

An Investigation into The Grammatical Errors of Students' Writing

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Abstract. Writing serves as a tool for students to extend their grammatical composition, enrich their lexicon, and increase other language abilities, such as reading, listening, and speaking. This study intended to examine written features and analyze frequent errors of students' grammar in writing. Employing a qualitative descriptive research method, the samples were chosen based on convenience samples. The participants were high school students studying at their Year 10, whose English language competence was at an average grade. The students practiced descriptive writing and grammar rules. Four students submitted their essays analyzed using content analysis. The assessment criteria were analyzed using a framework of grammatical errors by Carl James (1998), which classify errors into nine (9) categories (prepositions, articles, singular/plural, adjectives, irregular verbs, tenses, concord, possessive case, and passive/active). The study found 73 errors in students' writing. The top three errors found were prepositions, articles, and tenses, in a particular order. The next identified errors were singular/plural, concord, possessive case, and irregular verbs. Some pedagogical implications deriving from the study were also highlighted. The present study suggests the need for EFL teachers to improve their skills in marking and giving feedback toward students' writing. This will, in turn, improve students' writing skills.

Keywords: English as a Foreign Language, Grammatical Errors, Writing

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is an important skill, specifically in the setting where English is practiced as an international language, yet challenging to teach (Kline & Walker-Gibbs, 2015) professional engagement with parents and the community, and broader notions of preparation to teach in rural contexts. The Studying the Effectiveness of Teacher Education (SETE.

Writing accommodates students to strengthen their grammatical composition, improve their lexicon, and support their language proficiency, such as reading, listening, and speaking. Carroll (1990) contended that the most substantial finding in human records is writing. Moreover, he affirmed that writing presents a comparatively strong record of data, ideas, beliefs, emotions, reasons, definitions,

assumptions, etc. Writing enables people to pass the communication not only with contemporaries but also with the coming ages.

Students commonly deem Writing as one of the most challenging skills of other proficiency in mastering literature. The same obstacle is experienced by native speakers who frequently have difficulty in showing well-written commands (Johnstone et al., 2002). In Indonesia, a similar problem also occurs. Some studies (e.g., Mustikawati, 2017; Siahaan, 2013) found out that students seemed to have less control towards English Grammar as they frequently make errors in the text they wrote. Indonesian EFL students also find difficulty in writing in English. One reasonable cause is that the writing rule is different between English and the Indonesia language. Consequently, students are most likely to use inappropriate structures and break the English grammar rules. According to Brown and Lee (2015), grammar is a rule system that included a sentence administering the proper order and relation of words.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Grammar is considered one of the language components besides vocabulary and sound system, which students should acquire commonly in education and particularly in foreign language acquisition. Knowing grammar means understanding what the text means correctly. Cook (1990) defines "Grammar is the mental system which relates sounds and meanings in mind; it is the vital component in the human mind that allows us to use language for any purposes that we like" (p. 2). To strengthen the theory, Swan (2017) states that grammar is a

bunch of rules managing the way words should be connected, arranged, and changed to demonstrate different meanings.

Some significant factors make English more acceptable, and one of them is grammar because it helps people speak and write in a clearer and more effective manner (Debata, 2013). By grammar, it means a rules system that included a sentence administering the proper order and words. By mastering grammar, communication can be effectively carried out, either in oral or in written language.

Several researchers have conducted numerous studies regarding writing complexities. Al-Shujairi and Tan (2017) and Singh et al. (2017) examined the interlanguage disruption of the mother tongue in writing the target language. In an example of their study, they attempted to locate the classes of errors made by EFL students. They took the sample from compositions written by 112 and 162 students. They found that the most frequent errors in grammar made by students are in the classes of Preposition, Articles, Singular/Plural Nouns, and Tenses.

In separate studies, some researchers (Abushihab et al., 2011; Al-Bayati, 2013; Hourani, 2008; Murad Hassan Mohammed Sawalmeh, 2013) also revealed that students mostly committed errors in tense, preposition, and articles. Similar to other researchers, Maros et al. (2007) did their study on students' errors in grammar from 60 students of 6 rural schools in three different states of Malaysia, Pahang, Selangor, Melaka. Their findings of the study reveal that despite having learned English for six years in the school environment, the students

are still having challenges in practicing appropriate English grammar in their writings. The three most frequent errors are articles, subject-verb agreement, and copula 'be'.

Indeed, students must consider targeted grammar to comprehend writing skills well. Grammar, by definition, is the composition of a language that combines words and phrases to compose a perfect sentence in a particular language (Richards, 2013). As the difficulties of the students are in the structure of English, the undergoing study intends to focus on the error in grammar affecting the writing by applying an analysis of grammatical errors.

