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SNAP TO READ

GRAMMATICAL ERRORS IN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' RESEARCH PROPOSAL WRITING

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The paper investigated common grammatical errors produced by Indonesian university students of English as a foreign language when writing their undergraduate research proposals. Accordingly, an urgent research question to resolve was what common grammatical errors are made by the seventh semester students of the English Language Education Study Program of Sanata Dharma University in writing Chapter One of their research proposals? To answer the research question, the researchers conducted a content analysis. The researchers analysed students' research proposals, focusing on grammatical issues identified in the first chapter. Results showed that the errors were omission (content and grammatical morpheme), addition (double marking, regularization, and simple addition), misinformation (regularization errors, archi-forms, and alternating forms), misordering, parallelism and diction. The top three errors were successively omission (38.15 per cent), addition (21.97 per cent) and parallelism (18.5 per cent).

Keywords: error, error analysis, content analysis, proposal seminar, writing

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by Bram Barli

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Grammar plays a crucial role in writing in general and in research proposal writing in particular. To write grammatically in English, the target language, has remained a complex challenge for many learners of English in Indonesia, including undergraduate students of the English Language Education Study Program (ELESP) of Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta. Thus, in this paper, the researchers focus on grammar, one of the language elements, especially grammatical errors made by undergraduate students when writing their research proposals. Good grammar is a decisive factor in writing, which is extremely complex and which involves various language aspects (cf. Lipovšek 2006; Pasaribu 2017; Kurniasari 2017). Using good, standard grammar in writing is a difficult task for students (Widiati & Cahyono 2006; Abushihab 2014; Phuket & Othman 2015; Krishnasamy 2015; Kosaka 2016; & Bram 2018). In university, the students are required to write – grammatically – argumentative essays, research proposals, and summaries, for example. A good writing includes complexity of syntax and morphology and related to vocabulary and grammar (Cumming 2001); this incites students' anxiety (Daud, Daud, & Kassim 2005). This is one of the reasons why the students tend to make errors in their writing.

After doing thorough observations and based on the researchers' experiences in the Proposal Seminar Class, the researchers discovered grammatical errors which occurred more than five times on many pages of the students' drafts. In this context, grammatical errors are frequently related to subject-verb agreement, misuse of tenses, word order and syntactic categories, to list some examples. This is a critical problem as in the Desk Evaluation, which is a compulsory process of the thesis defence procedure implemented by the English Language Education Study Program (ELESP) of Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, the maximum grammatical errors on each page are five. Furthermore, these problems can still be found even in some finished theses published online by the university library.

Therefore, even though many have already researched about error analysis (Gustiilo and Magno 2012; Mali and Yulia 2012; Zawahreh 2012;

Krishnasamy 2015; Sihombing and Estrelita 2015; O'Donnell 2016; Febriyanti and Sundari 2016; Sermsook, Jiraporn, and Pochakorn 2017), this research is still of a paramount importance to be researched. This is because in this particular area – students of Proposal Seminar of ELESF – is not yet researched as much as the other area. However, this area holds as much importance as the other areas as this is where semester 7 of ELESF students produce a writing that will be published. Furthermore, they are future teachers, their English must be sufficient. Yet, this comes to a full circle as the researchers still found some – even many – ‘silly’ errors in the published students’ writing. Therefore, this particular area – students’ writing and grammar – must be improved.

The researchers conduct a document analysis to analyse the errors produced by seventh semester students of Proposal Seminar. However, the researchers only focus on Chapter I which is the background of the research or the introduction part. It is because in the Chapter I, the students are challenged to express their own opinion and ideas about their research in their own words. They can convey the meaning to the readers and also give arguments with their own sentences. This part shows students’ proficiency in their academic writing.

The research was conducted in one of the private universities majoring English Language Education. The researchers chose seventh semester students because they take Proposal Seminar course to prepare their Thesis. Gustilo and Magno (2012) state that “making errors is one of the most unavoidable things in this world” (p. 98). Therefore, error analysis is chosen because it is helpful for the students to have better result in their thesis writing. It is so that they will be more aware in writing their thesis later. The researchers provide the categorization in analysing the errors. They are omission, addition, misinformation, misordering, and others. The omission category is divided into content morpheme and grammatical morpheme. The addition category is divided into double marking, regularization, and simple addition. The misinformation category is divided into regularization errors,

¹⁰ archi-forms, and alternating forms. There ¹⁸are also parallelism and diction which as categorized as the category of other errors.

