



Grammatical Errors of Writing in EFL Class: A Case in Indonesia



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Article history:

Received: 18 September 2018

Accepted: 31 January 2019

Published: 18 March 2019

Keywords:

error analysis;

grammatical;

Indonesia;

TEFL;

writing;

Abstract

The current paper is descriptive qualitative research which aimed at describing grammatical errors of students' writing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Class. Data were gained from documents written by students of State Polytechnic in Kupang City, East Nusa Tenggara- Indonesia. The results have shown that the highest percentage of grammatical errors occurred in using the verb group. It consisted of 65.0 %. Following these errors, students made errors in the use of prepositions (12.8 %). The third errors that were usually made by students were the errors in the use of pronouns. It took 9.8 %. After errors in the use of pronouns, students made errors in pluralization (5.1 %). The next lower frequency of errors made by students were errors in the use of articles. It took 4.3 % of the whole text. Following that, students made errors in the use of conjunctions. The errors occurred at 1.7 %. The last errors made by students were errors in the use of subject-verb agreement. The errors occurred only 1.3 %. The results of the current analysis are hoped to be a reflection of EFL lecturers in Indonesia. Furthermore, EFL lecturers of State Polytechnic Kupang are hoped to focus more on teaching the use of verbs in writing class.

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1. Introduction

Undeniable, English is an important International language (Crystal, 2012). Laufer (2010), stated that it is now intensively learned by many people in countries like Indonesia where English is a foreign language. They learn it in order to master it, namely, to be able to use it in speaking, listening, reading, and writing as well as translating (Laufer, 2010). In other words, the aim of one's learning English is to communicate locally, nationally, and globally using the language with people around him/her (Nan, 2005). Despite their hard work to learn it, however, many students of

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English as a foreign language (EFL) fail to be fluent in using it (Astika, 2007; Harsono, 2005; Kweldju, 2003). One of their failures is in the writing skill.

In EFL writing, students' mastery of EFL is so poor that writing teachers call it "a crisis" (Phuket & Othman, 2015). The phenomenon has also occurred in English speaking countries like the USA, Australia, and the UK, and in countries like India and the Philippines where English is used as a second language (Gi-payana, 2004; Diaz-Chamaco *et al.*, 1995; Jenson, 1992). Despite the "crisis," however, there are some student writers who could successfully develop their (EFL) writing abilities (Tans, 1999). The problem is what makes a piece of (EFL) writing good so that its author is developing well as an author and what makes it poor so that its author fails to show his/her good writing development. In that case, that is what makes it poor or well, we conducted the current descriptive research as a part of broad analysis in EFL writing.

Furthermore, this article is an attempt to describe the problem of "crisis" by looking at the Indonesian context, that is, writing in EFL which was focused on writing text. In line with the thought, 19 pieces of EFL writing written by students of State Polytechnic Kupang, West Timor, NTT, Indonesia were analyzed in this article.

2. Materials and Methods

The current research is classified into descriptive quantitative research. The type of research attempts to collect quantifiable information to be used for statistical analysis of the population sample (Sandelowski *et al.*, 2007). Furthermore, related to the current research, the method was applied to describe the phenomenon (Gall & Borg, 1989; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), so that it can be understood well in its context and that its problems, if any, can be overcome. In the context of this research, the phenomena to be described, as have been mentioned in the previous section, are grammatical errors *English as Foreign Language* (EFL) in writing. The research subjects were one class that consisted of 19 students of State Polytechnic in Kupang City, Indonesia.

The primary data were gained from the document of students writing products. The writer collected the students' writing task as the product of writing. In this case, the writer collected the students' writing papers in the classroom as the results of assignments given by the lecturers. The writing was about "Past Experience". Next, the writing sheets were read, identified, labeled and categorized based on the errors done in the writing product. The focus of the analysis was in the grammatical errors. On this point, we classified the errors into 7 categories, namely errors in using verb forms, errors in writing verb agreement, errors in the use of the article, errors in the use of preposition, errors in noun pluralization, errors in the use of the pronoun, and errors in the use of conjunctions.

