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The Subject-Verb Agreement Errors on Students' Writing

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A B S T R A C T

Subject-verb agreement is an essential component to be mastered by English Language Learners to produce a good writing. Examining the students' errors on writing is part of the evaluation in English language learning and teaching. To produce a good writing, the English language learners have to be able to know the rules of the language use. However, the English learners still struggle in mastering the subject-verb agreement in the writing. This research aims to diagnose the errors made by the students as well as to explore the factors contribute the errors. To obtain the data, the researcher employed a document analysis and a semi-structure interview. The findings showed most of the errors belonged to misinformation category (33%) and were subsequently followed by omission category (29%) and addition category (29%) and misformation (9%). In addition, from the interview the researcher also found three major factors contribute the students' errors, namely ignorance the editing process, the unawareness of the grammar rules, and intralingual errors.

Keywords: Agreement, Language, Errors

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INTRODUCTION

Grammar is the center of language use (Kocaman & Cansız, 2012). It explains how the sentence is accepted as it is a description of the rules managing how a language learners' sentence is formed. It cannot be separated that learning a language means learning the grammar of the language. It manages how the meaning is conveyed through arrangement of some words in sentences (Razali & Jupri, 2014).

Hence, learning grammar is essential due to the language learners have to know the structure of the target language before communicating the language. The ability of mastering grammar can be evaluated by its use in communication; speaking and writing (Oscarson, 2009). Unfortunately, the people's opinion on the exclusion of the importance stressing on the grammar for speaking causes people's attention on the importance of the grammar itself. Since some people argue that speaking focuses on delivering and understanding the message, not the structure of the language. However, the ability to understanding a grammar of the target language is a must. On the contrary, written communication requires a good grammar on it. The ability to understand the grammar of the language cannot be ignored.

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Unfortunately, learning grammar is undoubtedly complicated and difficult for some EFL (English as Foreign Language) learners because of the existing rules of the grammar such as rules of using verb, subject, tenses, agreement in a sentence, etc (Oscarson, 2009). Another reason is probably because of the interference of the students' first language. Since English is Foreign Language in Indonesia, it requires great efforts for the students to learn the structure of the target language. The differences structure of the two different languages causes students' great effort to master it. These differences between English and the students' first language (Indonesia) could be problematic for the students in learning English. The students' confusion of using good grammar rules in creating a sentence are often experienced by the students because of their understanding on it.

As EFL students, English Department students are expected to master English grammar rules and will not produce such grammatical errors since it is learned intensively. The students' knowledge on grammar are evaluated through students' writing. In writing class, the university students are required to write an English writing. Based on the Semester Lesson Plan (RPS) designed by the lecturer, it is expected that by having writing II course, the English students are able to write some English writings in a good way.

As Brown state that grammar is one of the component assessed in writing. However, as stated before that writing in EFL for EFL students is hard. The students will be committed on some errors on the use of the target language grammar. As a matter of fact, from the researchers' informal observation, English Department students in the second semester still committed grammatical errors in writing. Followings are the examples of errors :
If your not good at speaking English other friends teach the correct.
We also have a class intensive course.
The life of student of English Education at University of Pahlawan Tuanku Tambusai second semester is very happy

The errors found on the students' writing above indicates that the students are struggling to arrange the words in a sentence. It happened due to the lack of the competency on using s-verb agreement rules in writing. It is found that the students' errors mostly come in form of subject-verb agreement.

Straus (2014, p.19) points out that subject verb agreement is a singular subject takes a singular verb whereas a plural subject takes a plural verb. Also, Umstatter (2007, p. 171) asserts that subject verb agreement means a subject that represents a single person, place or thing, agrees with singular verb, meanwhile a subject, one that represents more than a single person, place or thing, agrees with a plural verb.

Concept of Error

The terms of errors are presented by many experts and researchers. In this study, the definitions of error were uttered by some experts: (1) according to Norrish, error is a systematic deviation, when a learner has not learnt something and consistently gets it wrong (cited in Hasyim, 2002, p. 25), (2) Cunningworth states that errors are systematic deviations from the norms of the language being learned (cited in Hasyim, 2002, p. 25). It seems that the phrase „systematic deviation‟ in these definitions is the keyword which can be interpreted as the deviation which happens repeatedly. In addition, according to Zhang (p. 86), errors probably arise where there are great differences between the learner‟s mother tongue or any previously acquired language and the language he or she is trying to acquire. He also adds that errors made by the learners in the language production mean the learner reveals his underlying knowledge of the newly acquired language.

