Grammatical Error in EFL Students' Writing

¹Ahmad Bowo Saputro, ²Abdul Halim
¹²IAIN Kendari, Indonesia
Corresponding e-mail: pangeranahmad@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study sought to examine the frequency, and sources of writing errors committed by EFL students. To gather the information, 35 students were selected; the students were enrolled in a writing course in the second semester of academic year 2019–2020. They were asked to write three different topics of essays with 100 to 150 words in 40 minutes and requested to make reflection regarding the causes of errors according to their perception. The results of data analysis revealed that capitalization was the common mistake done by students followed by wrong word and punctuation. From students' perception the causes of errors were 38% grammatical understanding, 21% vocabulary, 17% lack of idea, 13% in rush, 6% less practice and 5% less focus. The researcher believes that the causes of those errors were incomplete knowledge about basic writing and grammatical rules. According to the results, recommendations and any suggestions that are of importance to teachers and policymakers as well as to EFL learners are presented in detail.

Keywords: EFL students; error analysis; grammatical error.

INTRODUCTION

By knowing what student's weaknesses and what they master on, teacher can try to identify students' difficulties in the classroom by conducting error analysis. James (2013) mentions that error analysis is a good way to measure students' difficulties because it can map students' ability clearly. If teacher can outline student's ability precisely, teacher can determine what method that students need the most, what scope in writing that teacher must develop to guide students to understand the writing material and compose it to be sentence and paragraph.

Analyzing students' grammatical errors or error analysis has been voiced from several studies since 19th century (James, 1998; Norrish, 1983; Richards, 1971, 1974; Ziahosseiny, 1999) until recently (Darus & Subramaniam, 2009; Hwee, Siew, Yuanbin, Christian, & Joel, 2013). Most of those researchers put their trust on Corder (1974) believe; that is teachers and practitioners of the field may be able to define specific areas that needed support in the teaching process if they systematically analyze the type of errors committed by EFL learners. Errors are not always bad; rather they are important parts and aspects in the process of learning a language. They may provide insights into the complicated processes of language development as well as a

systematic way for identifying, describing and explaining students' errors (Jobeen, Kazemian & Shahbaz, 2015).

In Indonesian context, there also some researchers who are aware with this issue; Syarifuddin (2015) for instance, he studied about Thai students' grammatical errors and analyzed the possible causes. He conducted the study at UIN Alauddin Makassar. Instead of focusing on students' grammatical errors in writing subject (Suhono, 2016; Hasan, & Marzuki, 2017), there also those who took different subjects such as speaking (Sastra, 2014) and Grammar (Hasyim, 2004).

Although many studies have so far been conducted on writing errors all over the world including Indonesian contexts, many research focus on comparing the writing errors between the class, different major, proficiency level, and different learning methodology; but there are not many researchers who study about common error especially in Kendari context. The researcher can only find two research that conduct in Kendari recently (Kartika, 2019; Sarikah, 2019) but, these two researches have different method and focus compare to this ongoing research. In addition, the result of this research can be used as medium for enlarging students' writing skill. This study is more significant in the sense that it has categorized and measured the types of errors that makes the present study unique in its scope and context. Considering the researcher's experience in learning with students in the field who still make common mistake even though they are in high semester is the main rationale of this study. It is hoped that the study would shed light on types and frequency of errors in the English writing samples of different groups and would help students, teachers and the other stakeholders to design curriculum and the teaching materials accordingly.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used qualitative research where the method of content analysis was used to gather the research results. The content analysis was widely used in social sciences research (Nuruzzaman, Islam, & Shuchi, 2018). This research determined the qualitative analysis plan to be appropriate for the aim of study because, as Bailey & Nunan (1996) confirm, "Qualitative techniques enable us to summarize significant sources of data and promote connections beyond levels and over time". This research aimed to identify, count, and mapped student's errors into percentage table, the types, and their frequency.

