Errors in EFL Students' Writing: A Case of Senior High School Level Learners

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Abstract

This study is aimed at investigating types of errors frequently found in students' writing, and 2) examining sources of errors in EFL students' writing.. Using students' writing assignments, the data were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. The finding shows that the students made the errors in the surface structure in their writing including misformation (58.18%), omission (20.15%), addition (16.35%), and misordering (5.32%). Two sources had been identified to contribute the causes of the errors made by the students. The complexity of the English language system was found to be the major source of the students' errors. It was also found that the interference of the students' mother tongue made them create incorrect sentence. Therefore, some suggestions and recommendations are formulated to deal with this problem.

Keywords: Error analysis, EFL, students' writing

INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the primary basis upon which students are learning in EFL context. It, however, is not an easy skill to master. It is perceived as the most difficult skill in English learning (Ananda et al., 2014; Fareed & Bilal, 2016; Rattanadilok Na Phuket, 2015) since writing is a complex activity (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996) in which the writers are needed to be able to organize content, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, punctuation and letter for action (Bell and Burnaby, 1984 cited in Nunan, 1989). Besides, they also require arranging and combining information into coherent and meaningful paragraphs and texts (Graham & Harris, 2003; Budiharso, 2017). Therefore, because of its complexity, it is not surprising if many students still make errors in their writing (Budiharso, 2017).

In the ELT Curriculum in Indonesia, writing is one of macro skills of English that must be developed. As productive skill (Özdemir & Aydin, 2015) and progressive activity (Ariyanti, 2016; Fauzan & Nadia, 2019), students need to be able to generate the language in terms of written to communicate and pass four main phases of writing process including planning, drafting, feedback and revising (Yusof et al., 2012; Haryanto & Mubarok, 2018). Thus, English teachers should pay more attention on how to teach writing more effectively to reach the intended outcome. Unfortunately, many teachers still neglect the process of writing in teaching and learning process. They usually only ask the students to write one or more paragraphs and give marks on them without giving feedback because of time limit.

Regarding to the fact, repeated errors in writing are unavoidable. The students usually make them systematically and repeatedly without any notice (Gass & Selinker, 2010). For students of high school level, errors in writing is natural and should not be regarded negatively since they are very beneficial means in learning English as a foreign language (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). By analyzing the errors made by students, teachers will know the ability of their students. Students also will recognize the rules of English after they obtain feedbacks from their teachers. As a consequence, their ability will increase.

Some studies have been conducted to analyze students' errors in writing. They were carried out to obtain kinds of errors made by students to get appropriate solutions for their problems in writing (Ananda et al., 2014; Andrian, 2015; Cahyaningrum, 2014; Ma'mun, 2016; Sihombing et al., 2017). Similarly, Rattanadilok Na Phuket (2015) and Sermsook, Liamnimitr, &

Pochakorn (2017) investigated types of students' errors and their sources to give insight of students' language learning progress to teachers.

Purpose of Research

This study is aimed at 1) investigating types of errors frequently found in students' writing, and 2) examining sources of errors in EFL students' writing.

RESEARCH METHOD

Design

This research belonged to descriptive study which used quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative approach was used to find out the frequency of errors types in students' writing, while the qualitative one was employed to obtain the sources of their errors.

Sample

The sample was taken from tenth graders of high school level in the total of 30 students. They were all EFL learners of senior high school in Indonesia. In addition, writing is one of skills of English which becomes compulsory subject taught since students are in elementary school.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data in this study were collected through written tasks given to the students. They were asked to write a passage with a free topic. Then, each sentence of their written texts were analyzed and labeled according to each type of error to get its frequency and percentage. The analysis was based on Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's Surface Structure Taxonomy which consists of addition, omission, misformation, and misordering. Finally, the errors were categorized into classification why the errors were occurred. The classifications were based on whether the errors came from the Indonesian language as the first language (interlingual transfer) or from English as the target language (intralingual transfer).

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Types of Errors Frequently Found in Students' Writing

Based on the data analysis, it was found that there were four types of errors in the students writing. The result could be described like the following:

Table 1.

Types of Errors Frequently Found in Students' Writing

Types of Errors	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Omission	53	20,15%	2
Addition	43	16,35%	3
Misordering	14	5,32%	4
Misformation	153	58,18%	1
Total	263	100%	

From Table 1, misinformation are the most frequently error type made by the students (58.18%). Others are omission (20.15%), addition (16.35), and misordering (5.32%).

Misformation

Misinformation is the most dominant errors made by the students. The students did error 153 times of the whole errors found. It occurs since the students fail in choosing the right words and they supply something although it is incorrect. In this study, errors are mostly occurred due to the use of incorrect verb form. In English system, there are five forms for each verb: root, third-person singular, present participle, past, and past participle. The following is the examples of sentences made by the students.

