

COMMON GRAMMATICAL ERRORS IN STUDENTS' WRITING AT MAN 1 PAREPARE

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Abstract

This research aims to find out (1) the common grammatical errors in students' writing at MAN 1 Parepare in Academic Year 2013/2014, and (2) whether students in higher class of MAN 1 Parepare make fewer grammatical errors than students in lower class.

This research was designed for a descriptive quantitative research. There were two variables in this research. They were common grammatical errors in students' writing and grammatical error comparison among students based on their class level. The population of this research was 141 students that consisted of three levels of classes, namely class X, XI, and XII. Class X consisted of 54 students, class XI consisted of 47 students, and class XII consisted of 40 students. The samples were taken by random technique. There were 30 samples in which each class level was represented by 10 students. The instrument of this research was a writing test. This research used percentage technique to analyze the data.

The results of this research showed that (1) From nine types of grammatical errors provided by La Trobe University Handout, there were three types which became the common grammatical errors made by the students in MAN 1 Parepare in academic year 2013/2014. They were singular-plural noun with 39 items (13.31%), vocabulary with 39 items (13.31%), and sentence structure with 39 items (13.31%), (2) Each class level in MAN 1 Parepare in academic year 2013/2014 had different percentage of grammatical errors. Class X made 139 errors or (47.44%). Class XI made 93 errors or (31.74%). Class XII made 61 errors or (20.82%). It showed that the higher class of the students in MAN 1 Parepare, the fewer grammatical errors that they made in their writing test.

Key words: Errors, Grammar, Analysis, Writing

Introduction

In this modern era, English becomes one of needs for many people. Some of them need it for business or nursing and some of them also need it for academic purposes. As a foreign language, English is not easy to master for Indonesian. However, it does not mean that everyone cannot learn it. One way to learn it is that step by step.

To learn a foreign language such as English, people need to learn its basic skills. There are two kinds of skills in English namely receptive skills and productive skills. Receptive skills are listening and reading while productive skills are speaking and writing. Those skills help learners in learning either spoken or written language.

In daily life, learners are commonly considered mastering English when they can communicate in spoken language even though they mostly do not care with the grammar, but it does not mean that they do not care to improve their writing skill.

A writing activity that students always do is updating status on their Facebook or writing something on their blog. They try to express their feeling, opinion or their idea to public. This activity can be used by teachers to stimulate students to write a writing text in the classroom especially in English class. Al Saleem (2008) emphasizes that writing is an essential component of classroom activities which reinforces grammatical structures and vocabularies.

That activity becomes preparation for senior high school students to enter a university where they will write many papers for their assignments. Moreover they should conduct a research and write it into a thesis as their final assignments to graduate from that university.

There are some genres in a academic writing. They are procedural text, narrative text, recount text, hortatory text, analytical exposition text, and descriptive text. Among them, a descriptive text is more familiar for students. not only because they learn it when they were still in Junior High School, but also because almost every day they describe something, such as their favorite film, idol and places to their friends.

As an academic writing, a descriptive text should be written in correct grammar. It means to make sure that there will no ambiguities for readers. In written language, good punctuation and good grammar are a must, because there are no intonation and stressing to help people catch the meaning of the sentences. Debata (2013:482) said “When people come to learn a new language like English language, they need to research its grammar”. He emphasizes that grammar is one of important parts in learning a new language.

Learners have learnt grammar for long time. Grammar is one of considered parts in English. It can be seen from the first methodology that was developed in teaching English as a second/foreign language namely grammar translation method (GTM). However learners still make errors in their writing. Therefore exercises help them to reduce errors. As a wise word states that practice makes perfect.

When people read a written text and they may find incorrect sentences, they should consider them firstly whether they are errors or mistakes because they are different. A mistake refers to a performance of error that is either a random guess or a slip in that is a failure to utilize a known system correctly.