In collecting the data, the researcher used writing test. This test conducted three times in three weeks then closed by making a reflection. The researcher took a role to explain the rule as well as distributed and collected the test and reflection. Students did not get any information regarding this test; they were requested to write 100 to 150 words with a common topic about descriptive text for each meeting such as "My favorite thing", "A nice place I want to visit", and "My dream house". Considering the time that was given to the participant in doing this research is relatively short—it is for about 45 minutes; the researcher chosen those topics because those are easy topics for current participant's knowledge.

To gather the data for this research, the researcher prepared: permission, the confirmation for time and place, and test sheet. Thus, the researcher set out into IAIN Kendari to meet the lecturer and authority then discussed and asked permission with the lecturer before doing observation. After the lecturer agreed with the researcher terms of research, the researcher came to the classroom to give the explanation for students regarding the topic that they must write, the amount of time which given to them and how much words the need to make. Then the researcher collected the test after the participant finished the test.

The researcher came to the campus to do the same test for three times on three weeks in a row. When the researcher had collected the third test, the researcher distributed the reflection draft then requested the students to work on it. After the whole data are collected, the researcher analyzed the types of grammatical errors based on Olsher (1995) theory then categorized the errors and calculated the dominant error based on the students work.

RESULT

The finding of this research revealed that capitalization is the most common errors that students committed in this research followed by wrong word and punctuation. The causes of those errors were 38% because of grammatical understanding, according to students' reflection. Thus, most of the students in this study did not completely comprehend the basic rule of writing, considering capitalization is the most frequents errors that committed.

The following is the presentation of students' writing test; it is organized from Capitalization, Punctuation, Spelling, Plural/singular mistake, Subject-verb agreement, Verb tense agreement, Wrong word, Conjunction mistake, and word order.

Tabel 1; Errors in students' writing

Original sentence	Correction	Type of errors
..big as indonesia. I want to visit is makkah one of them. my friend tell me	..big as Indonesia. I want to visit is Makkah one of them. My friend tell me	Capitalization (C)
So I like to take my neighbor's cat…. In inside must have four rooms. I wanna have a place... I can put a couple of thing what I like. and I want to…	So, I like to take my neighbor's cat…. In inside must have four rooms. I wanna have a place... I can put a couple of thing what I like and I want to…	Punctuation (P)
I am so excited with dools A simple house looks beautifull My favorite thing is my deary book.	I am so excited with dolls A simple house looks beautiful My favorite thing is my diary book.	Spelling (sp)
I want to have mirror in every corner… In Filipina many nice place …many time a day.	I want to have mirrors in every corner… In Filipina many nice places …many times a day.	Plural and singular (#)
Mobile phone have both…	Mobile phone has both…	Subject and Verb

my favorite motorcycle <u>look</u> very cool. My cat have beautiful fur	my favorite motorcycle <u>looks</u> very cool. My cat has beautiful fur	agreement (s/v)
it is <u>feel</u> less attention… Everyday, I always <u>give</u> it a food. When I high school…	It is <u>feeling</u> less attention… Everyday, I always <u>gave</u> it a food. When I was high school…	Verb tense (VT)
…my <u>shut</u> aurat, I also want to add a flower garden and also fish <u>pool</u> in the…… I have a plane	…my <u>closed</u> aurat, I also want to add a flower garden and also fish <u>pond</u> in the…… I have a plan	Wrong word (WW)
<u>I want always</u> to buy all. My house will be painted in white with a <u>roof in blue</u> Which have <u>color black</u> and pink.	<u>I always want</u> to buy all. My house will be painted in white with a <u>blue roof.</u> Which have <u>black and pink color.</u>	Word order (WO)
family. <u>And</u> I like… In the city. <u>And</u> the house.. Muslim women. <u>And</u> I feel…	family. I like… In the city. The house.. Muslim women. I feel…	Conjunction (conj)

The following is the table of number of grammatical errors made in test 1, 2, and 3. The table consists types of errors that have been separated accordingly.

Tabel 2; Table of students' grammatical errors

Test	C	P	Sp	s/v	VT	Ww	Wo	#	Conj	Total
First test	93	40	23	30	23	45	7	17	26	304
Second test	95	35	24	17	26	54	6	18	12	287
Third test	64	33	28	27	9	49	14	27	23	279

Total of 304 grammatical errors were found in the first test, while 287 errors in the second test and 279 errors for the third test. The results presented in the table above showed that the most common grammatical errors were capitalization, followed by wrong word. The wrong word in this context of the study are including unnecessary word and improper word choice.

