ERROR ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH WRITTEN ESSAY OF HIGHER EFL LEARNERS: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

The aim of the research is to identify grammatical error and to investigate the most and the least of grammatical error occurred on the students' English written essay. The approach of research is qualitative descriptive with descriptive analysis. The samples were taken from the essays made by 34 students in writing class. The findings resulted in: the most common error occurred was subject-verb agreement error and the score was 28, 25%. The second place of frequent error was on verb tense and form with 24, 66% as the score. The third was on spellings errors and the value is 17, 94%. The fourth was error on using auxiliaries and the score 9, 87%. The fifth was error on word order with the score was 8.07%. The rest error was applying passive voice with the score is 4.93%, articles (3.59%), prepositions (1.79%), and pronoun and run-on sentence with the same scores, 0. 45%. This may indicate that most students still made errors even for the usage of basic grammar rules in their writing.

Keywords*: developing essay; grammatical error; writing*

INTRODUCTION

English is a subject that is very important to be learned because it is used as an international language. On the other words, it means that language is universally used by almost people around the world. It is used as communication language among people in different country. Therefore, learning English is an essential thing that it must be learned by the language learner in almost all countries in this world.

The English skills that they have to master are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among skills that is the most difficult for Indonesian language learners is assumed on writing skill, for the production of writing competence is written. Therefore, it is very important to know how far they master their writing skill from knowing how many they make error on their written. Writing is a part of four elements (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) in studying English. This skill is always as a part of the syllabus in the studying English. *"When writing, students frequently have more time to think than they do in oral activities. They can go through what they know in their minds, and even consult dictionaries, grammar books, or other reference material to help them."(Harmer, 2008: 31).*

Actually, students need more time to write and they learn writing to make their learning English better. Langan (2010:6) defines "In writing any idea that you advance must be

supported with specific reasons or details." It means that the product of academic writing must be procedural, systematical, clear, and easy to be understood by the reader. As stated by Hogue (2008: 3) academic writing requires certain skills. These skills include sentence structure (how to arrange words in a sentence), organization (how to arrange ideas in a paragraph), and, of course, grammar and punctuation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In learning writing skill is not let free from learning grammar since it is a basic knowledge before beginning to write. Moreover, it is a crystal clear that the level mastery can be known from the error that is done by the language learner especially on mastering writing skill through the using of grammatical rule on their written. Hence, the identification of error on learners written can be identified from the error on grammatical used.

Khan and Khan (2016: 232-233) define an error is the use of language item in a way that a fluent or native speakers of the language regards it as showing faulty or incomplete learning. As said by Norrish in (Khan and Khan, 2016: 233) the error elaborately as a systematic deviation, when the learner has not learnt something and consistently get its wrong. Still, in Khan and Khan (2016:233), Cunningworth states that errors are systematic deviations from the norms of the language being learned. Also stated by Corder (in Khanom, 2014:40) that Errors are systematic, i.e., likely to occur recurrently and not recognized by learners. By the explanation before it can be concluded that error is the process of learning language that they cannot correct when they make errors.

On the other side, errors actually differ from mistakes. Corder (in Khanom, 2014:40) states mistakes are deviations due to performance factors (memory limitation, emotional strain, lack of attention, fatigue, carelessness, etc.) that are typically random and readily corrected by the learners when pointed out. Brown made a distinction between mistakes and errors based on the sources. A mistake indicates "a failure to utilize a known system correctly" whereas an error "Reflects the competence of the learner" (2000: 257). It was also admitted, however, that one may not be able to "tell the difference between an error and a mistake" in all occasions (2000: 217). In conclusion, when mistakes are done by the learners, they can correct the mistakes by themselves. Error refers to lack of competence; in contrast, mistakes are lack of performance.

Moreover, Richard and Schmidt (in Al-Khasawneh, 2014: 89) say that language errors can be classified into two main parts: inter-lingual and intra-lingual errors. Inter-lingual errors can be detected as transfer errors caused by learners' mother tongue merits such as lexical errors, grammatical errors, or pragmatic errors. Intra-lingual errors can be attributed to the ignorance of rule restrictions, imperfect implementation of rules, and false concepts assumed

which all lead to overgeneralization. Still in AL- Khasawaneh (2014:89) Ellis states that overgeneralization errors are caused when learners provide irregular structures unlike the target language structures, whereas unawareness of rule restrictions is related to the rule implementation in improper contexts.