In calculating the frequency of errors, we employed the following formula:

$$P = \frac{n1}{\sum N} \times 100 \%$$

in which,

- P : percentage of each error
- N1 : error(s) based on classification
- $\sum N$: total errors

3. Results and Discussions

After collecting and analyzing the data, we found that there were some grammatical errors. The errors are classified based on the traditional English Grammar concept. The total grammatical errors were 235. They were classified as follows:

- a. Errors in using verb group = 153
- b. Errors in subject-verb agreement = 3
- c. Errors in the use of articles = 10
- d. Errors in the use of preposition = 30
- e. Errors in pluralization = 12

- f. Errors in the use of pronouns = 23
- g. Errors in the use of conjunctions = 4

3.1 Errors in using Verb groups

Errors in using verb groups were the most frequent ones made by the students. In using verb groups, there are some rules to be obeyed, such as the form of the sentence whether it is in the active or passive form, and the tense of the sentence (Myhill, 2003). These rules are complex so that the students often make errors in this area. Some of the errors are described as follows:

- (1) a. **I went to saw it with my aunt and my brother at night.*
 b. **I stayed there to joined the First Centered Training Olympiad Central*
 c. ** On Tuesday, we visited Bali museum to saw Balinese culture.*
 d. ** We ought to stood in line, because there were many patients.*
 e. **We went to my aunt's home to had a rest.*

Here the students made errors in producing verb 1 or infinitive. They failed to recognize where to put the infinitives. In sentences, a, b, c, and e the students failed to figure out the non-finite verbs. They should be in the form of infinitives (to + the simple form of the verb) whether, in sentence d, the nonfinite verb should be in the form of the simple form of the verb because modals are followed by the simple form of the verb (Palmer, 2014). Although the tense used in writing "Past Experience" is in past form, there are still infinitives should be used. The sentences should have been:

- (2) a. *I went to see it with my aunt and my brother at night.*
 b. *I stayed there to join The First Phase of The Centered Training*
 c. *On Tuesday, we visited Bali museum to see Balinese culture.*
 d. *We ought to stand in line because there were many patients.*
 e. *We went to my aunt's home to have a rest.*

Besides the infinitive forms, verb groups could also be in the form of linking verbs (to be). Frank (1972: 48), stated that linking verbs are verbs of incomplete predication; it merely announces that the real predicate follows. The complement is usually an adjective or a noun (Huddleston & Pullum, 2005).

- (3) a. **That the good and happy month.*
 b. **I very amazed that Yogyakarta is beautiful.*
 c. **It still very natural.*
 d. **We so tired, and we decided to go home earlier than the plan.*
 e. **It usually called Kenoto in my village.*

In the five sentences above, the students failed to put the linking verbs. In sentences a, b, and e, for instance, the students failed to recognize the passive form of the verb. As we know in passive form there should be "to be+verb3" (Hasegawa, 1968). Whether in sentences c, and d; they failed to put the linking verbs before a noun and an adjective. The sentences should have been:

- (4) a. *That was a good and happy month.*
 b. *I was very amazed by the beauty of Yogyakarta.*
 c. *It was still very natural.*
 d. *We were so tired, and we decided to go home earlier than the plan.*
 e. *It was called Kenoto in my village.*

Still, in relation to linking verbs, the students also failed to recognize the correct form to be used in their sentences. The errors are as follows:

- (5) a. **Because my grandfather's house has located near the Lasiana beach.*
 b. **It has a small house but clean.*

- c. **The house is the biggest house that I have ever stayed.*
- d. **I know that there are no my aunt and my brother beside me.*
- e. **I were at Jogjakarta just 2 days because I still had many important activities in Kupang.*

Telling past experiences generally use past tense (Rumelhart & McClelland, 1985). Here the students also failed to recognize the past form of to be should be used. The sentences should have been:

- (6) a. *Because my grandfather's house was located near the Lasiana beach.*
- b. *It was a small house but clean.*
- c. *The house was the biggest house that I had ever stayed.*
- d. *I knew that my aunt and my brother were not beside me.*
- e. *I was in Jogjakarta just for two days only because I still had many important activities in Kupang.*

As stated above, in writing "Past Experience" past tense is usually used. In the sentences below, the students failed to put the verbs in the past form (verb2). The errors are as follows:

- (7) a. **The doctor examined my ears and say that my "membrane tympani" (hear tool to catch the sound) have broken and wounded.*
- b. **I have an unforgettable experience and it happened when I was in elementary school.*
- c. **In the twenty third day, it means the last day we studied together, was hold a farewell party.*
- d. **On the way, the rain failed.*
- e. **I only know there were many bats in every room in the second floor because the floor had been used for nothing.*
- f. **It looks beautiful.*

In sentences, a, b, c, e, and f the students failed to recognize the past form of the verbs. They still used the simple form of the verbs. This is incorrect since in telling their past experiences they should use the past form of the verbs (verb2). In sentence d, the student also failed to recognize the past form of the verb. Instead of using the past form, the student added the verb with -ed. This is wrong since the verb is the irregular one. S/he cannot add -ed. S/he was just generalized that the past forms of the verbs are always added by -ed. The sentences should have been:

- (8) a. *The doctor examined my ears and said that my "tymphani membrane" (hearing tools to catch the sound) had broken and wounded.*
- b. *had an unforgettable experience and it happened when I was in the elementary school.*
- c. *On the twenty third day, it meant the last day we studied together, was hold a farewell party.*
- d. *On the way, it rained.*
- e. *I only knew there were many bats in every room in the second floor because the floor had been used for nothing.*
- f. *It looked beautiful.*

The errors of using verb were 153 of the total errors 235.50. The frequency of these errors is;

$$P = \frac{n1}{\sum N} \times 100 \%$$

$$P = \frac{153}{235} \times 100 \%$$

$$P = 65 \%$$

3.2 Errors in subject-verb agreements

Agreement between subject and verb is influenced by the subject form whether it is singular or plural (Hudson, 1999). To construct a correct sentence structurally, the verb must agree with the subject. Fail to recognize this means we are failed to construct correct sentences structurally (Nicol et al., 1997). Thus, the students must be able to identify the subject whether it is singular or plural. Having no competence in identifying the subject will make students fail to produce the correct form of the verb (Franck et al., 2002). It means that the students have made errors in making the agreement between subject and verb. The total errors of the application of subject-verb agreement were 3. Its frequency is;

$$P = \frac{n_1}{\sum N} \times 100 \%$$

$$P = \frac{3}{235} \times 100 \%$$

$$P = 1,3 \%$$

Following is the other examples of data.

- (9) a. **We were very confused because the walls were glass walls and the house were dark.*
 b. **We ought to stand in line because there was many patients in there.*
 c. **On the way to the river, the sight was very beautiful. So did in the river.*

In sentences a and b, the students failed to make the agreement between subject and verb. Instead of using was for third person singular subject they use were and vice versa. In sentence c the student also failed to make an agreement between subject and verb. Here she failed in relating the idea from the previous sentence. The sentences should have been:

- (10) a. *We were very confused because the walls were glass and the house was dark.*
 b. *We ought to stand in line because there were many patients there.*
 c. *On the way to the river, the sight was very beautiful. So was in the river.*

3.3 Errors in the use of articles

The use of articles is also determined by the noun whether it is countable or uncountable and whether it is singular or plural (Thomas, 1989). There are two kinds of the article; they are a definite article (the) and indefinite articles (a/ an) (Abbott, 2006). We use the definite article (the) if the noun has been mentioned before or if the noun has been familiar.

While we use the indefinite article (a/ an) if the noun has not been mentioned before. The use of the indefinite article also takes into account whether the noun is countable or not and whether it is singular or plural. If the noun is countable, singular and has not been mentioned before, the indefinite article must be used. Thus, to be able to use an article properly, the students have to be sensitive in differentiating the use of the definite article, indefinite article and even using no article at all. If they are not able to differentiate them, they will make errors just like what we have found as follows:

- (11) a. **On Saturday, I visited Kolbano beach. The condition of society was still same.*
 b. **Beside that, we could see many of the big trees in there.*
 c. **It was the one and only house with two floors and the biggest official house on Oebobo.*
 d. **There was a invited guest, so I could came late.*
 e. **In twenty third day, it means the last day we studied together, hold a farewell.*

In sentences a, c, d, and e the students failed to use the definite article (the). Here they omit the definite article. In sentences a and c above they failed in recognizing the repeated subject whether, in sentences b, d, and e, they failed to recognize something familiar. The sentences should have been:

- (12) a. *On Saturday, I visited Kolbano beach. The condition of society was still the same.*
 b. *Besides, we could see many big trees there.*
 c. *It was the one and the only house with two floors and the biggest official house in Oebobo.*
 d. *There was an invited guest, so I could came late.*
 e. *On the twenty-third day, it means the last day we studied together, the committee held a farewell party.*

The occurrence of these errors were 10. Its frequency is;

$$P = \frac{n_1}{\sum N} \times 100 \%$$

$$P = \frac{10}{235} \times 100 \%$$

$$P = 4,3 \%$$

3.4 Errors in the use of prepositions

Prepositions are always followed by nouns (or pronouns). They are connective words that show the relationship between the nouns following them and one of the basic sentence elements: subject, verb, object, or complement (Jespersen, 2013). They usually indicate relationships, such as position, place, direction, time, manner, agent, possession, and condition, between their objects and other parts of the sentence (Wishon & Burks, 1980: 288). A preposition may be composed of one, two, or three parts. For instance:

- a. one part: of, on, in, at, for, from
- b. two parts: because of, according to, etc
- c. three parts: in front of, on top of, as far as, etc

In using a preposition, one should be aware because there is no certain rule for this. One has to determine which preposition should be used based on its context.

In our research, the errors in the use of preposition were 30. Its frequency is;

$$P = \frac{n1}{\sum N} \times 100 \%$$

$$P = \frac{30}{235} \times 100 \%$$

$$P = 12,8 \%$$

Some of the errors made by the students in this area are described as follows:

- (13) a. **It was very crowded by tourism of many countries.*
 b. **It was the one and only house with two floors and the biggest official house on Pangkah sugar factory.*
 c. **I didn't realize if my aunt and my brother had crossed it, because I was interested with the magic show that I saw it in crowded of people.*
 d. **I were at Jogjakarta just 2 days because I still had many important activities at Slawi.*
 e. **At last Saturday, after I followed an English course, my mother asked me to take her to the bank by motorcycle.*
 f. **They laughed me and of course, I cried again.*
 g. **It was very big and has a big swimming pool with many of plants at its surrounding.*

The sentences should have been:

- (14) a. *It was very crowded with tourists from many countries.*
 b. *It was the one and the only house with two floors and the biggest official house in Pangkah sugar factory.*
 c. *I didn't realize if my aunt and my brother had crossed it, because I was interested in the magic show that I saw in crowded with people.*
 d. *I was at Jogjakarta just for 2 days because I still had many important activities in Slawi.*
 e. *Last Saturday, after I followed an English course, my mother asked me to take her to the bank by motorcycle.*
 f. *They laughed at me and of course, I cried again.*
 g. *It was very big and had a big swimming pool with many plants in its surrounding.*

3.5 Errors in pluralization

This kind of errors occurred 12 times. Its frequency is;

$$P = \frac{n1}{\sum N} \times 100 \%$$

$$P = \frac{12}{235} \times 100 \%$$

$$P = 5,1 \%$$

Some examples of data that show the errors in pluralization are presented following.

- (15) a. **It was a beautiful beach, with a big wave and many of hill around it.*
 b. **It was a big bookstore with 4 floor.*
 c. **We saw many plane in there.*
 d. **People still stayed in tent, because their house had been rebuilt.*
 e. ** The next day we went to the garden and took some mangos.*
 f. **The mangos were so sweet.*

In the six sentences above, the students failed to recognize the plural form of the object of the sentences. The sentences should have been:

- (16) a. *It was a beautiful beach, with big waves and many hills around it.*
 b. *It was a big bookstore with 4 floors.*
 c. *We saw many planes there.*
 d. *People still stayed in tents, because their houses were being rebuilt.*
 e. *The next day we went to the garden and took some mangoes.*
 f. *The mangoes were so sweet.*

3.6 Errors in the use of pronouns

A pronoun is used to substitute nouns. It has many types; they are personal, reflexive, indefinite, relative, interrogative, demonstrative, and expletive pronouns (Wales, 1996). In the current research, the students made errors in this area as can be seen in following data:

- (17) a. **She wanted to have a vacation in So'e in grandmother's house.*
 b. **After acquainted, we took the photos with theirs.*
 c. **When I wanted to climb, I was so nervous.*
 d. **Those day, I was bored, and I was very tired.*