¹²The purpose of this research is to find out students' errors in writing their Chapter I in Proposal Seminar. Thus, the research question is: What are the errors made by seventh ²²semester students of English Language Education Study Program in writing their research proposals? The researchers expect that this research can be useful for the students to improve their writing skills in general, and to be more able to write their research proposals grammatically in particular.

Errors

Errors themselves can be seen as flaws in the writing and speaking (Dulay, Burt, and Krashen 1982). Furthermore, Ellis (1991) defines ²⁶errors as “deviation from the norms of the target language” (p. 51). Errors are systematic; which means that the problems are in the structural level occurred repeatedly and learners do not notice it (Dulay, Burt, and Krashen 1982; Ellis 1991; Febriyanti and Sundari 2016; Phuket and Othman 2015). Furthermore, errors are concerning about “the rules of the accepted norm” (Gustilo and Magno 2012, 98). Those errors are made by learners because they do not have sufficient knowledge (Dulay, Burt, and Krashen 1982). Nevertheless, those errors are normal to be made by learners and “they are evidence of intention to learn” (O'Donnell 2016, 1165). Errors now are seen as a part of learning process; that learners learn by making error (O'Donnell 2016; Phuket and Othman 2015). Therefore, errors cannot be separated from the learning itself. Learners can develop themselves when they are learning from their errors. Knowing the errors, especially grammar errors in learners' writing, is very important to develop learners' knowledge. This information can be used by the teachers to find out the learners' weakest points and improve them effectively (Dulay, Burt, and Krashen 1982) as teacher's input plays an important role in improving learners (Phuket and Othman 2015). However, sometimes teachers mix up errors and mistakes.

Errors and mistakes are different. Mistakes are performance errors.

They are caused not because the learners do not understand the grammar; they are caused because the learners experience fatigue or do not concentrate well enough to the matter (⁴ Dulay, Burt, and Krashen 1982). Errors themselves are mostly about ¹¹ the first one, that learners have misconception in understanding the grammar or do not understand the grammar to some extents. In making errors, the learners do not have enough competence as they are still learning the language and making sense of the structure of the language (Dulay, Burt, and Krashen 1982). Therefore, ¹¹ this research focuses on the errors, especially on the surface structure errors as this research focuses on English for foreign language (EFL) learners. Some of these learners still do not have sufficient competence in grammar. Thus, they would likely to make errors instead of mistakes.

Error Analysis

To analyse the errors, the researchers used error analysis. This method can be used to analyse EFL learners' errors when ¹¹ learning a language (Dulay, Burt, and Krashen 1982). Error analysis itself would give teachers knowledge about their students' errors and therefore could adapt their teaching to match the needs of the learners (Gustilo and Magno 2012; Zawahreh 2012). Furthermore, by using this method, errors are seen more as resources to develop the learners instead of flaws that must be eliminated. EA would "reveal the types and sources of errors which can lead to an accurate way and less time consumption to reduce errors made by learners" (Sermsook, Jiraporn, and Pochakorn 2017, 103). There are three sides that would benefit from Error analysis method: teachers, learners, and researchers (Wu and Garza 2014). For the teachers, these data would help them in determining the weakest point of their students' grammar and choosing the most effective method to improve them. For the learners, the data would help them to pinpoint their weaknesses and improve their grammar. For the researchers, the data would help them to understand how a language is constructed. This research focuses more on the first two: teachers (lecturers) and learners (students). The reason for this is because after Proposal Seminar and Thesis,

the students would face the Desk Evaluation, in which the maximum errors for each page are only five. Therefore, the students must prepare themselves and must be prepared to write the most flawless writing they could. The grammar errors must be minimised. To do that, the lecturers must have the errors data from the students. This research would help lecturers and students identify the most common errors that they make.

