

Analyzing Undergraduate Students' Errors in Writing Descriptive Text

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify the students' errors and find the most errors students made. This study used qualitative approach having descriptive approach the research method. The sample were 35 college students in the University at the first semester in English class which selected purposively. The data was collected through the writing test. It is used to identify the type of errors students' made and the highest errors students' made in writing descriptive text by using simple present tense. The writing test is conducted two times. After those, the data were analyzed and found the result. The result showed that there were 510 errors found in students' works, consisting of omission of "be", inappropriate use of "be", superfluous of be, subject-verb agreement, wrong form of have/has, wrong form of negative sentence, inappropriate use of pronoun and wrong form of modal auxiliary. The highest number of errors was subject-verb agreement at the first rank with 138 errors or 27% and omission "be" after subject at the second rank with 125 errors or 22.5% and the lowest numbers of error were inappropriate use of pronoun and inappropriate form of negative sentence with 11 error or 2.2 %. Based on the result, it can be found that students have difficulties in writing descriptive text by using simple present tense which influenced of interlanguage transfer and intralingual transfer.

INTRODUCTION

Grammar is one of crucial part in writing. It is about what form are possible in a language. According to Swan (1998) cited in Annisah and Roza, 2022 stated “grammar is the rule that says how words are changed to show different meaning, and they combine into sentences” It means grammar is a way forming different meanings of words which use to construct a sentence in writing. Every language has its own grammar. In English, there are approximately 16 tenses as its grammar. However, grammar becomes the biggest problem for the students in writing English because of the interference of their first language. Therefore, students tend to make mistake even error in learning English, especially writing.

Error is natural part of language learning process because they reflect various stages in language development in learner. Heidi Dulay (1982:138) claimed “Errors are flawed side of learner speech and writing”. While S. Pit Corder (1991: 224) said “Error is systematic deviation made by learners who have not mastered yet the rules of L2”. In the study of error analysis, some linguists distinguish error and mistake. Hubbard et al in Andryan (2015) makes a distinction between error and mistake. Error caused by the lack of knowledge about target language or by the incorrect hypothesis about it; and unfortunate mistake cause by temporary lapses of memory, confusion, slips of the tongue and so on.

Further, some linguists differentiate the source of errors; interlingual errors, intralingual errors, context of learning and communication strategies. Interference, language transfer, and cross-linguistic interference are also known as interlingual errors. Corder (2000) states that these kind of error occur when the learner’s habit (patterns, systems or rules) inference or prevent someone to some extent from acquiring the patterns and rule of second language. Chelli (2013) defined that interlingual errors are the result of language transfer, which caused by learner’s first language. While interlingual errors are the interference occurred because of the learner do not know well the target language. Richard (1974) states intralingual inference refers to items produced by learner, which

reflect not the structure of mother tongue, but generalization based on partial exposure of the target language. It includes overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of the rules, and false concept hypothesize or semantic errors.

In learning foreign language, grammar is one of the difficult things to learn by students because of the differences of grammar rules. For example Indonesia and English which have quite different grammar, in Indonesia it does not really regulate how verbs should be used. But in English there are many rules that must be considered, especially in the use of tenses, which are rules that indicate activities within a certain time. Simple presents tense is used when talking about general truth and permanent situation (Murphy: 2003). In line with this definition, Betty (2002) explains that simple present is used to show something that always happens, in the past, present and future.

Based on syllabus of English Program in the University which will be as the subject of this research, students at the first semester should be able to write descriptive text. The researcher assumes that students make grammatical errors, especially in tenses. Therefore, the researcher carried out a research on errors in tenses in descriptive text produced by college students at first semester.

Numerous researchers have previously done by Siswoyo (2016), Fitria (2019), Siregar (2020) which conducted a research in the same area with the Senior High School students as the subject. They tried to find out the errors made by the students in the term of writing English paper. They found that students made many errors in writing paper, such as omission and misordering. Another research was conducted by Firmansyah (2022) which used the eleventh grade students as the subject. He tried to identify the students' errors and to know the cause of student errors in using simple present tense. Both of studies found that students made the highest errors in term or missing "be" after the subject and subject verb agreement.

