the target language: as grammar, content, organization, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling and mechanics. Compared to the other English skills, writing skill requires a lot of sub-skills and sub-competences which are not easy to learnt and acquired. (Huda and Wuda, 2019).

In order to write clearly and efficiently, learner should pay attention to grammar as it is important to construct meaningful sentences. This is supported by Nurrohmah (2011) who said that in term of skill to produce a good rhetoric, a good writer must have good ideas, grammar competence, and language skills. Besides, in writing skill, grammar is also one of the most important role in producing the sentences (Kharmilah and Narius, 2019).

Thus, it is clear that writing and grammar are close in its relation. It connects between what people write and how they write it (Jones, et. al, 2012). From this statement, it can be inferred that grammar and writing is inseparable.

Wilcox (as cited in Ariyani, 2019) stated that grammar is a component of a language and it cannot be separated from it. Through learning grammar, the learners will construct the

meaningful utterances in which their interlocutors will understand and enjoy the communication with the language they use. Batstone (as cited in Rana, et al, 2019) even points out, “Language without grammar would be chaotic and cause the same communication problem, such as grammatical errors in writing and speaking.”

Both in writing and speaking, English learners may make errors. The errors are produced due to the lack of knowledge about the grammar which causes ‘deviation’ from produce selected norm of mature language performance as stated by Dulay, Burt and Krashen (as cited in Suwartono, 2006). However, it leads to a more fatal error when being produced in writing instead of speaking due to the absence of the speaker to clarify. In Indonesian English learner case, the errors are even greater because of the different structure between Indonesian and English (Asni and Susanti, 2018). Due to their first language grammatical structure interference, Indonesian students tend to produce the grammatical errors in almost all of English grammatical aspects (Wahyono and Yuliasri, 2019).

Writing itself, based on the previous explanation, is clearly revealed as a complex process and closely related to grammar which is also difficult especially for the non-English native speaker. No wonder that Phuket and Othman (as cited in Latupeirissa and Sayd, 2019) stated that in EFL writing, students' mastery of EFL is so poor that writing teachers call it "a crisis." In a higher education level grammar mastery become more important since higher education usually use English in writing their literature work and project. This is in accordance with Ulijn and Strother (as cited in de La Cruz, 2019) who stated that writing, which is the focus of this research work, is one of the macro skills of language usage. Writing apart from the other macro skills is an essential skill in student’s academic study in all colleges and universities, as it is needed for writing researches, writing essays, making reports, making letters, taking notes and the like. This is why grammar mastery is important and thus grammar evaluation should be done.

In order to evaluate the use of grammar, there are some procedures that can be used to analyse error. Error analysis is an activity to identify, classify and interpret or describe the errors made by someone in speaking or in writing and it is carried out to obtain information on common difficulties faced by someone in speaking or in writing English sentences (Kharmilah and Narius, 2019).

Generally, there are four most useful and common taxonomies that can be used i.e. Surface Strategy Taxonomy, Comparative Taxonomy, Communicative Effect Taxonomy, and Linguistic Category Taxonomy (Suwartono, 2006).

In Surface Strategy Taxonomy, the error analysis focuses on the errors occurred in the surface structure. Dulay, Burt and Krashen (as cited in Puspitasari, 2013) divide the errors into 4 types i.e. omission, addition, misformation, and misordering.

- a. Omission means the elimination of certain elements e.g. the elimination of morpheme in a word. For example, in the sentence “I hungry” (the morpheme ‘am’ is omitted).
- b. Addition, in opposite with omission, means adding items that should not actually be exist in proper use. Dulay, Burt and Krashen (as cited in Puspitasari, 2013) further classify the addition into three types i.e. double markings (e.g. “Did you went there?”), regularization (e.g. cuted) and simple addition.
- c. Misformation means the use of the wrong form of morpheme or structure (Puspitasari, 2013). For example, the use of ‘this’ in a situation when ‘these’ or ‘those’ should be used.
- d. Misordering refers to a wrong arrangement of morpheme in a structure. For instance, in the sentence “I wake up early very in the morning” in which the morpheme ‘very’ and ‘early’ are misplaced.

While in the perspective of Comparative Taxonomy, Dulay, Burt, Krashen (as cited in Puspitasari, 2013) classify errors on the basis of comparing the structure of second language errors to other types of constructions, most commonly to errors made by children during their first language acquisition of the language in question. In this taxonomy, there are four error categories: (1) developmental errors, and (2) interlingual errors, and, of course, (3) ambiguous errors, and (4) the ‘grab bag category’ of other errors.

