



A Morphosyntactical Analysis of University Students’ Writing: Indonesian Case

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Abstract*

Different grammar between languages often causes confusion to those who learn it. Students often experience such problems when their first language (L1) and the target language (L2) share very limited linguistic aspects. This study aims to focus on the morphosyntactic issues that lead to the grammatical errors which take place in the English writing of Indonesian university students taking writing class and to analyze the potential sources of their mistakes. The data from this study were collected from a writing assignment in three Writing classes. This research followed the steps initiated by James (1998), among others: collecting data, identifying errors, classifying errors, explaining errors, and finding sources of errors. The results revealed that of the 2.218 grammatical errors found, they could be classified into two main error types: morphological errors (81.97%) and syntactic errors (18.03%) which were divided into 32 specific errors. The findings suggest that the Indonesian students are not fully aware how to use the plural marker ‘s’ as well the ‘3rd singular’ in present tense. Moreover, they cannot build a simple sentence due to the different word-order and sentence structure between Indonesian and English in terms of morphology and syntax. With regard to the potential sources of error, both inter-language errors and intralingual errors and developments have an influence on errors made in writing. Errors between languages occur when students try to use their knowledge of the L1 structure to obtain the target language, but the differences between the two languages cause errors. Intralingual and developmental errors are found because of difficulties and problems in the target language itself. The findings in this study are very useful for the process of learning English especially in writing skills.

1. Introduction

Writing is a complex process and a difficult task even in the first language because the production of effective writing requires several components including content, organization, and language competence (Richards and Renandya, 2002). English learners in Indonesia tend to

experience the same problems. Basically, errors that occur reflect their English competence because it is related to cognitive processes. Learners do not realize when they make errors because they occur unconsciously. When they are asked to revise them, they cannot fix them because they do not understand the correct rules. Studying grammatical errors at morphological and syntactical level is intended for at least two purposes, namely: (1) searching for data on language acquisition, and (2) seeking information as a basis for developing curriculum and compiling teaching materials (Richards, 1974).

Grammatical errors are deviations from the standard rules in written language that occur systematically (Brown, 2000). In the process of learning a language, grammatical errors are natural and often inevitable (Myles, 2002). Therefore these errors need to be analyzed to inform teachers of their types, frequencies, and potential causes. In this way, the solution can then be formulated. The taxonomy used in this research is morphosyntactic taxonomy. Morphosyntactic error taxonomy is the taxonomy based on the misapplication of morphological inflection and syntactic rules (Vosse, 1992). Previous studies of grammatical errors that used morphosyntactic taxonomy have been conducted in some countries. Two of them were the research by Hariri and the research by Vosse. Hariri's research focused on the use of morphosyntactic taxonomy to categorize errors made by the students in Iran context. He also used a theory to categorize the source of errors. The result of his study was that the Iranian students made errors substantially in the use of preposition and the source of errors greatly came from intralingual errors. Then, the second research by Vosse focused on the categorization of errors based on the morphosyntactic taxonomy in Dutch context. Those two researches used morphosyntactic taxonomy to categorize errors made by the students. This research also used morphosyntactic theory to categorize the students' errors. While the research by Hariri uses Iranian context and the research by Vosse uses Dutch context, this research used Indonesian context.

There are several types of morphosyntactic errors that are generally grouped in error analysis. The types of errors are (1) omitting grammatical morphemes, (2) double marking, (3) regularizing patterns, (4) archiform use, (5) use of two or more forms of random change, and (6) misplacement (Dulay, Burt, and Krashen, 1982). Students of English Education Department at IAIN Jember as learners of foreign languages also tend to make such errors in their essays. Errors made were at the level of syntax, **lexicon**, orthography, pronunciation, and discourse. In the linguistic level, grammar often causes difficulties for them in writing an English essay. Even though they had learned grammar in class, they still made grammatical errors. Their grammatical errors in incorporating morphemes into larger units, such as phrases, clauses, and sentences are often found.

There are two possible factors that cause learners to make errors, namely inter-language and intralingual factors (Brown, 2000). Inter-language factors are related to English grammar which is very different from the first grammar. The complexity of English is a problem for them in mastering English grammar, for example in tenses that refer to aspects of time in English that are not found in Indonesian grammar. In addition, interference from first language also affects students in processing linguistic input where students tend to transfer the structure of Indonesian when they use English (Lado, 1971).

Based on the aforementioned background, this research used error analysis method to analyze morphosyntactic errors and investigate their potential causes in the English essays of students of the English Education Department at IAIN Jember Indonesia. Using the result of this research, the teacher can identify what kind of errors that have been made by the students, from which the teacher can focus on what area of writing should be improved to make the students' writing better.

2. Research Methods

The data in this study were taken from the essays of the English Education Department students of IAIN Jember Indonesia taking Writing III class. This study involved 95 students from three Writing Classes. This research was carried out by following the steps proposed by James (1998), among others: collecting data, detecting errors, finding errors, describing errors, and diagnosing errors. In the diagnosis step of the source of this error, the cause of the error is explained based on the theory proposed by James (1998) and supported by the theory proposed by Lado (1971) about the type of errors.

