ANALYZING ERRORS IN THESIS WRITING: SHOULD GRAMMAR BE AN ISSUE IN ENGLISH ACADEMIC WRITING FOR STUDENTS OF ENGLISH COLLEGE?

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Abstract

The result section is an essential part of the thesis to summarize information about research findings. Presenting research findings in terms of clear and concise writing is vital for the English students of the higher education. To this, students should know the linguistic aspects of writing. Previous research shows that a lot of research has been carried out regarding grammatical issues in writing, but little research has been done on deep grammar issues in writing the result section of the thesis. Thus, this study aims to analyze the grammatical issues in student-researchers' thesis. Data were officially collected from the reading room of the faculty of state university in Medan. The data were analyzed according to Bourke & Holbrook's (1992) theory. The results show student-researchers are still struggling to use verb-form issues, nouns, and tenses. At last, word form remains the most dominant issues of errors.

Keywords: *grammatical issues, result section, thesis, writing*

Sari

Bagian hasil adalah bagian penting dari tesis untuk merangkum informasi tentang temuan penelitian. Kemampuan untuk menulis hasil yang jelas dan ringkas sangat

penting bagi siswa. Para siswa harus mengetahui aspek linguistik penulisan. Beberapa penelitian sebelumnya menunjukkan bahwa banyak penelitian telah dilakukan mengenai masalah tata bahasa secara tertulis, tetapi sedikit penelitian yang telah dilakukan pada masalah tata bahasa yang mendalam dalam menulis bagian hasil tesis. Penelitian ini adalah penelitian kualitatif deskriptif yang bertujuan untuk menganalisis masalah tata bahasa yang ditemukan di bagian hasil tesis yang ditulis oleh mahasiswa jurusan bahasa Inggris di salah satu universitas di Indonesia. Sumber data dalam penelitian ini adalah 5 dokumen tesis mahasiswa. Data dianalisis menerapkan teori Schrampfer. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dari 5 tesis siswa yang diambil, masalah dominan dalam menulis bagian hasil adalah masalah bentuk kata kerja, dan yang paling dominan adalah masalah bentuk kata.

kata kunci: *bagian hasil, menulis, tata bahasa, tesis*

Introduction

Language is the gate of knowledge and the bridge of human communication. In language, there are four crucial features; they are speaking, writing, listening, and listening. To master the language means to master all of them. One of the most critical roles in studying language is writing. Writing plays a leading role in learning the language. Throughout the writing, someone can express their idea, opinion, feelings, or even persuade people.

As English Second Language (ESL) students, they are making English theses way more challenging than doing the theses in the native language. Norrish (1983) defines an error as such a systematic deviation that occurs when the learner has not learned something of the language and gets it wrong regularly because he has not learned the correct form. However, some factors cause errors such as carelessness, first language interference, and translation.

Grammar lessons have been taught to the students of the English department since the very beginning of their education, but the students still had problems in their thesis. The grammatical mistake might seem small, but an error is still an error and might affect the whole writing quality. This paper is seeking to analyze the type of problems that occurred in students' thesis and the dominant problem and to suggest a way to minimize

the issues. This study expected that the result of this study would be beneficial for the students and the theses guidance by noticing where the students faced the problem the most. Error is a deviation from the adult grammar of native speakers which signifies the inter-language capability of the language learners, while error analysis (Brown, 2007; James, 1998, p. 1), and is the process of concluding the occurrence, nature, reasons, and effects of unsuccessful language.

Two terms are commonly used to describe the inaccuracy in applying grammar into writing, namely error and mistake. The misperception of the uses of those two terms often occurs. Though they seem similar, they are entirely different. Ellis (2005) differentiates the error from mistake.

> "There are two ways suggested distinguishing between an error and a mistake. The first one is to check the consistency of the learner's performance. If he sometimes uses the correct form and sometimes the wrong one, it is a mistake. However, if he always misuses it, it is then an error. The second way is to ask the learner to try to correct his utterance. Where he is unable to, the deviations are errors; where he is successful, they are mistakes."