The third type of taxonomy, the Communicative Effect Taxonomy focuses on how the errors affect the ‘success’ of communication. Dulay, Burt, Krashen (as cited in Puspitasari, 2013) classify the errors into two types: global errors {include wrong order of major constituents; missing, wrong, or misplaced sentence connectors; missing cues to signal obligatory exceptions to pervasive syntactic rules; regularization of pervasive syntactic rules to exceptions; wrong psychological predicate constructions (predicates describing how a person feels); improper selection of complement types (subordinate clauses) and local error (includes errors in noun and verb inflections; articles, auxiliaries, formation of quantifiers, etc)}.

The last, in Linguistic Category Taxonomy, Politzer-Ramirez (1973) identify grammatical errors using linguistics terms and classify the errors into two kinds: morphological and syntactic errors with more specific classification for each kind of error.

METHOD

Design

This research was a descriptive-quantitative research. By using survey method, a description about ten types of grammatical errors that are mostly made by 7th semester students of English Education Department of Purwokerto Muhammadiyah University academic year 2018/2019 can be obtained. This is in accordance with Nunan (2005) who stated that the aim of survey is generally to obtain the snapshot of condition, attitudes, and/or events at a single point in time.

Participant

The subjects involved in this research was the whole 7th semester students of English Education Department Purwokerto Muhammadiyah University, academic year 2018/2019. In this 7th semester, there are around 100 students who come from 3 classes; class A, B, and C.

According to Suwartono (2014), the minimum number of sample that has to be taken in a descriptive research is 10 % from the population (20 % for such a big population). Thus, with the such amount of population, the sample amount of this research were 24 students (more than 10 %).

In order to get the valid data, simple random sampling technique was used in this research. The simple random technique was used to avoid bias because the population was already homogeneous. The random sampling in this research was done by randomly choosing 8 students from each class.

Instruments

The researchers used written test as the instrument to gain the data. The data which were obtained was taken from students' writings. Students' writings were then be the documents that were analysed in this research.

Data Collecting Technique

The collecting data method in this research used a written test as the instrument because the variable that was analysed here was about the grammatical errors. The written test seemed to be the most necessary because it was considered to be most effective and efficient rather than using questionnaire or interview to get any information about the grammatical errors.

In this research, students who were chosen as samples were required to do a test; writing a text about their experience studying in English Education Department of UMP. Later, their writings were analysed to find what grammatical errors they made.

Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis method that was used in this research was descriptive quantitative method under the Linguistic Category Taxonomy theory; which is the theory of Politzer-Ramirez. This theory was preferred to be chosen because it is considered to be most useful and practical of all (Suwartono, 2006).

The data analysis will be following on a procedure as follows (Suwartono, 2006).

- a. Identifying grammatical errors that occurred in each students' writing
- b. Classifying errors in accordance with the error types listed in the classification scheme referred to (errors of the same types will be tallied just once)
- c. Listing types of error across students writing
- d. Counting number of students writing that contain each type of error
- e. Applying the following formula. This formula is called as Gass and Selinker theory (Arniatika, 2019)

$$\frac{\text{number of students writing that contain each type of error}}{\text{total number of students}} \times 100 \%$$

- f. Ranking the types of errors in order of percentage rate obtained

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The research result shows ten types of grammatical error that were mostly made by the students. However, three of them do not belong to the taxonomy used in the analysis. Two of them belong to morphological error while the remaining fall into syntactic error.

Rank	Type of Errors	Percentage
1	Use of prepositions	75 %
2	Redundancy*	75 %
3	Simple past tense incorrect	62.5 %
4	Determiners	58.3 %
5	Number confusion	45.8 %
6	Omission of verb	45.8 %
7	Verb construction*	41.67 %
8	Derivatives/Wrong part of speech*	41.67 %
9	Nominalization	33.3 %
10	Use of pronoun	29.2 %

*doesn't exist in the taxonomy category

Discussion

A. Morphological Error

1. Simple Past Tense Incorrect

Errors in this type are generally in a form of the use of simple non past instead of using verb 2.

Error Examples:

- When I was the first semester I learning
- I registered and I choose ...

Corrected Versions:

- When I was in the first semester, I learned ...
- I registered and I chose ...

2. Derivatives/Wrong Part of Speech

In English grammar, words are classified based on their ‘class’ which we usually call this as part of speech. There are 9 types of part of speech in English: noun, verb, adjective, pronoun, article, preposition, adverb, conjunction and interjection. In constructing sentences, paying attention to the part of speech is important.

In some samples, there were several errors in using proper part of speech, as listed below.

Error Examples:

- Deeply inside my heart, I really love English Department
- I have already joint so many events and got the winner
- who was very spirit to participate me on that event
- ... to be a success person

Corrected Versions:

- Deep inside my heart, I really love English Department
- I have already joined so many events and got the win
- who was very spirited to participate me on that event
- to be a successful person

In example number 1, the use of the word ‘deeply’ is not suitable with the context. In that kind of sentence, the use of adjective ‘deep’ is more suitable and effective than the use of adverb ‘deeply.’ Besides, the use of adverb ‘deeply’ is incorrect because it doesn’t explain the way how things done, while the word ‘deeply’ itself belongs to adverb of manner.