The researcher also showed the students frequency in committing errors in this study. The researcher gained frequent data of students' errors by calculating the first, second and third tests then turn them into percentage form. The data will be explained in a table form along with the types of errors.

Chart 1; Chart of students' grammatical errors frequency
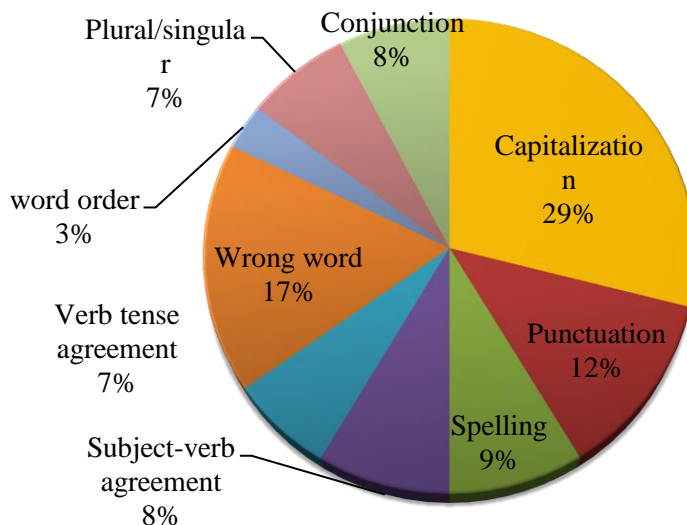
The chart above describes the students' frequency in committing grammatical errors. It could be seen that the most frequent errors that students at IAIN Kendari committed was capitalization; followed by 17% students who were committed wrong word errors and 12% students who were committed frequent errors in Punctuation.

The following chart presents the causes of errors made by the students in their writing.

Chart 2; Chart of Students' causes of errors
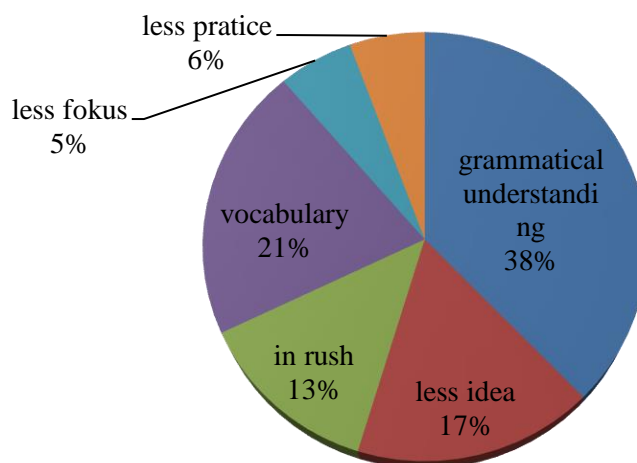
After conducting this reflection coding, the researcher found reasons of why the students made mistakes in their writing. Students did not understand about grammatical rules well, they hardly did not have their independent study for the review. Students have poor range of vocabulary. They were not motivated to read books.

DISCUSSION

According to the results of the current study, there was a certain development in students writing. A total of grammatical errors that committed by students were gradually decreasing each test; it shows that the students writing skill were getting better by practices, approved by Tuan (2010). A total of 304 grammatical errors were found in the first test, while 287 errors in the second test and 279 errors for the third test.