In Hasyim (2002: 47), Norrish classifies the causes of errors into three causes. The first is carelessness. It is often closely related to lack of motivation. Many teachers will admit that it is not always the student's fault if he loses interest, perhaps the materials and/or style of presentation do not suit him. The second cause of error is first language interference. Norrish states that learning a language (a mother tongue or a foreign language) is a matter of habit formation. When someone tries to learn new habits the old ones will interfere the new ones. It causes of error is called first language interference". Then translation is as the third causes of error. This happens because a student translates his first language sentence or idiomatic expression in to the target language word by word. This is probably the most common cause of errors.

In analyzing error, Corder (1974, cited by Ellis and Barkhuizen, 2005: 57-67) distinguished five steps in conducting error analysis. The first step is collecting of a sample of learner language. To provide data for the error analysis, the researcher needs to collect a sample of learner language. In this step, the researcher may control the data by narrowly specifying the sample he/she intends to collect. Secondly, the identification of errors involves a comparison between learners' sentences and native speakers' sentences in the same context. Then, the researcher could identify which part of learners' sentences is different from the "reconstructed version". Description of errors is the third step in error analysis. The description of errors usually employs either linguistic taxonomy or surface structure taxonomy to describe the differences between learner's sentences and native speakers' sentences. Next step is explanation of errors. Explaining errors consists of determining their sources in order to find out the reason why they made errors. Obviously, learners make errors due to the difficulties in accessing their L2 knowledge in communication. The last is error evaluation. Error evaluation is a supplementary stage in error analysis. "It is containing determining the criticalness of errors and the need of reinforcement.

Related to grammatical error, Shumaila Khan and Mohammed Riaz Khan (2016: 283) who analyzed error on English written by Saudi students of Jazan University classified the types of grammatical into the following: Verb Tense and Form, Subject-Verb Agreement, Word Order, Prepositions, Articles, Auxiliaries, Spellings, Pronoun, Passive Voice, and Run-on Sentence.

Moreover, the research about learners' errors in written essay has been widely

conducted by some researchers. In 2012, Gustillo and Magno investigated the sentence-level errors of freshmen students in five private schools in Manila, Philippine. They found that the most frequently errors were using comma 16.6%, word choice 13.5%, Verbs including S-V agreement 11.8%, capitalization 11.3% and punctuation and sentence structure 9.4% (Gustillo and Magno, 2012: 101). Next, Sawalmeh from Saudi Arabia analyzed 32 essays written by Saudi learners. The result showed that the most frequently errors were verb tenses 16.5%, 12.4% for errors in articles, sentence fragment 11.7%, spelling 11.6%, and word order 10.9% (Sawalmeh, 2013: 10).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purposes of this research are to identify, to categorize, to describe, and to investigate the grammatical errors that frequently occur on student's English written essay. This research study will be conducted in qualitative descriptive method. A qualitative research by Gay and Airasian (2000: 627) is the collection of extensive data on many variables over an extended period of time, in a naturalistic setting, in order to gain insight not possible using other types of research. Descriptive research, according to Gay and Airasian (2000: 275) is a study to determine and describe the way things are. Therefore, this research study will concern on the data which taken from the essay test.

The participants of this research study were 34 students at Indraprasta PGRI Jakarta University on sixth semester that took Writing Subject and made essays on their examination. The essays they wrote, then, were collected. In analyzing data, there are five steps of error analysis (Corder, 1974 cited by Ellis and Barkhuizen, 2005: 57-67), as follow: 1) Collection of a sample of learner language, 2) Identification of errors, 3) Description of errors, 4) Explanation of errors, and 5) Error evaluation. The errors will be analyzed based on the grammatical errors proposed by Azar (2002).

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

The description of data on this research study shows the result of grammatical error analysis towards student's English written essay. There are 10 items of grammatical errors found, as follows:

1. Verb Tense and Form

On this term there were found 56 errors among 223 errors. It is assumed that this amount is very significant result. There are several examples of respondents' errors they are as follows:

Table 1. Finding in error of verb tense and form

Error Construction	Suggested Correction
I *hope* my first day in the university was good.	I *hoped* my first day in the university was good.
… I don't care because there *was* not ...	… I don't care because there *is*..
…I was a bit annoyed if my parents always *ask*...	…I was a bit annoyed if my parents always *asked*…

By seeing the error examples above, it can be stated that the error construction occurs on incorrect form of verb tense; there are no equivalences on the simple present tense and simple past tense used.