All people may make mistakes, both native speakers and second language learners. Native speakers are normally capable of recognizing and correcting mistakes which are not the result of deficiency in competence but the result of some sorts of breakdown or imperfection in the process of producing speech. This hesitations, slips of tongue, random ungrammatically and other performance in native speakers production also occur in second language speech.

Celce-Murcia in Patricia Murrow (2002:5) takes an even stronger stance in proposing that we must: “...analyze virtually all of English grammar at the discourse level in order to be able to teach our students rules of grammar that will serve them when they read and write English for Academic or communication purposes”

In addition, Richards et al., (1996) convinced about the importance of doing error analysis. They said that error analysis was conducted to identify strategies which students used in language learning, to track the causes of students’ errors, obtain information on common difficulties in language learning or on how to prepare teaching materials.

In fact second language learners may make errors. These errors can be observed or identified, analyzed, and classified to reveal something of the system operating within the learner, led to a surge of study of learners’ errors. It is called error analysis. Celce and Richard et al’s statements above emphasize the importance of doing an error analysis grammatically to students’ performance, either in spoken or in written. Based on the explanation above the writer is interested in doing a research under the title ”Common grammatical errors in students’ writing texts at MAN 1 Parepare.”

Problem Statements

Referring to the background above, this research elaborates some problem statements as follows:

1. What are the common grammatical errors in students’ writing at MAN 1 Parepare in Academic Year 2013/2014?
2. Do the students in the higher class level of MAN 1 Parepare in Academic Year 2013/2014 make fewer grammatical errors than students in the lower class level?

Objectives of the Research

In accordance with research questions above, this research owns several objectives below:

1. To find out the common grammatical errors in students’ writing at MAN 1 Parepare in Academic Year 2013/2014.
2. To find out whether students in the higher class level of MAN 1 Parepare in Academic Year 2013/2014 make fewer grammatical errors than the students in the lower class level.

Significances of the Research

Regarding to significances of the research, this research is expected to provide information about the following points:

- a. The findings of this research become input for teachers as consideration in reviewing the grammar materials deeply especially the common errors.
- b. For the students, the results will be guidance to avoid grammatical errors in writing in the future

Scope of the Research

The scope of this research is error analysis, especially the analysis of the grammatical errors in students' writing at MAN 1 Parepare in Academic Year 2013/2014. The writer asks the students to write a descriptive text of a place. The writer uses "La Trobe University handouts for Students" which is a guidance of writing an academic writing to classify the common grammatical errors. Beside that, the writer compares a number of students' grammatical errors among students in the XII, XI and X classes. The writer wants to know whether the students who have studied English longer make fewer grammatical errors than other students who have just studied English shorter.

The Previous Related Research Findings

Some researchers have studied the problems experienced by students in learning English as a second language, especially for grammatical errors. Some of their findings are as follows:

Siminto (2007: 9) found that in analyzing the writing of thesis abstracts in English by students of the State Islamic Collage Palangkaraya, the most frequent errors were word choice, word order, plural – singular form of nouns, verb tenses, missing and misapplied articles, ineffective sentences, punctuation, unparallelled structures, Indonesian terms used, run - on sentences, meaning not clear, redundant words, adjective order, misusing possessive nouns and adjectives and misconstruction of WH – questions.

Giri (2010) discovered that all the bachelor level Nepali students of English committed 117, 1280, 922, and 94 word, phrase, clause and sentence level errors respectively. The highest numbers of errors were committed at the Phrase level and the lowest numbers of errors were committed at the Sentence level. All the bachelor level Nepali students of English committed 2413 grammatical errors in their written compositions. They committed 140 errors in the use of affixations, 815 errors in the use of articles and so on. The most erroneous categories were Art, Prep, Aux/M, V-Form, S-V Ag, Aff, and WC.

The results of the studies above show a number of errors categories that made by second language students. Related to the topic above in this research, the writer also conducts a research about common grammatical errors in students' writing at MAN 1 Parepare in academic year 2013/2014 by using category from La Trobe University Handouts for Students. This category is more detail in classifying grammatical errors, particularly for grammatical sentence level errors.

