

The Syntactical Error Analysis of The Eighth Grade Students' Recount Text Writing at SMPN 1 Bangsal Mojokerto

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Abstract: Error analysis is a method that is used to analyze the errors made by the language learners in their speech and writing. In this study, the researcher analyzed the syntactical errors in the recount text writing made by the eighth grade students at SMPN 1 Bangsal. The syntactical errors made by the students are classified into 4 (four) types. They are simple past tense error, misuse of articles, misuse of prepositions, and error of word order. Then those four types specified based on the Surface Strategy Taxonomy. According to the result of the data analysis, the most dominant syntactical errors found in the students' recount text writing is the simple past tense error with the percentage is 57,73% (71/123 errors). Meanwhile, the lowest percentage is the misuse of prepositions with the percentage is 10,57% (13/123 errors).

Keywords: error analysis, syntactical error, recount text, surface strategy taxonomy

1. Introduction

English becomes the first foreign language which is taught in formal educational institution in Indonesia. It is compulsory subject taught to the students from elementary school to university. There are four language skills in learning English, namely: listening, speaking, reading, and writing as well as three language components, namely: grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. As we know, writing is regarded as the most difficult skill. Especially for second language or foreign language learners, the difficulty in writing does not only lie in creating and organizing ideas but also translating the ideas into readable writing. (Richards and Renandya, 2002:203)

Hence, writing in English is not a simple process especially for Indonesian students who learn English as foreign language. It is because the systems of English and Indonesian are different in terms of pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. So, it commonly happens that most Indonesian students face problems and they often make errors when they write.

Dulayet *al.* (1982:138) state that language learners will not be able to avoid committing error in their writing because it is the part of the learning process. In English learning process especially writing process, language learners commonly make grammatical errors and mechanical errors. (Ridha (in Sawalmeh, 2013)) It shows that they still have difficulty in applying grammar and mechanic correctly when they write in English.

According to personal interview with The English teacher, she said that the main problem faced by students in writing activity is grammatical rules. Most of students were facing difficulty in choosing the verb to write, consequently they got much grammatical error. For instance in writing recount text the students had difficulties in choosing the right form verb for past events. Besides, they also made some errors in the use of prepositions, articles, pronouns, word order and some others. However, the teacher did not have any report of the errors and she had not done any analysis dealing with grammatical errors.

Furthermore, it was found that most of the students still think in *Bahasa Indonesia* when they are required to write in English, although they have been taught that the structure of English is different from *Bahasa Indonesia*. Consequently, they frequently produce a sentence which is not grammatically correct.

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that most of errors that are made by students in writing activity is grammatical error. As we know that grammatical errors refer to the two components of grammar analysis; those were syntactical error and morphological error. This research will concern more on syntactical error, because the students' errors in writing is more on syntactical errors in which it deals with the way of the words are arranged into a phrase, a clause, or a sentence.

In order to analyze the students' syntactical errors in recount text writing, the researcher conducted a research entitled "The Syntactical Error Analysis of The Eighth Grade Students' Recount Text Writing at SMPN 1 Bangsal Mojokerto"

2. Literature review

2. 1. *Theoretical framework on syntactical errors in writing*

According to Mark and Anderson (in Bayinah, 2013:35) recount is a piece of writing that retells past events, usually in the order in which they happened and the purpose of recount is to give the audience description of what occurred and when it occurred. In addition, recount text writing in this research is a recount text composition which consist of two or three paragraphs, they are orientation, event, and re-orientation.

However, the students normally commit errors in the language learning process. As Dulayet *al.* (1981:138) hints that making error is an inevitable part of learning. In addition, English learning process especially writing process, language learners commonly make grammatical errors and mechanical errors. (Ridha (in Sawalmeh, 2013)) It shows that they still have difficulty in applying grammar and mechanic correctly when they write in English. For example: the statement "*Last week, I go to the Zoo in Surabaya City.*" shows the omission of irregular past tense verb. The error can be seen in the use of the present verb instead of past verb. There was the

omission of irregular past tense verb in the verb “go”. However, the students should use irregular past tense verb “went” to indicate the pas action since the sentence is in the simple past tense form.

Based on the case above, one of the aspects that needs to be evaluated in writing is grammatical aspect especially syntax. Yates (2008:7) notes that syntax is technical word that is used to describe the sentence structure. Moreover, Dulay *et.al*(1982: 148) state that the syntactical error are usually dealt with: some phrases, verb-and-verb construction, word order, and some transformation.

In this case, some types of syntactical errors need to be analyzed and evaluated in order to be significant especially for the English teacher to find the appropriate teaching strategy to overcome the students’ error.

2.1. Previous Studies on Syntactical Error Analysis

The previous research on syntactical error analysis was conducted by Rahmayanti (2012:36) reported that the most syntactical error made by the seventh grade students at SMPN 4 Genteng in the 2011/2012 academic year in their descriptive text writing was on simple present tense errors with the percentage was 38,29%. The other research dealing with the syntactical error was conducted by Azizah (2014:33) reported that the most syntactical error made by the eighth grade students of SMPN 1 Yosowilangun in the 2013/2014 academic year in their descriptive text writing was on the error of subject and verb agreement which the percentage was 27,41%.