Error Analysis is how to classify and interpret the errors (Al-Shujairi et al., 2017). In this study, the researchers classified and interpreted the students' errors in grammar in writing an expository essay. The main objective is to unveil the typical students' errors in expository essays. Further, the study underlines the motives for performing such errors. Interlingual (interlanguage) and intralingual (intralanguage) are the two main factors of errors (Brown & Lee, 2015). Interlanguage errors are located to the native language barrier, while intralanguage errors are commonly associated with the negative interlingual changes.

The aims of the present study are: (1) To classify the students' grammatical errors in writing. (2) To analyze the numerous students' errors in the application of time marker in writing. The present study intends to respond to the subsequent issues: What are the grammatical errors found in students' writing?

3. METHODOLOGY

This part discusses the research plan, method, participants, research media, and data collection as well as data analysis method. This study preferred the design of qualitative research since the methodology accurately provide the needed data to explain the research problem (Ruark & Fielding-Miller, 2016).

The four samples were taken based on convenience sampling from high school students ranging from 16 to 17 years of age. Their English language skill was at an average level. Students learned various English skills and subskills in their secondary schools, such as descriptive essay and grammar practices.

The data of the present study were students' writing. Those writings were the essay of students' assignments. The topic for the writing assignments was about "Talking about Self". Students were given ample time to complete their writing for forty-five minutes. The assessment criteria were analyzed using a framework of grammatical errors by James (1998), which divided errors into nine classes: prepositions, articles, singular/plural, adjectives, irregular verbs, tenses, concord, possessive case, active/passive.

Students' writings were then collected for further analysis. Besides, the number of students' errors was calculated and converted into percentages to get the numerical data of the study. Specific grammatical errors were checked, chosen, and classified, including speech and word forms, appearing based on students' writing. Further, researchers applied content analysis to analyze students' writing.

4. RESULTS

Table 1 reveals the review of grammatical errors derived from the variety of errors, the number of errors, and the rate of errors made by the students.

Table 1. The number and rate of grammatical errors

Item	Variety of Errors	Number of Errors	Rate of Errors (%)
1.	Prepositions	19	26.02
2.	Articles	17	23.29
3.	Singular/Plural	11	15.07
4.	Adjectives	0	0
5.	Irregular verbs	4	5.48
6.	Tenses	13	17.81
7.	Concord	5	6.85
8.	Possessive case	4	5.48
9.	Passive/Active	0	0
Total		73	100

The table reveals the review of grammatical errors derived from the students' essay writing. After being collected and analyzed, there were a total of 73 grammar errors from the writing samples of four

students. Students most often make three errors, namely in prepositions, articles, and tenses. The next noticeable errors were singular/plural, concord, possessive case, and irregular verbs.

Table 2. Students' Grammatical errors in writing

Item	Grammatical Errors	Examples
1.	Prepositions	* <i>I have a pet in home</i> Instead of: <i>I have a pet at home</i>
2.	Articles	* <i>I was born in the Bekasi</i> Instead of: <i>I was born in Bekasi</i>
3.	Singular/Plural	* <i>I have many friend</i> Instead of: <i>I have many friends</i>
4.	Irregular verbs	* <i>My teacher teached me to be a good student</i> Instead of: <i>My teacher taught me to be a good student</i>
5.	Tenses	* <i>I started school in at SDN Karang Mukti and continuing school to junior high school</i> Instead of: <i>I started school in at SDN Karang Mukti and continued school to junior high school</i>
6.	Concord	* <i>My father work in the restaurant</i> Instead of: <i>My father works in the restaurant</i>
7.	Possessive case	* <i>My cousin's will marry soon</i> Instead of: <i>My cousin will marry soon</i>

Table 2 shows the students' errors in grammar in their writing. The first is about grammatical errors in prepositions. Students mostly made some errors in grammar, including prepositions. That shows that their knowledge of prepositions is limited. From the findings of students' writing, they often used prepositions correspondently.

Further, students perhaps consider that prepositions do not modify the meaning of their sentences. It is because they have not been able to distinguish the placement from the preposition. Thus, they cannot precisely locate the use of prepositions in their sentences. One of the main conditions is the carelessness of the students.