In example number 2, considering to the context, the most suitable word should be ‘win,’ not ‘winner,’ because what is meant by the writer is ‘achievement,’ not ‘person’ (‘winner’ refers to the ‘doer’ or ‘person’).

The use of word spirit in example number 3 and 4 is also not suitable since it is not an adjective, but is used as an adjective. Both ‘spirit’ and ‘success,’ are nouns, and cannot be applied in sentence as adjectives

B. Syntactic Error

1. Use of Preposition

Errors in this type are mostly in a form of omission and misuse of the prepositions.

Error Examples:

- I have been studying in UMP almost ...
- One thing that made me happy that time was
- ... joining KKL program, KKN program and met with new friends
- Studying on UMP, ...

Corrected Version:

- I have been studying in UMP for almost ...
- One thing that made me happy at that time was....
- ... joining KKL program, KKN program and meeting new friends
- Studying in UMP, ...

2. Redundancy

Over use of words (preposition, article, etc.) are causing redundancy as shown on the examples below.

Error Examples:

- During there, I enjoyed my life especially...
- In our class is PBI-A, we have different
- It's never mind,

Corrected Versions

- There, I enjoyed my life especially ...
- In our class, PBI-A, we have different
- Never mind,

3. Determiners

Omission of articles as determiners is frequently found in the samples.

Error Examples:

- I have friend, her name is Teta.
- In 7th semester ...
- When I was in 5th semester ...

Corrected Versions

- I have a friend, her name is Teta
- In the 7th semester ...
- When I was in the 5th semester ...

4. Number Confusion

Substitution of plural form for singular and vice versa are often found in the samples.

Error Examples:

- It was a fun days
- They have beautiful story

Corrected Versions:

- It was a fun day
- They have beautiful stories

5. Omission of Verb

Omitted verbs are causing incomplete structure of verb phrase in a sentence.

Error Examples:

- One of them is I less confident.
- I also shy, maybe until now

Corrected Versions:

- One of them is I feel less confident.
- I am also shy, maybe until now

6. Verb Construction

Failure to construct verb as predicate also become a big problem for students.

Error Examples

- I can followed the lesson well
- She can not to followed the lesson
- I was not prepare or think what major would I choose

Corrected Versions:

- I could follow the lesson well
- She could not follow the lesson
- I did not prepare or think what major would I choose

7. Nominalization

Errors of this type are in the form the use of simple verb instead of verb ing in a sentence.

Error Examples:

- I have wonderful experiences about that, like join in KKL program ...
- such as religion, have a good akhlak and attitude
- Study on UMP ...

Corrected Versions:

- I have wonderful experiences about that, like joining KKL program
- ... such as religion, having a good akhlak and attitude
- Studying in UMP ...

8. Use of Pronoun

The use of pronoun in some samples are less effective. In fact, it caused redundancy. But in certain case, the pronoun was omitted. Some of the examples are shown below.

Error Examples:

- I got some experiences since studied here
- but alright after one semester.
- During I studying ...

Corrected Versions:

- I have got some experiences since I studied here...
- ... but it is alright after one semester.
- During studying ...

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

Based on the discussion above, we are able to identify what types of grammatical errors that were commonly made by the students in their writings. The types of error were varying. Ten types that students mostly made were: errors in the use of prepositions (75 %), redundancy (75 %), simple past tense incorrect (62.5 %), determiners (58.3 %), number confusion (45.8 %), omission of verb (45.8 %), verb construction (41.67 %), derivatives/wrong part of speech (41.67 %), nominalization (33.3 %), and errors in the use of pronoun (29.2 %). Two types of errors fall into morphological error while the remaining are syntactic errors. Three remaining types of error do not exist in the category taxonomy which represents data variety.

Suggestions

The researcher would like to propose some suggestions for some parties as written below. First it is addressed to lecturers. Students' errors can be a consideration for lecturers to identify the problematic areas of students' grammar. The lecturers may try to find any other technique in teaching grammar to make the students' grammar better. Secondly it is addressed to students. Students had better improve their grammar especially in the most problematic areas. As an English teacher soon to be, they are expected to have a good mastery of grammar to be a good teacher. Hence, they should learn English more to improve their grammar mastery. Finally, it is addressed to other researchers. The researcher believes that there are still many aspects that can be revealed and improved in this study. Hopefully, in the future the other researchers who conduct similar research can do some improvement whether in the method, data analysis or the other aspects to have a better research.

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