There are some theories dealt with error in writing sentences. Brown (2019) says that error actually cannot be separated from language learning. It happens in speech as well as in writing. Further, Dulay (1982:146) states that some linguists are encouraged to study about errors made by language learners. One of them is taxonomy. This taxonomy categorized errors according the language component or the particular linguistic constituent of each component or both of them. The language component includes phonology (pronunciation), syntax and morphology (grammar), semantic, and lexicon (meaning and vocabulary) and discourse (style). The morphological is chosen to analyze students' error in tenses; omission "be" after subject, inappropriate use of "be", superfluous be, subject-verb agreement, misinformation of passive form, a form of have/has, wrong form of modal auxiliary, inappropriate use of pronoun, and wrong form of negative sentence. In spite of many errors occurred in learning process, it is not sure that the learner does not understand because error is a part of learning process. Errors which students made can be used as a tool to know how far the learners understand and through making error able to know where many of learners get difficulties. And for the next, errors can be revised to know the correct one. By making errors the knowledge or understanding of learners become more develop than before and by making errors can help learners to be better.

Based on the background above, the researcher tried to conduct a research in the same area as the further study to find the deep finding about the topic in which the university students as the subject. As it is cited by Pohan (2017) which stated that Error analysis provides a deep insight for understanding of the process of language learning while according to Karim er al (2018) cited in Sumarti (2020) stated that identifying errors is not important but essential. Therefore, the purpose of this research was intended to describe the objective condition about students' writings in descriptive text by analyzing the errors.

Further, the finding of this research would be benefit as one of the preliminary studies to develop the materials since the

researcher is the first one who conducted the research to the English class in this university. This research is also important to be done as the informational for the teacher to improve the strategy in teaching learning process to fit with the students' needs.

METHODS

Qualitative approach with descriptive method is chosen to accomplish this research. Frankel and Wallen (2012:15) describe descriptive study as a given state of affairs as fully and carefully as possible. It describes the fact systematically of certain population factually and accurately, in this case, the researcher focused on the problem students' made such as errors on the part of speech, sentence pattern, subject verb agreement, and verb tense.

The subject of the research is the undergraduate student at the first semester of D3 Midwifery and S1 Nursing Program. They are chosen as the representative for the whole population in all areas of health study programs. The population of both study programs in English class at the first semester was 110 which were divided into 3 classes. The total sample of this research is 40 students. The researcher took one class of them by using cluster random due to the accessibility. According to Frankel and Wallen (2006) a sample is a group on which information is obtained. Furthermore, Frankel and Wallen (2006) stated that cluster random sampling is the selection of group of cluster of subject than individual.

In order to get the related data to each variable, the researcher uses writing descriptive paragraph test as the instrument. The test item shows the students' knowledge in writing descriptive paragraph. They are asked to write descriptive paragraph which consist at least 200 words in 45 minutes based on the topic given. The result of students' work is not to measure student's ability, but to find out the errors which students made in producing their writing. The data took two times: once at the first week, and once at the second week.

After the researcher got the data, it will be analyzed. The steps are: identifying the errors, calculating the number of frequencies by

each type, finding the percentage, making description of errors, and drawing conclusion. The identification errors refer to the identification of any deviation in students' writing. After identifying the errors, the total number of errors made by the students was recapitulated. Before drawing conclusion, the researcher calculated each type of errors to find out the highest and the lowest number of errors. Further the data was interpreted. According to Kothari (2004) as cited in Pohan (2017), Interpretation is a device through which the factors that seem to explain what have been observed by researcher in the course of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From both two tests, there were many errors found from 80 written products of the students. The error analysis focusses on some aspects like S-V Agreement, omission, superfluous be, wrong form of have/has, inappropriate use of be, wrong form of modal, wrong form of negative, wrong form of pronoun. The results can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. The Error Analysis Recapitulation for S-V Agreement, Omission, Superfluous be, Wrong form of have/has

Student Code	Total Error			
	S-V Agreement	Omission	Superfluous be	Wrong form of have/has
S1	5	3	0	0
S2	0	4	2	0
S3	3	4	2	4
S4	5	3	2	2
S5	4	2	2	0
S6	4	2	4	2
S7	2	0	5	0
S8	6	4	3	4
S9	4	4	2	3
S10	2	6	2	2
S11	2	2	2	4
S12	8	3	4	2
S13	2	6	3	0