3. Discussions

Based on the findings in this study, it can be elaborated that the ability of students to apply the rules of English grammar still needs to be improved because there are 32 types of specific errors, especially in the three biggest errors, plural singular markers, articles and prepositions. It can be assumed that the errors found in this study are general grammatical errors made by students when they write in English. From the errors made by students as much as 2,218 it can be concluded that morphological errors ($f = 1.818$, 81.97%) are greater than syntactic errors ($f = 400$, 18.03%). This shows that students experience more difficulty in the production process at the lexical level than at the sentential level. The three most common errors in this study were single/plural marker errors (30.43%), followed by article errors (21.51%), and prepositional errors (5.23%). This means that students must focus more on the use of grammar rules when writing English, especially for these three specific errors.

Regarding the results of the analysis of sources of error, errors between languages cause students who are incompetent in English grammar tend to rely on Indonesian language structures when producing English sentences. The difference between the structure of Indonesian and the structure of English can confuse students. It causes them to make mistakes in writing English. The following examples are cases found in students' writing:

The clothing of Saman dance **make** person curious...

The government **have** the strategy ...

Jokowi **choose** Ma'ruf Amin as vice president.

Indonesia as host of Asian games **have** prepared for this event.

The above examples show that the students are not fully aware of third person singular marker 's' in present tense case. It is potentially caused by the fact that in Indonesia Language the third person singular marker does not exist. Therefore teachers can use these findings to fix the students' problem in the following teaching learning activities.

The following examples are cases of single/plural markers.

There so **many singer and dancer**.

Indonesia invite Korean group singer like superjunior and **many Indonesian singer**

The above errors potentially occur because single/plural form rules are not available in Indonesian, so students do not pay attention to the plural '-s' marker after the plural nouns when those words are translated from Indonesian to English. Hence, students tend to be unsuccessful of

transferring Indonesian norms into English writing when they try to present more complicated ideas or opinions in the essays they write. They have not yet understand how to write rather complicated ideas in English so they employed their first language competence when they write English essays. Consequently, the direct translation produces inappropriate sentences. In addition, intralingual errors and developments also cause students' errors. They over-generalize the structure of English because some rules are difficult and complex. In this case they tend to use the structure of English that they have learnt to apply in new sentences but the results are incorrect sentences.

4. Novelities

After identifying and classifying errors in students' essays, there are two main types of errors namely morphological errors and syntactic errors. The following results of the classification of the two main types of errors found:

Table 1. Types of errors in English essays

Main Error	Specific Error	
1. Morphological errors (form of error at word level)	1) <i>Noun form errors</i> 2) <i>Singular/plural errors</i> 3) <i>Pronoun errors</i> 4) <i>Present errors</i> 5) <i>Past errors</i> 6) <i>Subject-verb agreement errors</i> 7) <i>Gerund errors</i> 8) <i>Infinitive errors</i>	9) <i>Modal/auxiliary errors</i> 10) <i>Adjective errors</i> 11) <i>Adverb errors</i> 12) <i>Possessive errors</i> 13) <i>Preposition errors</i> 14) <i>Article errors</i> 15) <i>Possessive (determiner) errors</i> 16) <i>Demonstrative errors</i>
2. Syntax errors (the form of errors at the sentence level)	1) <i>Word order errors</i> 2) <i>Run-on/ comma splice errors</i> 3) <i>Fragment errors</i> 4) <i>Omission of subjects</i> 5) <i>Omission of verbs/actions</i> 6) <i>Omission of objects/compliments</i> 7) <i>'There' structure errors</i> 8) <i>AND-type errors</i>	9) <i>BUT-type errors</i> 10) <i>OR-type errors</i> 11) <i>SO-type errors</i> 12) <i>Noun clause/phrase errors</i> 13) <i>Adjective clause/phrase errors</i> 14) <i>Adverbial clause/phrase errors</i> 15) <i>Passive voice errors</i> 16) <i>Comparison errors</i>

As shown in Table 1, the two main types of errors found in this study were morphological errors and syntactic errors. There are 16 sub-types of errors under morphological errors, and also there are 16 sub-types of errors at the level of syntactic errors. The next data is the type of grammatical error that is commonly used in students' English essays.