In order to analyze learners‟ errors in a proper perspective, it is crucial to make a distinction between "mistake" and "error". According to Brown (2000, p. 217), a "mistake" refers to a performance error in that it is a failure to utilize a known system correctly. While an "error" is a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker reflecting the interlanguage competence of the learner. Therefore, it can be concluded that errors occur because the learner does not know what is correct, even the learner has learnt about the language, he/she does not understand about the form. Meanwhile, mistakes occur because

the learner is unable to perform what he/she knows, sometimes the learner forgets about the form of the language then he/she makes mistakes.

Types of Errors

According to Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982, p. 150), the classification of errors is called surface strategy taxonomy; the taxonomy that classified the errors based on how the structure of language changes that lead to the error. The classification of error is elaborated in the following: 1) Omission, this error is where some elements are omitted which should be present e.g. *The queen here last night* (verb is omitted in this sentence, linking verb (was) is needed to make the correct sentence, it should be *the queen was here last night)*. 2) Addition, this error is where some element is present which should not be there e.g. *The princess was had pretty eyes* (the auxiliary (was) is added even though the verb had been applied, it should be *the princess had pretty eyes)*.

According to Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982, p. 156), errors in addition were divided into: 1) Double markings: where two items are used as the marker in the same feature (eg. tense). eg: *"Malin Kundang *was wanted to join them"*, the auxiliary (was) is added as the marker that the sentence is in past tense even though the verb has been applied, it should be *"Malin Kundang wanted to join them"*. 2) Regularization: where there is an addition of suffix –*ed* for irregular verb. eg: *"Dayang Sumbi *hitted Sangkuriang's head"*. *3)* Simple addition: an addition error neither double markings nor regularization. 4) Misformation, it is use of the wrong form of a structure e.g. *She did not rich enough at that time* (*did not* is grammatically incorrect, linking verb *was not* is needed to make a correct sentence, it should be *she was not rich enough at that time)*. 5) Misordering, this error is where some elements presented are correct but wrongly sequenced e.g. *She yesterday came late to the party*, ("yesterday" is not in exact position, the position should be in the last as adverb of time, and it should be *she came late to the party yesterday)*.

Factors Contributes the Errors

Keshavarz (2012:130) adds another point for the cause of errors called Language Learning Strategies. In language learning, learning strategy is a way in which a learner attempts to work out the meanings and uses of words, grammatical rules, and other aspects of a language, for example by the use of generalization and inference. There are three main types of second-language learning strategies: Overgeneralization, Transfer of Rules and Simplification. The first two have been explained earlier.

The third instance of second language learning strategies is simplification through which the learner reduces the target language to a simpler system in order to decrease the learning difficulties of the target language. This strategy is sometimes called redundancy reduction because it eliminates many items, which are redundant to conveying the intended message. Here are some examples of simplification:

I like air north of Iran
I am student English Language
We look up map to situation cities

Besides, Norrish (1983:22) adds the causes of errors that are carelessness and translation. *Carelessness* is often closely related to lack of motivation. Many teachers will admit that it is not always the students' fault if he loses interest, perhaps the materials and/or style of presentation do not suit him. The second cause is translation. It happens because of the students translates his first language sentence or idiomatic expression in to the target language word by word. Richards (1989) adds one more cause of the students' error, namely performance errors. It is unsystematic error that occurs as the result of such thing as memory lapses, fatigue, confusion, or strong emotions.

METHOD

This research employed descriptive research. According to Gay (2000:275), descriptive research determines and describes the ways things are. The study focuses on exploration the

source and the factors contribute the errors produced by the students in writing paragraph. It was conducted in writing II class at University of Pahlawan Tuanku Tambusai, the students are asked to write paragraph in which the topic decided.

The source of data was the students' final project on writing II. There were 26 writings chosen in this research. The documents were analyzed by knowing the document sign on subject-verb agreement errors.