2. Subject- Verb Agreement.

On Subject- Verb Agreement, the number of the errors is 62 errors. This result means the amount of subject –verb agreement is the most dominant errors that were made by the respondents. For further description it can be seen by the examples in the following table:

Table 21. Finding in Error of Subject-Verb Agreement

Error Construction	Suggested Correction
She *know*…	She *knows*…
Everyone *have* favorite food.	Everyone *has* favorite food.
My husband always *love* me.	My husband always *loves* me.

The error examples above describe the unbalance on placing subjects and verbs. The incorrect using of proper verbs toward subjects occurs on putting singular subjects that should be followed by singular verbs. Otherwise, plural subjects must be followed by plural verbs.

3. Word Order

The errors on word order items consist of 18 errors. In other words, the errors of word order on the mid- level. Several examples on word order errors can be seen in the following table:

Table 32. Finding in Error of Word Order

Error Construction	Suggested Correction
If you like meal *whatever it.*	If you like meal *whatever it is*.
You must know *how to you reserve...*	You must know *how to reserve...*
My mother is the most *stronger...*	My mother is the most *strongest...*

The table describes lacking of using word order properly can be the reason why the

errors occur.

4. Prepositions

On prepositions were found the errors only 4 errors. It means that the amount of preposition errors is less of significant error. Those errors can be seen on the table as follows:

Table 4. Finding in Error of Prepositions

Error Construction	Suggested Correction
Many people sales *in* street...	Many people sales *on* street...
My husband learn me *for* like sweet food.	My husband teaches me *to* like sweet food.
I don't have an idol *in* television...	I don't have an idol *on* television...

The table describes that the prepositions are placed on incorrect position towards object of prepositions.

5. Articles

On articles were found the amount of the errors is 8 errors. That amount represents that the errors which were made is less of significant error. In the following table can be seen several examples of errors on articles:

Table 53. Finding in Error of Articles

Error Construction	Suggested Correction
Add *a* egg...	Add *an* egg...
…I can be *good girl...*	…I can be *a good girl...*
…as *a* employee…	…as *an* employee…

The table above describes unsuitable articles are placed on the nouns that follow the articles. For instance, the using of article "*an*" should be followed by the nouns that have sound of vowel while article "*a*" should be followed by consonant sound.

6. Auxiliaries

The errors on auxiliaries were found on 22 errors. This amount means the errors of using auxiliaries is fair amount. The examples of errors on using auxiliaries can be seen on the following table:

Table 6. Finding in Error of Auxiliaries

Error Construction	Suggested Correction
We can *takes*...	We can *take*...
… you can't *handled*…	… you can't *handle*…
…you must *choice…*	…you must *choose…*

The description of the table above is inconsistent on placing auxiliaries after modal and negative modal. Modals should be followed by verb one or bare verb whether in positive or negative form.

7. Spelling

On spelling error the numbers of errors is 40 errors. This amount shows that the number of spelling errors is very significant. The examples of spelling errors can b seen on the table below:

Table 7. Finding in Error of Spelling

Error Construction	Suggested Correction
… *konsumsion* noodle.	…*consumption* noodle.
… a new *atmosfer*...	… a new *atmosphere*...
…pure love, loyalty, *sucrifice*, and many more.	…pure love, loyalty, *sacrifice*, and many more.

The table presents that the errors of spelling are on the incorrect written form.

8. Pronoun

On Pronoun, the errors occur in amount of 1 error. This amount is less or not significant errors. The examples of pronoun errors as follows:

Table 84. Finding in Error of Pronoun

Error Construction	Suggested Correction
…she always….of *his* children.	…she always….of *her* children.

The table describes that the pronoun error occurs when the inconsistent main subject towards related pronoun that refers to its main subject.

9. Passive Voice

The amount of errors on passive voice is 11 errors. This amount means on less of significant error. The examples are in the following table:

Table 95. Finding in Error of Passive Voice

Error Construction	Suggested Correction
Indian Paneer Kare can be *eat*...	Indian Paneer Kare can be *eaten*...
The fermentated paneer also must be *cook*...	The fermentated paneer also must be *cooked*...
It is clearly *mention* in the Qur'an...	It is clearly *mentioned* in the Qur'an...