In this research, surface structure taxonomy was used to classify learners' errors. In this taxonomy, the errors are classified into omission (content and grammatical morpheme), addition (double markings, regularization, and simple addition), misformation (regularization errors, archi-forms, and alternating forms), and misordering (Dulay, Burt, and Krashen 1982). Content morpheme omission is the omission of noun, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs (e.g. John salad) while grammatical morpheme omission is the omission of is, the, of, noun and verb inflections, articles, verb auxiliaries, and prepositions in a sentence (e.g. He singing). Double markings category is the addition of dual structure, in which to "delete certain items which are required in some linguistic constructions, but not in others" (Dulay, Burt, and Krashen 1982, 156) and the example is "He did not ate rice". Regularization is when the learners add the typical addition in an exceptional item (e.g. putted). Simple addition is a category for addition that cannot be included in double marking and regularization (e.g. on over there). Regularization errors category is when the learners misform a word by using regular marker to irregular word (e.g. theirselves). Archi-forms category is "the selection of one member of a class of forms to represent others in the class" (Dulay, Burt, and Krashen 1982, 160) and the example is "That dogs". Alternating forms category is when the learners alternate the forms (e.g. he for she). Misordering is when the learners do not use correct order in a sentence (e.g. I rice eat).

The researchers also added other categories (parallelism and diction) to accommodate the errors that cannot be included in those classifications. Parallelism itself can be either the grammatical structure or the category of

words (Blake and Bly 1993). A sentence must use a parallel construction within the sentence itself. This means that when a construction in a sentence is written in the simple present tense, the next construction in that sentence should use the simple present tense too, unless the writer has a good explanation in changing the tenses. This rule also applies to parallelism in a paragraph, from sentence to another sentence. The example of within the sentence is 'He is cooking while Sam was dancing'. Here, 'was dancing', which is the past continuous tense, is not parallel to the first construction/phrase that uses the present continuous tense. Therefore, the verb must be changed, either to past or to present, according to the time. The other example of this is "He loves dancing, eating, and to play". This is not parallel as the other two use a gerund while the last one uses to + infinitive. Therefore, the last one should be changed to a gerund, namely 'playing'. Parallelism itself is very important for a sentence and/or paragraph to be comprehensive. It would be very hard for someone to comprehend when in a paragraph, a writer jumps from the present tense and the past tense back and forth. Thus, this category is included in this research's error analysis.

The other category that the researcher added is diction. In this category, the researchers analysed the choice of words from the students (Sardi, Atmowardoyo, and Weda 2017). In writing a thesis, formal diction must be used by the students. Furthermore, appropriate diction must also be used to convey a specific meaning. Diction itself is very important for a writer as it is the only bridge between the writer and the readers. In a writing, a writer wants the readers to have the same understanding as the writer him/herself. If the diction used by the writer is wrong, then the meaning conveyed by the readers would be wrong too. Inappropriate diction would confuse the readers and therefore would ruin the writing itself. From the explanation, it can be seen that diction holds the continuity and clarity of the writing. Thus, this important component is included in this research's analysis. The last two errors explained here were included in other errors category. All of the explained classifications of errors were used by the researchers to analyse

and classify the errors found in Chapter I of Proposal Seminar Class.

METHOD

This research used content analysis as a method. Ary, Jacobs, and Sorensen (2010) explain that “content analysis focuses on analysing and interpreting recorded material to learn about human behaviour” (p. 457). Furthermore, Ary et al.(2010) add that “the material may be public records, textbooks, letters, films, tapes diaries, themes, reports, or other document” (p.29). The purpose of the research was to analyse types of errors, especially errors in the Chapter I, which is the introduction part produced by the students of Proposal Seminar Class. The researchers analysed the document and interpreted it in the form of description. The research was conducted at Sanata Dharma University on October 31, 2017. The researchers asked the research participants to send their writing through email.

There were eleven students in this research with 11 writing analysed. Their thesis discussion covered two fields in English Language Education research. Those fields were education and linguistics. By analysing the students’ writing in Chapter I in research proposal, the researchers found the data: results and findings. The results and findings showed the students’ errors in writing their Chapter I in Research Proposal. First, the researchers analysed the writing by using comment through Microsoft Word. After commenting, the researchers coded the data by using the list of errors mentioned in the error analysis explanation. For the coding of errors itself, Dulay et al. (1982) state that there are two types of describing errors. Those types are linguistic taxonomy and surface taxonomy. The researchers chose to use the latter one because it would be more effective to be used in analysing students’ errors. Then, the researchers counted the errors found in the students’ writing and made an error percentage based on the error analysis categories explained before. The coding of the data was put into the table.