The document analysis and the interview were employed to get the data on the s-v agreement errors produced by the students. The document analysis was employed to figure out types of errors on students' writing. Then, the interview were employed to find the factors contribute on students' errors.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After collecting the data on the students' writings, the researcher identified and classified the error on s-v agreement produced on the students' writing. The four types of errors were found on the students' writing.
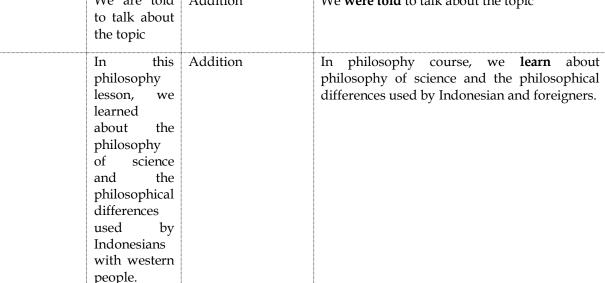
Table 1. Identification and Description of Type of Error

Informant	Occurrence	Types of Errors	Correct Forms
LA	The life of student of English Education at University of Pahlawan Tuanku Tambusai second semester is very happy	Misordering	The life of **the second semester student** of English Education at University of Pahlawan Tuanku Tambusai is very happy
	If your not good at speaking English other friends teach the correct.	Misformation (helping verb) Omission	If **you are** not good at speaking English **the** other friends correct it.
	We also have a class intensive course.	Misordering	We also have an intensive course class.
RA	In my mind life the English department students it's the same with the major student other.	Ommision Misformation	In my mind life**of** the English department students are similar with the other students.
FY	I studied at the	Addition (article)	I studied at University of Pahlawan Tuanku

	University Pahlawan Tuanku Tambusai.		Tambusai.
	I have occupied in 2nd semester.	Ommission	I have occupied in the 2nd semester.
	Lecturers in 2nd semester starting from the date of 12 February 2018.	Misformation (Gerund as S) Omission	**Lecturing** in the 2nd semester **started** from the date of 12 February 2018.
	18 credits it is divided into 9 subjects.	Addition	18 credits is divided into 9 subjects.
	In grammar lessons the learning methods is in groups.	Misordering	We learn grammar in group.
	Usually when group 1 presents its material or another groups asks questions ……	Misformation (possessive pronoun) Addition	Usually when group 1 presents the material or another groups ask questions ……
	We are told to talk about the topic	Addition	We **were told** to talk about the topic
	In this philosophy lesson, we learned about the philosophy of science and the philosophical differences used by Indonesians with western people.	Addition	In philosophy course, we **learn** about philosophy of science and the philosophical differences used by Indonesian and foreigners.
HF	In campus Universitas Pahlawan Tuanku Tambusai	Addition Ommission	Universitas Pahlawan Tuanku Tambusai has four faculties that is faculty health and faculty education……………techniques

	has faculties that is faculty health and faculty education… ………….tec hniques		
	I majors in university ……..is English	Misformation (Poss Adj) Addition	My Major
AD	I am Adilatunnisa………..on 22 December 1996.	Misformation (Date)	I am Adilatunnisa………..on December 22, 1996.
	I am a study of English study Program of University… ……	Addition	I study of English study Program of University………
	We are study speaking	Addition	We study speaking
	In English study …….listenin g and writing difficult for me	Ommission	In English study …….listening and writing are difficult for me
	It's good for me to be a English Teacher	Misformation (article)	It's good for me to be an English Teacher.
HA	Everybody must have some activity …….at campus.	Ommission	Everybody must have some activities …….at campus.
	On the campus has some organization.	Addition Ommission	Campus has some organizations.
	The lecturer give some subject …….	Ommission	The lecturer gives some subject …….
	Then, …….and lecturer give	Ommission	Then, …….and lecturer gives the score.

	the score.		
SA	On campus we have many activity ………	Ommision	On campus we have many activities ………
	English student are also active in some organization ……	Ommision	English students are also active in some organizations ……
	So that students fluent speak English .	Misordering	So that students speak English fluently.
RN	In listening ………from some audio and video.	Ommision	In listening ………from some audios and video.
	This subject learning about description …….	Ommision	This subject learns about description …….
MR	Student life English on campus ………..	Misordering	English Student's life at campus
	Student must take card's parking	Misordering	Student must take parking's card
	We ……what is in say lecturer	Misordering	We…… what lecturer says
	If lecturer not entered	Misformation (helping verb)	If lecturer does not come
	We went straight to the mosques…. We went straight to campus	Addition	We went to the mosques…. We went back to campus
MY	Which is the only university in	Ommision Addition	Which is the only one university in Kampar