The second error is the articles. In this case, students made the mistake of putting "article" before the name of the city. Zero articles are "terms", or terms used when a "noun" or noun is not prefixed with any articles, either definite articles (the) or indefinite articles (a, an). However, they are used to putting "article" after the name of the city. This case does not only occur in one student. After that, the irregular verb comes to be the next error. Students have not been able to distinguish between "regular verbs" and "irregular verbs". They only understand, "past tense" form, just add "ed". That is why they only have to add "ed" after the verb, such as the example they made in Table 2. The next error is tenses. Students

tend to make errors in this aspect because they lose control over the correct tense they should use. They still cannot understand that compound verbs in a sentence highly likely use similar tense. The last error is the possessive case. Students have not understood the possessive case. They are often mistaken that a possessive case is a case of a pronoun for showing ownership. When learning English, sometimes they often mix up possessive adjectives with possessive pronouns. That was proven when they wrote the essay in this study.

5. DISCUSSION

As shown in the table, there are seven kinds of students' grammatical errors. One possible reason underlying the student grammatical errors in writing is mother tongue disruption (Chen & Huang, 2003). The target language, such as English, has a different system to the first language of the students. However, practicing errors is a consequence of natural learning (Al-Shujairi et al., 2017), and it is crucial to recognize the causes of their appearance. Moreover, errors mainly occur due to limited knowledge over grammatical rules.

The study then suggests specific problems related to how teachers put effort to stimulate their students to compose a better essay writing by recognizing students' weaknesses in writing. Besides, teachers can set their teaching methods according to students' errors in writing. Students, in this case, make grammatical errors in writing because they have inadequate grammar input. The outcomes of this study reveal some steps for EFL teachers to improve students' writing proficiency, notably by giving comments after scoring their articles, including

showing students the revision after they are corrected. To reach this, teachers have to improve themselves through, for instance, regular teacher professional development (Grant et al., 2017). By doing so, teachers can combine both grammar and writing instructions. They need to apply the term grammar that reasonable to students (Chin, 2000). By directly including grammar features into editing, rewriting, and correcting, the teacher can accommodate students to learn and practice grammar purposely to their essays. Plans, like essay conventions, writing partnerships, mini grammar tutoring, and peer response groups, are helpful techniques for combining grammar and writing preparation (Chin, 2000). They present the opportunity of teachers adopting multiple approaches to help students apply grammar theories to obtain their writing goals.

Since students' native languages do not analyze changes in verbs, tenses in English seem to be a new problem for students learning English. Students often make errors in this aspect because they might be confused about what tenses they should use. Moreover, tenses in English consist of several rules that make students finally mix up the rules because of their complexity.

This analysis in writing practice can be an effective way for teachers to determine the level of students' understanding of grammar. By writing, students can practice their critical thinking and develop their ideas in written practice. Lastly, students' language skills will improve because writing can combine English components in a sentence such as tenses, prepositions, articles, concords, and active/passive.

From the findings of the study, students frequently used prepositions concurrently, followed

by articles and tenses. Prepositions and articles, especially, are the most difficult elements of English for second language students. They estimate for 20%–50% of all grammar and usage errors made by second-language students (Izumi et al., 2003; Bitchener et al., 2005). Besides, they are complicated since their usage depends on the interaction of various factors.

Furthermore, words with similar meanings cannot be depended on to follow the identical prepositional, such as 'reason for' and 'cause of'. Accordingly, students face difficulties in learning preposition rules. Further, it is usually evenly hard for native speakers to explain the causes of these differences or provide guidance on how to deal with such difficulties.

Finally, the findings of this study were quite similar to the previous study conducted by Al-Shujairi et al. (2017), Singh et al. (2017), Abushihab et al. (2011), Al-Bayati (2013), Hourani (2008), Murad Hassan Mohammed Sawalmeh (2013), and Maros et al. (2007). However, in this study, the researcher found more grammatical errors in students' writing. Errors found in previous studies occurred in the current study, such as errors in prepositions, articles, and tenses. In the present study study, almost all classes of grammatical errors offered by James (1998) were in students' writings, except adjective and active/passive.

6. CONCLUSION

The present study has examined the written discourse and student common grammatical errors in students' writing. Employing James (1998)

assessment criteria, the study found seven (7) common grammatical errors: preposition, articles, singular/plural, irregular verbs, tenses, concord, and possessive case. The outcomes of this study show significant results, though on a relatively small scale. This study can explain similar studies in the future or even in different contexts. The more similar studies are conducted, the more we know the prominent of students' grammatical errors. Further, this will significantly inform on how teachers should deliver the teaching of grammar to their students. Lastly, the present study suggests the need for EFL teachers to improve their skills in marking and giving feedback toward students' writing. As a result, this will gradually enhance students' writing skills.

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