The table of error on passive voice describes that the incorrect form of verb that should

be followed after "*To be*" that it is supposed to be on past participle verb form. In fact, the errors occur on using verb one.

10. Run-On Sentence

On run-on sentence the error is one error. It means the amount of the error is less or not significant error. The example of error can be seen on the following table:

Table 10. Finding in Error of Run-on Sentence

Error Construction	Suggested Correction
…I feel…, he teach…, sometimes…, he always...	*…I feel…; he teaches…; sometimes…; he always...*

The table describes that the error of using run-on sentence occur because there are several independent clauses that cannot be combined into one sentence without conjunctions or semicolons. Next, after describing the amount of each item of grammatical errors, the researchers calculated the amount of data in percentage value as follows:

Table 116. Percentages of Errors

The Types of Grammatical Errors	Percentage
1. Verb Tense and Form	24,66%
2. Subject-Verb Agreement	28,25%
3. Word Order	8,07%
4. Prepositions	1,79%
5. Articles	3,59%
6. Auxiliaries	9,87%
7. Spellings	17,94%
8. Pronoun	0,45%
9. Passive Voice	4,93%
10. Run-on Sentence	0,45%

From the table above it can be known the result of grammatical errors in percentage value. Knowing the information by those table and diagram, it can be stated that the most frequent grammatical error is on subject-verb agreement error and the score is 28, 25%. The second place of frequent error is on verb tense and form with 24, 66% as the score. The third is on spellings errors and the value is 17, 94%. The fourth is error on using auxiliaries and the score 9, 87%. The fifth is error on word order with the score is 8, 07%. The sixth is error on applying passive voice with the score is 4, 93%. The seventh frequent of grammatical error is articles and the score is 3, 59%. The eighth frequent grammatical error is on using prepositions and the amount is 1, 79%. Finally, the least frequent grammatical errors are pronoun and run-on

sentence and the same score is 0, 45%. In conclusion, the most frequent of grammatical error is on subject verb agreement by the score 28, 25% and the least frequent grammatical errors are on pronoun and run-on sentence with the score 0, 45%.

Comparing to the result on this research study, Darus (2009) in Malaysia also found the six most common errors committed by the participants were singular/plural form, verb tense, word choice, preposition, subject-verb agreement and word order. Besides, Khanom (2014) also found the most frequent grammatical errors towards Bangladesh higher secondary level were: spelling, verb tense, and on applying plural form. And, Khan and Khan (2016) by their research in Jazan University towards Saudi students, the most common errors found were: verb tense and form, subject-verb agreement, word order, prepositions, articles, auxiliaries and spellings. Even though the most frequent of grammatical errors are different position, there are still the similarity types of grammatical errors that commonly occur; they are subject- verb agreement, verb tense, and spelling. Moreover, this research finding was consistent with the investigation by Gustillo and Magno from Philippine which resulted in comma 16.6%, word choice 13.5%, Verbs including S-V agreement 11.8%, capitalization 11.3% and punctuation and sentence structure 9.4% as the most common errors (Gustillo and Magno, 2012: 101). Also, this research supports study by Sawalmeh (2013: 10) from Saudi Arabia who analyzed 32 essays written by Saudi learners. The results from both research also found that the most common errors were verb tenses, spelling and word order.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

After collecting and analyzing data from students' English written essay, some findings have been obtained. There are ten items of grammatical errors found on the essays. Error in subject-verb agreement is leading with 28.25%. The second place of frequent error is on verb tense and form with 24.66%. The third is spellings errors with 17.94%. The fourth error found is error on using auxiliaries (9.87%). The other errors in a sequence are word order (8.07%), passive voice (4.93%), articles (3.59%), and prepositions (1.79%). Finally, the last frequent grammatical errors are pronoun and run-on sentence with 0.45%.

These findings may indicate that errors in basic grammatical rules are still found on the students whose grade can be called as intermediate level learners. With a lot of grammatical errors found, the essays will not be scored excellently. It is because grammar is one of evaluation aspects in writing. It is not surprising that the students will probably face difficulty in acquiring writing skills in writing class, unless they master basic grammar rules. These findings also provide encouragement for further research related to find solution how to lessen the errors in writing essay particularly grammatical errors

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