　　　'He made *(makes)* a lot of krabby patty all day long.'
In this case, the student uses wrong verb form because the context of the passage is describing something in which it should use third-person singular.

　　　'…we take *(took)* a picture…'
The student makes error because the context of the passage is telling a story that happens in the past. Therefore, the student should use past form.
Another example of misformation error is found when the student uses the wrong part of speech.

　　　'I am very comfort *(comfortable)* with my family.'
In this sentence, it should use adjective 'comfortable' instead of verb 'comfort'.
The error in students' writing is also found in their word choice. The sentences made by the students include improper or incorrect vocabulary which diverge the meaning of the written text.

　　　'…and I enter *(put)* vegetables in the oven.'
'enter' means 'to come or go into a particular place'. It is inappropriate to use in this sentence. It should be replaced with 'put'.

Omission

The second highest percentage of students' error was omission error. In table 1, there are 53 omission errors. They occur because of the

absence of an item that must appear in a well-formed utterance. The students omit an item or more in their sentences.

'The road between *(the)* exit and the market was jammed'

In this sentence, there should be article 'the' before 'exit'. 'The' needs to be added since it describe the specific noun 'exit'.

'I couldn't *(get)* out from my house'

In this case, the modal 'couldn't' is followed by the word 'out' which is may be considered as a verb by the student. The meaning of 'out' as a verb is 'to emerge' which is different with the student's intended meaning. The student wants to say that 'I couldn't leave my house'. Therefore, the sentence should be added with the word 'get' before the word 'out'.

'One of them *(was)* at Prambanan Temple.'

Another error made by the student is seen in the sentence above. The student omits 'be' as a main verb. This verb is needed in the system of English in making nominal sentence. Since the context of sentence was simple past tense for the singular subject, the correct 'be' is 'was'.

Addition

The third percentage of students' error was addition error (43 errors). They occur because there is the presence of an item which must not appear in a well-formed sentence made by the students. The students usually add unnecessary item in their sentence.

'…but I'm really like cooking with her…'

In the sentence, the student adds add 'to be (am)', which is incorrect. 'To be + like' means 'having the same characteristics or qualities as'. Therefore, the sentence has different meaning from the author's intention.

'…his parents told to Rony…'

'tell-told' is one of transitive verbs that always need an object immediately after it. Although it sometimes needs two objects (a direct and indirect object), preposition, such as 'to' should come after the first direct object. Therefore, the sentence should be '… his parents told Rony…'

'…and he promises to himself…'

In this sentence, the student also adds preposition 'to', which is incorrect. It should be ''…and he promises himself…'

Misordering

The last percentage of error found was misordering error. In this study, the students committed 14 errors. They occur since the students place the wrong sequence in a sentence.

'I don't know what should I do'

If the sentence includes a statement about a question rather than a direct question, the subject should come before the verb. Therefore the correct order of the sentence above is 'I don't know what I should do'.

Sources of Errors in EFL Students' Writing

From the data, errors committed by the students are caused by two sources: intralingual transfer and interlingual transfer.

Table 2.
Sources of Errors in EFL Students' Writing

Sources of Errors	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Intralingual Transfer	170	64.64%	1
Interlingual Transfer	93	35.36%	2
Total	263	100%	

Table 2 shows that intralingual transfer contributes a large error compared to interlingual errors in the students' writing. The students are confused in using target language because of the complexity of the English language system and their lack competence. As Asni & Susanti (2018) mention that the main source of errors made by the students is because the system of English language is too complex. Therefore, the students fail to transfer into target language. The example of students' errors that were caused by intralingual transfer is as follows.

'Yesterday he wake *(woke)* my brother up at 7 a.m'

In this case, the student does not use the verb of simple past tense form to tell about the activity in the past. In making correct sentence in English, the students must have adequate knowledge of grammar, including the use of verb form.

Another source of error made by the students was interlingual transfer. It occurs due to the influence of the students' native language and they usually have not been familiar with the target language. For example

'…it has seven room*(s)*…'

In this sentence, the student still had interference with the native language which is in the system of Bahasa Indonesia there is no additional 's' or 'es' for plural things.

CONCLUSION

The finding shows that the students make misformation, addition, omission, and misordering

errors in their writing. It indicates that they have problems in the surface structure of the sentences. In addition, the errors are caused by intralingual and interlingual transfer. The complicated system of English language is the major source of students' errors in their writing. Moreover, the errors are also caused by the influence of the students' native language. Therefore, the English teachers of EFL students need to pay more attention on how to help students to overcome their problem. In teaching writing, they also have to give more explanation about the pattern of the sentence. The teachers should use various teaching technique and media to make the students easy in absorbing the lesson.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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