According to Corder (1967), the errors made by the ESL/EFL learners are significant because "they provide to the researcher evidence of how language is learned or acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in the discovery of the language" (p.167). James (1998) goes with this idea by saying that "the learners' errors are a register of their current perspective on the target language" (p.7).

Methods

Data were taken from students of the English department in graduating year of 2016 – 2017 randomly both in odd and even semester. The theses were officially taken from the reading room of the faculty. In analyzing the data, close reading was employed (Yin, 2009). All the five selected theses were read for several times and coded. Issues and notes were underlined according to Bourke & Holbrook's (1992) theory. All underlined errors were numbers and tabulated in 2007 Microsoft Excel and proceed to descriptive statistics.

Results and Discussion

The issues in sentences and paragraphs were divided into five categories of errors: subject-verb agreement, verb-form, tense, singular-plural noun, & word form. Each issue is presented and discussed.

Subject – Verb Agreement Errors

Subject-agreement becomes something crucial not only in academic writing but also in any EFL writing contexts, e.g. essays, paragraph writing (Chien, 2012) in Asian EFL classroom. The results of the analysis provides further evidences of this phenomenon, e.g. in table 1.

Table 1. Subject – Verb Agreement Errors

No.	Error Sentences	Correct Sentences
1.	Some findings were found as f**ollows**	Some findings were found as **follow**
2.	It is also has the meaning that **refer** to the status of Geisha	It is also has the meaning that **refers** to the status of Geisha

In this type of error, the students tend to add the suffix – s after the verbs, and in some sentences, they forgot to add the suffix –a while it needed, e.g. in sentence 1 and 2 in table 1. In the first sentence, the word "follows" doesn't need the suffix –s since the subject that written there is a plural noun (findings). In contrast, in the second sentence, the word "refer" actually needed the suffix –s, since the subject that was discussed is singular (it). Consult a dictionary (APA prefers Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 2005) when in doubt about the plural form of nouns of foreign origins, e.g. agreement between subject and verb with collective terms. Subject-verb agreement for Indonesian EFL writers is uneasy in terms of formation-based writing. This, for an example, is due to different system of writing between English and Bahasa Indonesia as native language. High expectation of the supervisors make it worse (Strauss, 2012; Zheng, Yu, Wang, & Zhang, 2019).

Verb Form Errors

Students have often conflicted from if-clause and past events. The results of analysis discovered that students experiencing putting a certain verb before or after another verbs in right contexts. Table 2 shows these evidences.

Table 2. Verb Form

No.	Error Sentences	Correct Sentences
1.	The myth that **can be shown** by the author	The myth that **can be showed** by the author
2.	Since he **had become** a son of his new family	Since he **has become** a son of his new family
3.	After he **had become** the king of Anga	After he **became** the king of Anga
4.	It **found** that there were four	It **is found** that there were four
5.	The total numbers of maxim violation uttered in the movie were **dominantly** violated maxim	The total numbers of maxim violation uttered in the movie were **dominated by** violated maxim
6.	Giving more information can make clearly to **understood**	Giving more information can make clearly to **understand**
7.	The context where violation usually **occur**	The context where violation usually **occurred**
8.	When the speaker **give** answers or to **respond** to the listener	When the speaker **gave** answers or to **responded** to the listener
9.	It was found that there were 21 symbols that **was exist** in the movie	It was found that there were 21 symbols that **existed** in the movie

In this type of problem, the students tend to write the form of the wrong verbs to complete specific tenses structure. For example, in sentences 3, 7, and 9. In the first sentence, the student used past perfect tense (had become), since had already occurred in the event, the appropriate verb that can be used is "became." In the second sentence, the word "occur" is present tense. Meanwhile, the event already happened in the past, so the correct word must be "occurred." In the third sentence, the student used past perfect tense to complete the sentence (was exists); the appropriate word to be used is "existed" to describe what the event already occurred. Verb forms is also a matter of reading as funds of knowledge sources (Misdi, 2018).