The researchers analysed the errors from students’ writing and categorized them in a table. The table itself had two percentage categories.

The first one was for the specific categories (e.g. content morpheme, simple addition, and alternating forms) and the second one was for the big categories (e.g. omission, addition, and misformation). This was done to give a comprehensive explanation and to find out the most common errors made by the students according to the specific categories and big categories. After putting the data into the table, the researchers discussed the results by describing the data in the table. To enhance and give more elaboration of the data, the researchers also used the researchers' own experience.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

By using the error analysis, errors from 11 written products of the Proposal Seminar Class' students were gathered. The data summaries were compiled in the following table.

Table 1. Students' errors

No	Categories of error		Frequency	%
Surface strategy taxonomy				
1	Omission	Content morpheme	8	4,62
		Grammatical morpheme	58	33,53
2	Addition	Double marking	31	17,92
		Regularization	2	1,16
		Simple addition	5	2,89
3	Misformation	Regularization errors	8	4,62
		Archi-forms	0	0,00
		Alternating forms	18	10,40
4	Misordering		4	2,31
1	Parallelism		32	18,50
2	Diction		7	4,05
Total			173	100

The table shows four main categories of surface structure taxonomy errors and two additional error categories. From the table, ¹³it can be seen that the most common error made by the students was omission with a total of 68 times, which makes up 38.15% out of the overall categories; this result is in line with Wulandari's research results in 2014 which identified 72 omission errors (41.9% of the total data). Then addition, parallelism, misformation, diction, and misordering were the second to last most common, respectively. ⁵As misordering was the least error found in the students' writing, it can be inferred that the students already knew the categorization of words and the structuring of a sentence. Some of the categories have their own sub-categories, which are discussed further in the paragraph below.

There are two sub-categories for omission: content morpheme and grammatical morpheme. For the content morpheme errors, only a small amount found, which was 8 that made up 4.62% of the total errors found. The example of omission of content morpheme from the students' writing is "some parents have their (own) activities". Here, the student omitted 'own' which is a determiner. By omitting 'own', the sentence would not make sense to the readers. The latter sub-category of omission had the highest number. 58 errors (33.53%) were found in the students' writing. One of the examples is "Based on Elliot's book, it (is) stated that". The student omitted 'is' and therefore it becomes 'it stated', which is an active sentence. However, 'it' here refers to Elliot's book and it is a thing. Therefore, it cannot state something. This sentence should be a passive sentence ('it is stated') as the one who states is Elliot, not the book itself. Omission of grammatical morpheme itself was almost double the second largest errors. It can be seen that this was the students' weakest point. All of the students had at least one grammatical morpheme error.

For the addition, which was 21.97% of the overall data (38 errors), there are three sub-categories. The first sub-category for addition was double marking which scored 19.08% (33 errors). This sub-category ranked two in the overall data. The example of this sub-category is "In this era people are

use (using) English frequently”. The student here used double verb, which were ‘are’ and ‘use’. The present continues rule is to be + v-ing. The student should have changed ‘use’ to ‘using’ as it is the present participle to complete the to be ‘are’. The next sub-category was regularization and 0 error found. The last sub-category was simple addition. There were 5 errors found for this category (2.89%). In this sub-category, the example is “the character named Jerry Mulligan in a movie entitled with An American in Paris”. In here, the student added ‘with’, which is not necessary when using ‘entitled’. This addition could not be included in the other sub-categories; therefore, it was included in simple addition as it is the grab-bag.

Misformation also has three sub-categories: regularization errors, archi-forms, and alternating forms. The first sub-category, regularization errors, had 8 (4.62%) errors. In this sub-category, the example is “as a media (medium)”. ‘A’ showed that the student intended to use a singular noun. However, the student wrote ‘media’, which is a plural noun. Therefore, it was an error made by the student. It should be ‘medium’, the singular noun of ‘media’. None of the students did an archi-forms error. There were 18 errors found for the last sub-category, alternating-forms. The example of this is “to develop their critical thinking especially on (in) developing reading”. The student used ‘on’ instead of ‘in’, the student alternated the form of preposition.