	the Kampar		
	I am second semester	Ommission	I am the second semester
	In listening…… ..and after we listen to it	Addition	In listening……..and after we listen it …….
MAA	During I am learn in University ………	Misformation (poss adj)	During my study in University ………
	I am join so much activity	Addition Misformation	I join some activities
	…. And eat typical Indonesia food namely Rujak.	Misformation (Poss Adj)	…. And eat Indonesia's traditional food namely Rujak.
GM	We -----the base of science of teaching	Misformation (noun)	We -----the basic science of teaching
SA	Students University ………	Misformation (Poss adj)	Students's University ………
	Students majoring English education more woman than man	Misformation (poss adj)	English Study Program's students consist of some women than men.
	When the lessons are empty …..	Misformation (relative pronoun)	If there is no schedule
SY	We are so happy to following some lessons	Misformation (to infinitive)	We are so happy to follow some lessons
	We always make a activity	Ommission	We always make an activity
	There is a courses too	Addition	There is a course too
	That can make we have a good English	Misinformation (object pronoun)	That can make us have a good English.

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SRY	I want to tell about activity English student	Misformation (Poss. Adj)	I want to tell about English Students' activity
	If there a party …….	Ommission (to be)	If there is a party …….
	English Department have a 2 class	Misformation (article)	English Department have 2 classes
	We are meet……	Addition	We meet……
SS	We also discussion ….	Misformation (Verb)	We also discuss ….
	I'm happy to go to college at University of Pahlawan Tuanku Tambusai	Addition	I'm happy to go to University of Pahlawan Tuanku Tambusai
RY	We are a talent to be an English Teacher in future	Ommission	We are a talent to be an English Teacher in the future
	In the class, we have to focus learn English to able good and correctly speak English	Misformation (to infinitive)	In the classroom, we have to focus to learn English to enable us to speak English correctly.
SM	This university has four faculty	Ommission	This university has four faculties
	To join some organization …	Ommission	To join some organizations …
NN	I will explain to you about the life of student Education	Misformation (possessive adj)	I will explain to you about the life of Education's student
	On campus seminar are held to support	Ommission	On campus seminar are held to support the students' knowledge of English.

	students' knowledge of English.		
SI	I am is one of the …..	Addition	I am one of the …..
	As a English Student my friend and I try to can how …..	Ommission (article)	As an English Student my friend and I try to increase …..
	All of ………..in order to English students can speak English be better.	Misformation (to infinitive)	All of ………..in order to enable the students to speak English.
	Because English language now be the world language .	Misordering	Because English is an international language nowadays.
	…… we are happy be English student.	Misformation (Verb)	We are happy become an English student.
RN	But, after I'm become a student of English Education	Addition	But, after I become a student of English Education
	When we were on first semester…	Ommission	When we were on the first semester…
DF	….I challenge myself to take a course the according to my ability	Addition	….I challenge myself to take a course according to my ability
AA	We registered… …..we are in second semester.	Ommission	We registered……..we are in the second semester.
	Finally, all of activities that we already do have a	Ommission	Finally, all of the activities that we already do have a goal.

goal.		

It can be seen from the table 1 that there were 78 errors found on the students' writing. Those 78 errors appeared in each type of error. The frequency and the percentage can be seen in the following table:

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage of Types of Errors

Types of Errors	Frequency	Percentage
Omission	23	29
Addition	23	29
Misordering	7	9
Misformation	25	33

As seen on the table above, the three types of error were found frequently on students" narrative writing; omission, addition and misformation. The findings showed that misformation is the most frequent type of error on students" writing with the total number of occurrence was 25 (33%). Omission and Addition became the second most frequent type of error on students' writing with the total number of occurrence 23 (239%). And the last type of error occurred on students' writing was misordering with the total number of occurrence 10 (9%).

CONCLUSIONS

Firstly, the students contributed each type of error in term of subject verb agreement in their writing, those were (1) Misformation (33%), (2) Addition (29%), (3) Omission (29%) and Misformation (9%).Secondly, this study revealed that the most frequent type of subject verb agreement errors contributed by the students on their writing was misformation with the occurrence 25 errors and the percentage 33%. It was marked by the students used a wrong form in a sentence, the possible source of the error was communication strategies, where it was related to students" learning style or the students" way to get the message, it indicated that the students failed in interpreting the rule of the sentence form.

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