Tense Errors

Verb tense is still issues of writing errors among the students of English as foreign language, especially in the higher education. As table 3 show, errors vary in several forms of parts of the clauses. Students experienced difficulties to express events occurring at present or in the past. It also suggests that such findings as general knowledge (Bourke & Holbrook, 1992) of current findings are also confirmed.

Table 3. Verb Tense Errors

No.	Error Sentences	Correct Sentences
1.	The irrelevant comment or answer **is** to represent	The irrelevant comment or answer **was** to represent
2.	They did not give as informative as it **is** needed	They did not give as informative as it **was** needed

The problems made by the students in this type of mistake are the inappropriateness use of verbs related to the kind of tenses. It can be shown in sentence number 1 and 2 in table 3. In the errors that were committed in this type of error is the use of "is." From the context, it can be identified that the event already happened in the past. So the correct form should be "was. This

kind of errors has been explored and sought in higher education academic writing contexts (Bourke & Holbrook, 1992)

Singular/Plural Noun Ending Errors

Countable and uncountable nouns often drive students to wrong direction. The findings revealed students commit on several issues related to noun, e.g. singular vs. plural nouns. The results of the analysis is presented in the following table.

Table 4. Singular/Plural noun Ending Errors Found in the Theses

No.	Error Sentences	Correct Sentences
1.	The most dominant kind of taboo **words**	The most dominant kind of taboo **word**
2.	It had been known that all the data (**lyrics** of songs)	It had been known that all the data (**lyric** of songs)
3.	The main character in the **movies**	The main character in the **movie**

The significant problem made by the students in this type of error is the inappropriate suffix – es/s in the singular noun. For example, in sentence number 1, 2, and 3 in table 4. In the bold words above, don't need the suffix –s. The word form in those sentences is singular. The same as the findings in earlier parts, errors of this type can be maintained early in teaching writing from the early age of education, e.g. senior high schools (Chien, 2012).

Word Form Errors

Word form errors are basically critical accidents. Word form errors come in different evidences and arguments, e.g. because of the former English teachers. In short, the followings are the results of the word form errors analysis.

Table 5. Word form Errors

No.	Error Sentences	Correct Sentences
1.	So that **in there** is no confusion in the future	So that **there** is no confusion in the future

The problem committed in this type of mistake is the wrong choice of words. For example, in sentence 1 in table 5. The word "in" shown above is inappropriate because the sentence felt strange when it's read. Without the word "in," the meaning of the sentence still can be accepted. Overall, errors can be shown in the following summary table.

Table 6. Total Number of Error's Percentage

No.	Grammatical Problems	Number of Problems	Percentage (%)
1.	Subject – Verb Agreement	2	11,76
2.	Verb – Form Errors	9	52,94
3.	Verb – Tense Errors	2	11,76
4.	Singular/Plural Noun Ending Errors	3	17,64
5.	Word Form Errors	1	5,89
	Total	17	100

Verb-form errors provide the highest percentage of the errors experienced by the students. There are some errors sources and evidences of errors. Lack of critical reading is one of the sources students' error thesis writing Misdi (2018) causing insufficient funds of knowledge-a long impact of teaching grammar style and modeling in the classroom Faisal & Misdi (2016). To highlight, errors during thesis writing is actually influenced many factors, e.g. supervising process (Golding, Sharmini, & Lazarovitch, 2014; Strauss, 2012; Zheng et al., 2019).

Conclusion & recommendation

From the overall findings, errors occurred mostly in all types of errors (Bourke & Holbrook, 1992), i.e. verb-form, subject-verb, word form, tense, and singularity of nouns. Verb forms errors dominated the errors in student thesis writing in the context of the study. From the findings, it suggests to investigate further areas of errors and their sources of errors, e.g. lack of funds of knowledge in their earlier education.

Acknowledgment

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