Student Code	Total Error			
	S-V Agreement	Omission	Superfluous be	Wrong form of have/has
S14	0	0	0	0
S15	5	5	2	4
S16	3	6	2	3
S17	8	3	2	2
S18	6	2	3	2
S19	5	2	4	0
S20	0	4	3	4
S21	5	4	3	4
S22	0	3	4	0
S23	3	2	6	2
S24	4	4	5	2
S25	8	4	2	3
S26	0	6	2	2
S27	4	3	3	2
S28	4	3	5	2
S29	5	2	4	0
S30	5	5	3	4
S31	4	2	2	0
S32	4	0	2	2
S33	2	2	4	0
S34	2	2	0	0
S35	2	2	2	2
S36	3	4	4	0
S37	4	2	4	2
S38	2	2	0	0
S39	0	4	2	0
S40	3	4	2	2
Total	138	125	108	67

From Table 1, it can be seen that most of the students are having trouble within the aspect of s-v agreement in which there are 138 errors found. Meanwhile, they are struggling in creating a complete and finished sentence which there are 125 errors identified. On the other hand, students are moderately able to use the word has/have as it was found only 67 errors. Likewise, the students' error within the aspect of inappropriate use of be, wrong form of modal,

wrong form of negative, wrong form of pronoun can be seen in the following table:

Table 2. The Error Analysis Recapitulation for Inappropriate Use of be, Wrong Form of Modal, Wrong Form of Negative, Wrong Form of Pronoun

Student Code	Total			
	Inappropriate use of be	Wrong form of modal	Wrong form of negative	Wrong form of pronoun
S1	5	0	0	0
S2	0	0	0	0
S3	2	0	0	0
S4	2	0	0	0
S5	0	0	0	0
S6	0	2	0	0
S7	2	0	0	0
S8	0	0	0	2
S9	2	3	0	0
S10	4	0	0	0
S11	0	0	0	0
S12	2	0	0	0
S13	4	3	0	0
S14	0	0	0	0
S15	4	0	0	0
S16	2	0	0	0
S17	2	0	0	0
S18	0	2	0	0
S19	0	0	0	0
S20	0	0	0	3
S21	0	0	0	0
S22	0	0	0	0
S23	2	0	0	0
S24	4	0	0	0
S25	2	3	0	0
S26	3	0	0	0
S27	2	0	0	0
S28	2	0	0	0
S29	0	0	3	0
S30	3	0	0	0
S31	0	0	0	0

Student Code	Total			
	Inappropriate use of be	Wrong form of modal	Wrong form of negative	Wrong form of pronoun
S32	0	2	0	0
S33	0	0	0	0
S34	0	0	0	0
S35	0	0	0	0
S36	0	0	0	0
S37	0	0	3	0
S38	3	0	0	0
S39	0	2	0	0
S40	2	0	0	0
Total	54	17	6	5

Surface strategy taxonomy proposed by Dulay et al (1982) is used to analyze the errors. Thus, it is found that the classification of students' errors in writing descriptive paragraph are eight types: (1) Omission of "be" after subject, (2) inappropriate use of "be", (3) superfluous of be, (4) subject-verb agreement, (5) wrong form of have/has, (6) wrong form of negative sentences, (7) inappropriate use of pronoun and (8) wrong form of modal auxiliary. The accumulation is displayed as following

Table 3. Distribution of Students' Errors

No.	Types of Errors	Total Errors	Percentage%
1	Subject-verb agreement	138	27
2	Omission "be" after subject	125	22.55
3	Superfluous be	108	21.67
4	Wrong form of have/has	67	13.14
5	Inappropriate use of be	54	10.58
6	Wrong form of modal auxiliary	17	3.3
7	Wrong form of negative sentence	6	1.2
8	Wrong form of pronoun	5	1
	Total	510	100

Based on the findings above, it can be seen that there were 510 errors from students' writings. The highest number of error was in the form of using subject-verb agreement with 138 errors or 27% from the total errors. It followed by the omission "be" after subject with 125 errors or 22.55 %. And the third rank of errors was superfluous be with 108 errors or 13.14%.