There were 4 errors in the misordering category. The example this category is “is a type of (oral) communication orally”. The student here misordered ‘oral’ to be an adverb. It should be an adjective put in front of the noun to modifies the noun itself. Therefore, it should be ‘oral communication’. For the parallelism, it held the third rank as there were 32 errors found from the writing, which was 18.5% of the total data. The example is “to promote economic, politics, social, and cultural”. Here, the student included ‘cultural’ which is an adjective in a list of nouns. Therefore, this sentence did not have a good parallelism, it should be ‘culture’. The last category was diction, which had 7 errors (4.05%). The example of this is “it is the exact time to teach them English”. ‘Exact’ here was not suitable to be used here as the meaning

is 'in great detail or complete, correct, or true in every way'. Therefore, the use of 'exact' was semantically incorrect. One of the possible solutions is to use 'appropriate' to replace 'exact'.

This research analysed 46 pages of 11 Proposal Seminar's students Chapter I written works. Therefore, each student wrote at least 4.18 pages with size 12 of Times New Roman font, double-space paragraph, with top and left margin of 4 and bottom and right margin of 3. The total errors found from those more or less 9.900 words written works were 173. Thus, the average errors of each students were 15.72 and each page were 3.76. Some students had more than 5 errors in one page, which was not acceptable for the Desk Evaluation.

The error analysis of this research was only for Chapter I that usually averages around 4 to 5 pages. There were 15.72 errors found in each student's Chapter I. Students themselves must write at least 30 pages in making a thesis. If following this research's errors trend, then the students would make more or less 112 errors in their thesis, which is arguably not acceptable for a student of ELESP. Furthermore, it would be very embarrassing if those errors find their way to be published in the online library as people can see them. This notion is based on the researchers' experience as the researchers still find errors in the students' writing published in the online library. Therefore, it is of a paramount importance for this to be prevented to happen again. So, it is also of a paramount importance for the students to polish their grammar and for the lecturers to strengthen their students' grammar. Furthermore, according to the researchers' experience, most of the students did not know what to do about their grammar. They wanted someone to proofread their writing, especially the lecturers. However, sometimes, it was not possible as the timing was not appropriate. One of the possible ways, then, was to give the writing to their friends to proofread, which is termed as peer feedback. Some would say that this was not a very effective approach as their friends were also a student, they were also learning about the grammar itself. Nevertheless, even though this would help the students in minimising the

errors in their writing, the lecturers must also guide their students especially in minimizing those errors.

CONCLUSION

The results showed that the students' errors were successively omission (especially omission of grammatical morpheme), addition (especially double marking), and parallelism. Therefore, the students must focus on improving on these weaknesses. The lecturers must also try to improve the students in their strategies to minimise these errors. The four main categorizations are omission, addition, misinformation, and misordering. The researchers also found other errors. They are parallelism and diction. The researchers used eleven documents of Chapter I of Research Proposal. From the research, there are 173 errors based on the theory of surface structure taxonomy. The omission errors are 66 errors. The addition errors are 38 errors. The misinformation errors are 26 errors. The misordering errors are 4 errors. Besides, the researchers also found other errors which could not be identified in those five types of error which are parallelism and diction. The parallelism errors are 32 errors. The diction errors are 7 errors.

For the sub-categories, there are content morpheme, grammatical morpheme, double markings, regularization, simple addition, ⁹ regularization errors, archi-forms and alternating forms. The content morpheme errors were 8 errors. The grammatical morpheme errors were 58 errors. The double marking errors were 33 errors. The regularization error in addition was 0. The simple addition errors were 5 errors. The regularization errors in misinformation were 8 errors. The archi-forms error was 0. The alternating forms errors were 18. To summarise, the students tended to make errors in omission, addition, and parallelism.

As for implications, the students should practice more and check their theses more thoroughly before submitting them for the desk evaluation. It is indispensable for the students because in the desk evaluation, the maximum errors on each page are five. The students can ask their friends to give

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feedback so that the students can learn more not only from their own writing but also from others. It is expected that this research would contribute to assisting students of English and their lecturers or instructors to understand their weaknesses in writing theses.

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