Some Pertinent Ideas

1. The concept of error analysis
 - a. Error analysis

Error analysis is a part of inter language study. Error analysis focuses on the error produced by the second language. According to Hammaberg (in Corder:1981) , error analysis is only concerned with the errors; while Corder in the same book express that error analysis as a study of different ways between the second language students and the native speakers are error analysis discussion.

Dulai in Baso Paewai (2003) stated that the error analysis refers to what has been produced by the students. It may refer to what linguistic category effected by the errors, how the errors are altered, or whether or not the errors under communication. While Lado states that error analysis is identifying errors that actually appear in the performance of students learning the second language.

The term of errors is taken to mean some idiosyncratic, deviation, nonnative like language produced by a second language student. Error analysis in simple definition is an activity to reveal errors found in writing or speaking. Besides that, Richard stated that error analysis is the study of error made by second language students and error analysis may be carried out in order to (a) find out how well someone know a language, (b) to find out how a person learn a language, and (c) obtain information on common difficulties in language learning, as an aid in teaching or in the preparation of teaching materials. The definition is more stressed to the function of an error analysis.

By considering all definitions of the experts above, the researcher concludes that error analysis is identifying and analyzing process of errors made only for those second language students.

Error Analysis is useful in second language learning because this will reveal to teachers, syllabus designers and textbook writers - the problem areas. Teachers could design remedial exercises and focus more attention on the trouble spots.

2. The Concept of Error

a. Definition of errors

In learning process no one language students never makes any errors. It is something normal. However it does not mean that it is allowed for them to make errors every time. When they make errors, it will be good when teachers can identify them and let the students know their errors and make it better. To know how error like is, let us have a look to these definitions.

Jackson and Brown in Baso Paewai (2003) defined an error as a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of students. Both Jackson and Brow regard an error as a deviation from the grammar aspect of deviation to be termed as an error. Norrish (1983) defined that error was a systematic deviation that consistently produced by student means that the deviate from some norm. Corder (1974:152) stated "The study of error is part of the investigation of the process of language learning. In this respect it resembles methodologically the study of the acquisition of the mother tongue. It provides us with a picture of the linguistic development of a student and may give us indications as to the learning process."

There are two main purposes in studying students' errors. They are a) providing data from which inferences about the native of the language learning process can be made, and b) indicating to teachers and curriculum developers which parts of target language of the students have most difficult and which types of errors that students do.

b. Kinds of errors

There are four categories about language errors, namely

- 1) Interference like goof is an error which reflects mother tongue structure or native language, and it does not exist in the first language which derives from target language.
- 2) Developmental goof is an error which does not reflect mother tongue structure but exist in the first language acquisition of target language.
- 3) Ambiguous goof is an error that can be categorized as interference like goofs or even as first language developmental goofs.
- 4) Unique goof is an error which does not reflect first language neither exist in the first language acquisition of target language.

c. Factors that Cause Errors

Arnold in Ancker (2000) classified that there were two factors of errors. They are inter lingual and intra lingual interferences. The inter lingual errors are the errors made by students because they apply the rules of their mother tongue into the target language. This is usually called "interference errors". The intra lingual errors are those organizing within the structure of English itself. In the process of second language learning, the grammatical system of the student's mother tongue may interfere the process of second language. The deviation that reflects the grammatical system of mother tongue is called inter lingua interference, while an interference which occur between the role of a particular

construction and the role of mother or other construction within the same language is called intralingua interferences, however, they are resulted from the learning process. Different from Arnold, Chomsky in Nurdin stated

“The factors of error in relation to learning process could be attention equally called performance factor or they could be the lack of knowledge of the rules of the language, usually called competence factor. It is simply to say that performance factor indicate that the students do not pay much attention to what they are learning. Again the competence factors indicated that the students make errors because they do not enough or sufficient knowledge about what they are produces.