The researcher classified the data as the errors of students' made not mistakes due to the repetition of deviation in task 1 and task 2 based on Hubbard et al in Andryan (2015) which stated that error caused by the lack of knowledge about target language or by the incorrect hypothesis about it; and unfortunate mistake cause by temporary lapses of memory, confusion, slips of the tongue and so on. Therefore, when the students tend to repeat same deviation in their writing, it would be classified as errors.

Error in subject-verb agreement was the first rank of the highest number of errors found in every test. This kind of error is characterized by the use of incorrect form of verb to require a subject. For example: a student may use "She like singing and dancing" instead of "She likes singing and dancing" or "she become a great teacher" instead of "she becomes a great teacher." The errors of subject verb agreement may occur because of the differences of language system in which there is no agreement between subject and verb in Bahasa Indonesia as complicated as English. In English sentences, a singular subject requires a singular verb while in Indonesian sentences, it does not happen. In this case, the students may have some errors because they failed to make subject and verb agree. This finding supported to the research has done by Firmansyah (2020) which found that subject-verb agreement is one of the highest errors found in his research. He found that more than 30% of errors in the term of subject-verb agreement area.

The second highest number of errors found in the form of omission "be" after subject. In the form of using "be", it is necessary to be presented in English while in Bahasa Indonesia it is optional or even not needed. In this type, students make errors because they

failed to put *be* after subject. For example: a student may use “when she x in home” instead of “when she is in home” or “I x lazy to study” instead of “I am lazy to study.” It is supported to the research done by Siswoyo (2016), Fitria (2019), Siregar (2020) and Firmansyah (2020) which have found that omission of “*be*” frequently occurred in students writing. In this type of errors, it may happen as a result of the differences language system between native language and target language as same as subject-verb agreement errors occurred. Applying Indonesian rule which is no “*be*” or copula needed before a predicate in sentences made the learner failed to construct a correct English sentence grammatically.

Another dominant errors happened in the term of superfluous *be* which had the total number of errors was 108 errors or 21.67%. In this type of error, students used “*be*” with no useful purpose. For example: a student tend to write “He is likes ice cream very much” instead of “He likes ice cream very much”. In the form of superfluous *be*, it probably happened as a result of the generalization the use of “*be*” or copula in every sentence. No competence in identifying which the sentences need copula or not made the students failed to form correct sentences.

The errors of subject-verb agreement and omission “*be*” after subject may occur because of the influence of the native language. It is categorized as the interlingual transfer due to the differentiation between native and target rule as it is stated by Chelli (2013) foreign language learner make mistake in target language by effect of his mother tongue. It is known that Bahasa Indonesia has difference grammatical feature like English has. It may be caused the students make errors in composing English sentence. Grammatical inference may influence many things that become problems for Indonesian students in writing English. The students may still use the rule their native language to produce a sentence in English as target language. It is supported the previous findings by Firmansyah (2022) that found the most errors in students writing were misformation between subject and verb and omission of auxiliary verb.

The other errors, such as; superfluous be, inappropriate use of be, a form of have/has, and a form of negative sentence occur because of their incomplete mastery of learning target language (intralingual transfer) in this case English. In other word, the error occurred as a result of the students' inability in determining the right form.

Intralingual errors called development error which caused by the direct result of the learner's attempt to create language based on their hypotheses about the second language system they are learning. Intralingual transfer refers to items produced by the learners which reflect not the structure of mother tongue, but generalization on partial exposure of the second language.

From the cause of errors above, in fact, writing is difficult, because students should have not only the capability to express their desire on their writing, but also they have to master vocabulary and grammatical patterns that are very different to their native language. In addition, the students should do more practices and need to read a lot of English book in order to become good writer.

The findings of this study similar with the previous studies, in a way that subject-verb agreement and omission "be" after the subject occur most frequently. The highest errors made by the students similar to those high school students in some previous studies.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the college students on the first semester which learned at English Class consisted of D₃ Midwifery and S₁ Nursing Program made many errors in almost types of errors which were intended to observe. It can be categorized as errors because most of students made the same errors repeatedly in both their writing tests. The highest number of errors was subject-verb agreement and omission "be" after the subject. The errors made by the students resulted from both the mother tongue influence (interlanguage errors) and target language causes (intralanguage errors). The interlanguage errors were caused by over differentiation and the intralanguage errors probably occur because

of their incomplete mastery of learning the target language (intralingual transfer)

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