In sentence a and b, the student failed to recognize the possessive pronoun. In sentence c, the student failed to recognize the personal pronoun. And in sentence d, the students failed to recognize the correct form of the demonstrative pronoun. The sentences should have been:

- (18) a. *She wanted to have a vacation in So'e in her grandmother's house.*
 b. *After being acquainted, we took photos with them.*
 c. *When I wanted to climb it, I was so nervous.*
 d. *That day, I was bored and very tired.*

Total of this error was 23. Its frequency is;

$$P = \frac{n1}{\sum N} \times 100 \%$$

$$P = \frac{23}{235} \times 100 \%$$

$$P = 9,8 \%$$

3.7 Errors in the use of conjunctions

Conjunctions are used to connect words. They connect not only words but also phrases and clauses (Schlepppegrell, 1996). The rules in using them are the same as their rules in Indonesian. Despite the same rules, the students still make errors in this area. The errors are as follows:

- (19) a. ** But caused I thought it just took a moment, so I said ok.*

- b. * *Next when we throughed the traffic light, the red blazed.*
 c. * *Besides that, most of them live in one place or never moved to another city.*

In the three sentences above, the students seem confused in failed to recognize the correct form of the conjunctions. They just added them with *-ed*, just like what we do when we form the past form of verbs. They generalized what we do in making past verb form to what we do with conjunctions. The sentences should have been:

- (20) a. *But, because I thought it just took a moment, I said ok.*
 b. *Next, when we passed the traffic light, the red blazed.*
 c. *Besides, most of them live in one place or never moved to another city.*

The total errors in the use of conjunctions were 4. Its frequency is;

$$P = \frac{n1}{\sum N} \times 100 \%$$

$$P = \frac{4}{235} \times 100 \%$$

$$P = 1,7\%$$

The percentage of the result in the analysis can be seen in the following table:

Table 1
The percentage of grammatical errors

No	Type of error	Total Error	Percentage
1.	Errors in using verb group	153	65.0 %
2.	Errors in subject –verb agreements	3	1.3 %
3.	Errors in the use of articles	10	4.3 %
4.	Errors in the use of prepositions	30	12.8 %
5.	Errors in pluralization	12	5.1 %
6.	Errors in the use of pronouns	23	9.8 %
7.	Errors in the use of conjunctions	4	1.7 %
	TOTAL	235	100 %

As can be seen from table 1, the highest percentage of grammatical errors were errors in using the verb group. It consisted of 65.0 %. Following these errors, students made errors in the use of prepositions (12.8 %). The third errors that were usually made by students are the errors in the use of pronouns. It took 9.8 %. After errors in the use of pronouns, students made errors in pluralization (5.1 %). The next lower frequency of errors made by students were errors in the use of articles. It took 4.3 % of the whole text. After that, students made errors in the use of conjunctions. The errors occurred at 1.7 %. The last error made by students were errors in the use of subject-verb agreement. The errors occurred only 1.3 %.

4. Conclusion

Despite the fact that English is a foreign language in Indonesia, that is, it is not used widely in everyday lives of Indonesian people, the language is widely taught and learned all over the country (Tans, 1999; Mistar, 2005). In teaching and learning it, EFL lecturers and their students use the language to express their ideas, feeling, complains, and many more purposes. The expressions were also conducted by writing their past experience (recount text). The phenomena related to the case is about the grammatical errors made by students of EFL.

Having analyzed the data, we conclude that teaching writing in EFL class in Indonesia, in this case writing “Past Experience” text, must be more focused on how to use the verbs. As can be seen in the previous description, the use of verbs was in the highest percentage of errors made by students. The next focus that must be taught by lecturers is the use of prepositions and pluralization. After that, lecturers can focus on the use of articles, as well as the use of conjunctions. The last focus that can be taught by lecturers is the application of the subject-verb agreement.

Conflict of interest statement and funding sources

The authors declared that they have no competing interest. The study was financed by themselves.

Statement of authorship

The authors have responsibility for the conception and design of the study. The authors have approved the final article.

Acknowledgments

The authors send their gratitude to the Director of State Polytechnic Kupang, as well as to the Head of Business Administration Department, who have let them conducted the current research in the campus.



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