In addition the sources of error occurrence according to Ancker (2000:1):

- 1) Interference from the native language. The students may assume that the target language and their native language are similar. Then, they will over generalize the rules of their native language and the target language.
- 2) An incomplete knowledge of the target language. Because of the incomplete knowledge, the students may make guesses. When they have something that they do not know, they may guess what it should be there. Lengo (1995:1) added that foreign language students commit errors largely because of the paucity of their knowledge of the target language whereas deviant forms produced by native speakers are dismissed as slips of the tongue or slips of the pen.
- 3) The complexity of the target language. Certain aspects in English are difficult for some students, it may be caused by the rules of their native language are quite different from English and even more complex than their native language.

3. The Differences between Errors and Mistakes.

When teachers see something wrong with a piece of written work, teachers must try to decide whether it is an error or a mistake. According to Donn Byrne (2006) broadly, students make errors when they try to do something with the language which they are not yet able to do. For example, they often make false generalizations (they use a regular instead of an irregular form, such as throwed instead of threw) or they transfer from the mother tongue (they write; the people is angry instead of the people are angry) these are two major sources of error. Mistakes on the other hand, are slips of some kind. The students have learned something, but perhaps they have temporarily forgotten it or are tired or teachers' feeling are just being careless.

Corder (1983) in his book made a distinction between mistakes and errors. He stated that mistakes were caused by memory lapse, physical as teachers as psychological condition, such as tiredness or strong emotion. Mistake were not systematic, they were incidental. On the other hand, errors were failure to apply the language system correctly, because the students had not yet mastered a full command of the language system. The students lack of knowledge about the rules, etc. Errors in a language tell us something about students' mastery of the language.

Although in practice sometimes difficult to decide if something is a mistake or an error (after all teachers may think that they have taught the students something but perhaps they did not learn it), it is important try to decide. Clearly for example if students have not learned something, teachers cannot expect them to correct it for themselves. On the other hand, it is perfectly reasonable and pedagogically sound to get them to correct their own mistakes and it is certainly no use getting cross with the students if they keep on making certain errors. The lesson that teachers can learn from this is that the students need to learn something, whether or not the syllabus or the course book has provided for it at this stage, and the best way teachers can help them is by giving them the opportunity to learn it. Students' error, in short, can help shape our teaching (and certainly our remedial teaching).

4. Common grammatical errors

According to Hornby (2000:559), grammatical is connected with the rules of grammar or correctly following the rules of grammar. In this study the students' grammatical errors refer to the application of a rule of English in an inappropriate situation. In the same book, he also defined 'common' (2000:169) as all or nearly all members of a group.

Common grammatical error means that errors that happen nearly all rules of grammar in a determined category or guidance. Betty Schramper (1989:29) gave the guidance for correcting writing errors grammatically.

The list of type's error as follows: 1. Singular-plural; 2. Word form; 3. Word choice; 4. Verb tense; 5. Add a word; 6. Omit a word; 7. Word order; 8. Incomplete sentence; 9. Spelling; 10. Punctuations; 11. Capitalization; 12. Article; 13. Meaning not clear; 14. Run-on sentence.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework underlying in this research is shown in the following diagram:

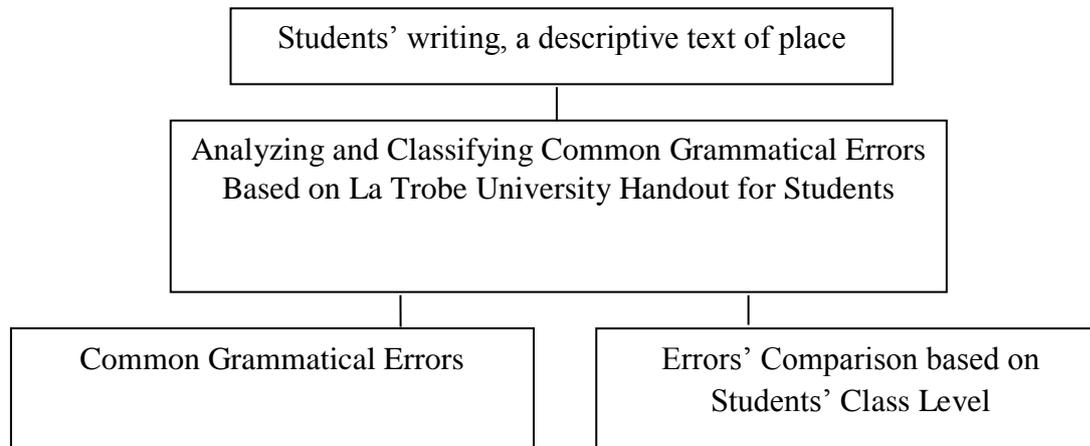


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

Based on the theoretical framework above, there are three elements to be explained, they are

1. Input. It refers to students' writing in which a descriptive text of place.
2. Process. It refers to analyzing the grammatical errors from the students' writing by using La Trobe University Handout for students. In addition, the degree of errors is distinguished among students class level.
3. Output. It refers to the results of the process. There are two results in this research. They are common grammatical errors and degree of errors among the students in the class level.

Method of the research

This chapter deals with the research design, variables, and operational definitions, population and sample, research instrument, procedure of collecting data and technique of data analysis.

Research Design

This research was designed for a descriptive quantitative research to find out the grammatical errors in students' writing and the comparison of a number of grammatical errors based on students' class level.

Variable

This research consisted of two variables. They were common grammatical errors in students' writing and error comparison among students based on their class level.

Operational Definition

Common grammatical errors in this research were the highest percentage of grammatical errors made by the students which provided in La Trobe University Handout for Students as stated in review related literature.

Students' writings in this research were descriptive texts of a place that were written by the students of X, XI and XII classes of MAN 1 Parepare in the academic year 2013/2014.

Population and Sample

The population of this research was students' writing in MAN 1 Parepare in academic year 2013/2014. Class X consists of 4 classes with the total number of students 54. Class XI consists of 4 classes with the total number of students 47. Class XII consists of 3 classes with the total number of students 40. The total number of students of MAN 1 Parepare in academic year 2013/2014 is 141. Based on the list above, the writer classified them into three groups based on their class level, namely class X, class XI, and class XII. Each level was represented by 10 students. The samples are 30 students. The samples were taken by using random sampling.

Instrument of the Research

The instrument of the research was a writing test of a descriptive text of place with the theme "Parepare, An Awesome Town". The text was written at least 300 words in 90 minutes. It was allowed for students to use dictionaries or other external aids. It could not be permitted for them to speak each other during the writing process.

Procedures of Collecting Data

In collecting the data about students' grammatical errors, the writer read those descriptive writings sentence by sentence to identify the kinds of errors and calculated a number of grammatical errors based on La Trobe University Handout for error categories. After that, the writer also used frequency and percentage formulas to compare a number of students' grammatical errors based on their class level.

Technique of Data Analysis

The data that was collected from the test was analyzed by using error analysis technique which consisted of three steps. They are identification, classification, and correction of errors. The identification and classification were done based on La Trobe University Handout. Each of the selected grammatical item of students' writing error was calculated by its percentage by using the following formula:

$$\text{Percentage grammatical item} = \frac{\text{Sum of error item}}{\text{sum of total error all items}} \times 100\%$$

Findings

The data described in these findings were taken from students' descriptive writing results of MAN 1 Parepare. There was only one topic that the writer provided in the writing test. That was "Parepare, an awesome town". The students' writings were identified and classified based on error categories from La Trobe University Handout for Students as stated in the previous chapter. Then, the frequency and percentage of errors were presented in order to ease readers to understand the data. Here are the grammatical errors made by the students and their correction. The writer provides the data from class X, XI, and XII. Each class is represented by ten students.

The writer differentiates the errors of class X, XI, and XII. It aims to know which class that makes more errors in writing. To make it simpler, the writer provides it in the following table.