After examining the students' test which consist unexpected number of errors, the researcher found that most of those errors were caused by their mother language (L1). During data analysis, the researcher found a lot of unnecessary word and improper word choice which if translated in to Bahasa Indonesia—students' first language—will make a structurally complete sentence. In other word, students in this context of the study are translating Bahasa Indonesia into English word by word. This can be seen from this excerpt "In inside must have four rooms"; this sentence prepositionally incorrect, because we do not need "in" before "inside"; the right sentence is "Inside the house must have four rooms". The students also wrote "For learning English and if I meet with they", English has different pronoun, "they" used for subject and "them" used for object. So, the right sentence is "For learning English and if I meet with them". Another error from student is "member Black Pink her is Rose"; phrase in English is started with modifier then followed by head, while "her" is a pronoun for object. So, the right sentence is "Black Pink member, she is Rose". There also students who wrote "Which have color black and pink"; phrase in English is started with modifier then followed by head, but in Bahasa Indonesia it is reverse. So, the right sentence is "Which have black and pink color". The last excerpt is "I have dream can study in Paris"; in English sentence formula there will not be two verbs in one sentence without conjunction. In this sentence there are two verbs without conjunction those "have" and "study". So, the right sentences are either "I have a dream to study in Paris" or "I have a dream so I can study in Paris". However, if the sentences are translated into Bahasa Indonesia, all those sentences are structurally correct. These errors, according to Amara (2015), are made because of L1 interference. Heydari and Bagheri (2012) and Touchie (1986) who are study about error analysis are also having the same kind of students' errors and they agree if such errors sentences are made because of first language interference.

Considering the amount of capitalization errors that committed by students and the amount of errors in this study; the researcher can conclude that students in this study are not aware of basic rule in writing and they seldom write even in Bahasa Indonesia. This might also happened because the existence of social media. The students frequently communicate with other via social media where the use of capitalization is ignored because of auto correction.

Generally, the results of data analysis showed that the errors made by the participants are caused by two major sources: i.e., Interlingua errors, which occur as a result of L1 transfer, and

intra-lingual errors, which occur due to the lack of L2 knowledge (Kaweera, 2013). The students find more difficulty in learning English patterns that are similar to, but in some way different from patterns of their own language. The key to this problem in the lower level is the fact that they always resort to literal translation before they form English patterns. Put it differently, they translate one language phrase into another word for word (not phrase by phrase).

Regarding the sources of mistakes performed by EFL students at IAIN Kendari; according to the results of the reflection analysis and strengthens by one of students' opinion who said "the reason I made mistakes when writing essays is that I don't think I have mastered grammar well, so I'm afraid that the English sentences I write will not be grammatical". This showed that students' incapability in understanding grammatical rules. This is in line with Sattayatham & Honsa (2007) and Ahmadvand (2008) who assumed that the most common students' mistakes were often incomplete grammatical understanding.

The result of this study in formal errors contradicted with the results of studies conducted by Shalaby, Yahya, & El-Komi (2009) and Hemchua & Schmitt (2006). In all of these studies, the results of lexical errors indicated that semantic error was the most frequent error found in the students' writings. The possible reason behind the difference between the results of this study with the other studies may be due to the characteristics of participants of the study. The participants in this study have many differences compared to other studies such as different proficient level, background knowledge, and cultural understanding.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study are expected to spell out the types and frequency of errors that committed by students from English major in writing subject. By collecting three students' tests and reflection regarding their errors, the researcher hopes able to answer the research questions. This research presented different types and numbers of errors made by the students in second semester of IAIN Kendari which indicated their different levels of proficiency. The results of the analysis showed that there were three most common types of errors produced by the students in their writing: capitalization, wrong word and punctuation. From students' perception, the causes of their errors were their incomplete knowledge about grammar and basic writing rules. In addition, in their written paragraphs, inter-lingual errors due to L1 interference are clear. Intra-lingual transfer of Bahasa Indonesia and developmental errors have also been observed as the causes of their errors. This study shed light on the writing difficulties of IAIN Kendari's EFL students and hoped can be regarded as input for the betterment of future teaching writing.

The findings of the present study can have implications for EFL learners, teachers, test developers and researchers. Being informed of the most common mistake classes as well as the primary mistake sources, educators can focus on the students' linguistic problems. Moreover, they can tell students about nature of their errors. Making advanced EFL learners notified of their most problematic areas can encourage them to concentrate on these errors and enhance their writing and speaking abilities (Tahririan, 1986). This can increase their awareness concerning the difficulties of the language education method.

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