Table 2. Frequency of specific errors

Classification of Specific Error Types			
No	Type of Error	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	<i>Morphological Errors</i>		
1.1	<i>Noun errors</i>		
	A. <i>Noun form errors</i>	16	0.77
	B. <i>Singular/ plural errors</i>	676	30.43

1.2	<i>Pronoun errors</i>		
1.3	<i>Tense Errors</i>		
	A. <i>Present errors</i>	35	1.53
	B. <i>Past errors</i>	10	0.50
1.4	<i>Subject-verb Agreement Errors</i>	95	4.24
1.5	<i>Verb Form Errors</i>		
	A. <i>Gerund errors</i>	60	2.75
	B. <i>Infinitive errors</i>	59	2.71
	C. <i>Modal/Auxiliary errors</i>	35	1.53
1.6	<i>Adjective Errors</i>	45	2.03
1.7	<i>Adverb Errors</i>	19	0.86
1.8	<i>Possessive Errors</i>	57	2.57
1.9	<i>Preposition Errors</i>	116	5.23
1.10	<i>Determiner Errors</i>		
	A. <i>Article errors</i>	477	21.51
	B. <i>Possessive errors</i>	25	1.13
	C. <i>Demonstrative errors</i>	15	0.68
2	<i>Syntactic Errors</i>		
2.1	<i>Word order errors</i>	15	0.68
2.2	<i>Ill-formed sentence errors</i>		
	A. <i>Run-on/ comma splice errors</i>	40	1.76
	B. <i>Fragment errors</i>	37	1.71
	C. <i>Omission of subjects</i>	38	1.76
	D. <i>Omission of verbs/ actions</i>	25	1.08
	E. <i>Omission of objects/ compliments</i>	31	1.40
	F. <i>“There” structure errors</i>	24	1.08
2.3	<i>Compound sentence structure errors</i>		
	A. <i>AND-type errors</i>	26	1.17
	B. <i>BUT-type errors</i>	29	1.31
	C. <i>OR-type errors</i>	6	0.27
	D. <i>SO-type errors</i>	13	0.59
2.4	<i>Complex sentence structure errors</i>		
	A. <i>Noun clause/ phrase errors</i>	39	1.71
	B. <i>Adjective clause/ phrase errors</i>	31	1.44
	C. <i>Adverbial clause/ phrase errors</i>	19	0.86
2.5	<i>Passive voice errors</i>	20	0.90
2.6	<i>Comparison errors</i>	7	0.32
	Total	2,218	100%

Table 2 shows that there are 2,218 grammar errors under the category 32 specific errors. The three most commonly found are errors related to singular/plural markers ($f = 676$, 30.43%), misuse of articles ($f = 477$, 21.51%), and errors in the use of prepositions ($f = 116$, 5.23%).

The next data is the result of classification of errors based on the source both between languages and intralingual and developmental errors. The findings of this study reveal that the

two main sources have a significant influence on the production of errors. The following is a table about potential sources of sub-type errors.

Table 3. Sources of specific errors in students' essays

Error Source	Special Error
1. Interlanguage Errors	1) Noun form errors 2) Singular/ plural errors 3) Pronoun errors 4) Modal/Auxiliary errors 5) Adjective errors 6) Adverb errors 7) Possessive errors 8) Possessive (determiner) errors 9) Word order errors 10) Run-on/ comma splice errors 11) Fragment errors 12) Omission of subjects 13) Omission of objects/ compliments 14) 'There' structure errors 15) Adverbial clause/ phrase errors
2. Intralingual and developmental errors	
2.1 Overgeneralization	1) Past errors 2) Infinitive errors
2.2 Ignorance of rule restrictions	1) Subject-verb agreement errors 2) Gerund errors 3) Preposition errors 4) Article errors 5) Demonstrative errors 6) Omission of verbs/ actions 7) AND-type errors 8) BUT-type errors 9) OR-type errors 10) SO-type errors 11) Noun clause/phrase errors 12) Adjective clause/ phrase errors 13) Adverbial clause/ phrase errors
2.3 Incomplete application of rules	1) Present errors 2) Passive voice errors 3) Comparison error
2.4 False concepts Hypothesized	-

Based on Table 3 above, the results of this study indicate that both inter-language errors and intralingual errors and development tend to be the potential causes of students' errors when writing English essays, therefore both will be analyzed. Referring to the possible source of error

from table 3, there were 15 specific errors of influence on L1, and 18 specific errors resulting from difficulties and problems in the target language itself.

5. Conclusion

From this study the conclusion that can be drawn is that the most frequent errors are singular/plural markers (30.43%), followed by article errors (21.51%), and prepositional errors (5.23%). These three rules become the main problems of students when they write English essays. The reason is that the complexity of the use of these three rules makes students experience confusion in choosing the correct form.

Regarding the potential sources of error, errors between languages cause students who are incompetent in English grammar tend to rely on Indonesian language structures when producing English sentences. The difference between the structure of Indonesian language and the structure of English can confuse students which cause them to commit errors in writing English. In addition, intralingual errors and developments also lead to students' errors. They over-generalize the structure of English because some rules are difficult and complex, so they tend to use the structure of English that they have studied applied to new sentences but the results are incorrect.

As a recommendation from the results of this study, students should improve the ability to use grammar when writing English, especially in three specific errors: singular/plural forms, articles, and prepositions. Writing lecturers and syllabus makers can use the results of this study as inputs to make more appropriate teaching materials to fix students' English grammar problems.

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