Error Types Based on La Trobe University Handout	Students' Errors			TOTAL
	Class X	Class XI	Class XII	
Article	12	5	5	22 (7.51%)
Verb Tense	16	10	8	34 (11.60%)
Subject Verb Agreement	15	12	9	36 (12.29%)
Singular Plural	18	11	10	39 (13.31%)
Punctuation	11	5	2	18 (6.14%)
Word Class	14	10	9	33 (11.26%)
Vocabulary	17	15	7	39 (13.31%)
Sentence structure	20	13	6	39 (13.31%)
Spelling	16	12	5	33 (11.26%)
TOTAL	139 (47.44)	93 (31.74)	61 (20.82)	293 (100%)

Based on the table above, there are 293 errors that occurred from 30 samples of students' writings. There are three types of the highest percentage of grammatical errors made by the students. They are singular-plural noun with 39 items (13.31%), vocabulary with 39 items (13.31%), and sentence structure with 39 items (13.31%). After that, there are subject-verb agreement with 36 items (12.29%), verb tense with 34 items (11.6%), word class with 33 items (11.26%), spelling with 33 items (11.26%) also, article with 22 items (7.51%), and punctuation with 18 items (6.14%). That is the order of errors starting from the highest to the lowest.

Discussion

This section presents the discussion of the results of the data. It aims to provide specific discussion of the data analysis that includes the types of common grammatical errors and the comparison of errors among class X, XI, and XII at MAN 1 Parepare. The data of the errors made by the students were obtained after conducting a writing test in the classroom activity. The students tend to write on the paper based on the particular topic. Analyzing the data was conducted after writing activity. There were three steps in this case i.e. identification, classification, and statement of errors frequency and percentage.

The first is identifying and classifying of the students' errors into kinds of errors which will be grouped by nine general types of errors in La Trobe University. Then it is continued by making statement of frequency and percentage of errors made by the students in writing descriptive texts. The types of common grammatical errors and the comparison of errors among classes are elaborated on each part based on the findings of this research and also compared with other research findings and theories on the field of students' errors.

Conclusions

As the end of this research, the researcher would like to give conclusions as follow:

1. From nine types of grammatical errors provided by La Trobe University Handout, there are three types which become the common errors made by the students in MAN 1 Parepare in academic year 2013/2014. They are singular-plural noun with 39 items (13.31%), vocabulary with 39 items (13.31%), and sentence structure with 39 items (13.31%). They have same percentage. It can be concluded that the students mostly have difficulties in dealing with English grammar systems especially in the three types above.
2. Each class level in MAN 1 Parepare in academic year 2013/2014 has different percentage of grammatical errors. Class X makes 139 errors or (47.44%). Class XI makes 93 errors or (31.74%). Class XII makes 61 errors or (20.82%). It shows that class XII makes fewer grammatical errors than other classes, namely class XI and class X. It indicates that the higher level of a class in MAN 1 Parepare, the fewer errors that it makes. It shows that there is reduction of errors in higher level of a class. It indicates that duration of learning influence students' mastery in grammar. Level of percentage difference of each class is not too significant.

Suggestions

Based on the result of this study, the writer offers some suggestions to minimize the grammatical errors in students' writing ability.

For the students:

1. Special attention should go to the certain types of errors that have been found in this research such as singular-plural nouns, vocabularies, and sentence structure.
2. The students should practice writing English texts and pay more attention to the application of an accurate English grammar.
3. After receiving correction feedback from the teachers, the students should check and recheck to the errors, so that there will be reduction of errors in the future writing.

For English teachers:

1. This study has shown there were many common grammatical errors made by the students in their writing, therefore the teacher should pay additional attention to teaching grammar in writing.
2. The English teachers should give lots practice in writing English texts in order to improve students' writing skill.
3. The English teachers should correct the students' papers and return them, so that the students can see and know what errors that they have made and learn from them.

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