Thus, based on the above rationale and problems, this article aims at presenting research findings on syntactical errors in recount text writing made by the eighth

grade students of SMPN 1 Bangsal Mojokerto because there had never been research conducted about syntactical error in this genre

3. The Study

3.1. Research design

This research is a descriptive research that is particularly in the form of error analysis. According to McMillan (1992:144), a descriptive research defines an issue and usually in the form of statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, averages, and sometimes variability. The main purpose of this research is to describe the syntactical errors of the eighth grade students' recount text writing at SMPN 1 Bangsal Mojokerto.

3.2. Research context

The research was conducted in the context of EFL (English as a foreign language) where the students learning the language did not use English to communicate with their friends, parents and even their teachers outside their classrooms. In selecting the research area the researcher used purposive method. The research area selected by purposive method.

3.3. Research participants

The participants of this research were the eighth grade students at a junior high school (SMPN 1 Bangsal) determined by using proportional random sampling.

3.4. Research data and analysis

The researcher used writing test, interview and documentation to collect the data. In this research, the writing test used by the researcher belonged to diagnostic test because it was intended to know the learners' strengths and weaknesses in

mastering grammar when they write a recount text. In the test, the students were required to write a recount text about things they did on their holiday in 10-15 sentences. The students should write based on the generic structure of recount text that consist of two paragraphs. The first paragraph tell about the orientation, then the second paragraph tell about the events happened. The allocated time to do the test is 40 minutes. Meanwhile, the interview was conducted with the English teacher of SMPN 1 Bangsal Mojokerto to gain the data about the study of writing at the students and the students' problem in writing. Furthermore, the documentation was used to get the data about the total number of the eighth grade students of SMPN 1 Bangsal Mojokerto in the 2016/2017 academic year as the research population and the textbooks used by the students.

The data were analysed by using the steps based on Ellis' theory (1997:15) that first identifying the syntactical errors made by the students in their recount text writing by reading the students' writing, underlining the errors and labelling them by using certain labels. Second, describing and classifying the labelled syntactical errors into the categories of syntactical errors through a table. Third, calculating errors by using Ali's formula (1993:186) in order to know the percentage of syntactical errors made by the eighth grade students of SMPN 1 Bangsa lMojokerto. Then, after calculating each type of syntactical errors, the most frequent error and the least frequent error made by the students in their recount text writing will be found. The last was drawing conclusion about the result of the data analysis to answer the research problems. Related to the interview, the English teacher stated that the students still experienced difficulties in writing well-formed sentences.

4. Research result and Discussion

The research results showed that there were some types of syntactical errors in the students' recount text writing. Even though the teacher taught them how to write a recount text, they still made numerous errors in their recount text writing. Actually, they had been good at expressing the idea through their sentences. They knew how to write their activities on holiday. They also had enough vocabulary to write a sentence. However, they still experienced difficulties in writing well-formed sentences. They still had not been able to organize their ideas and their words into a good writing that had the correct grammatical structure. Many components of the sentence were misused or even omitted.

In this research, the researcher classified four types of syntactical errors. There are simple past tense errors, the misuse of articles, the misuse of prepositions, and the error of word order. Those each types of syntactical errors have some subtypes which are adapted from Surface Strategy Taxonomy by Dulay *et.al* (1982:150). From the result of data analysis, it was found that the highest percentage of the syntactical errors made by the eighth grade students at SMPN 1 Bangsal Mojokerto in their recount text writing was the simple past tense errors as many as 57,73% and the lowest percentage was the misuse of prepositions as many as 10,57%.

Regarding to the most syntactical error made by the students that was the simple past tense errors, it relate to the irregular verbs, regular verbs, and the auxiliary verb used in simple past tense. In this case, the students often did error in determining whether the verb belonged to regular or irregular. In *Bahasa* Indonesia, there is no such thing as a verb tense rule that requires the *-d* or *-ed* inflections at the end of the verb to indicate the past action. In English, however, the *-d* or *-ed* inflections are required to indicate past action.

According to the source of errors, this type of error belonged to intralingual transfer because it dealt with the system of the target language itself. Ellis (1999: 58) states that “intralingual errors reflect the general characteristics of rule learning such as faulty generalization, incomplete application of rules and failure to learn conditions under which rules apply.” Based on the statement, the simple past tense error was a result of the students’ confusion of English rule, especially in using English verb. They did not fully comprehend a distinction in the target language that made fail to learn the condition under which rule applies. They still needed to understand more that in simple past tense, there are regular and irregular verbs which are different.

The other factor was the fact that the students as foreign language learners frequently experienced difficulty in understanding the target language because of the different structure between the target language (English) and *BahasaIndonesia*. Both English and *Bahasa* have different ways in combining the words into a sentence. In this case, the different word order between English and *BahasaIndonesia* gave the influence to the students because most of them still wrote English in *BahasaIndonesia* structures. Consequently, they produced errors of word order in their writing because they used incorrect structure. For instance, there was a student who wrote “*It was weekend unforgettable.*” The word order error happened in the sentence because the student wrote “weekend unforgettable”. In writing a noun phrase in English, the adjective comes *before* the noun, not *after* the noun. In this case, the adjective is *unforgettable* and the noun is *weekend*. Therefore, it should be “*unforgettable weekend*” instead of “*weekend unforgettable*”. The students might thought in *Bahasa Indonesia* while writing in English because in *Bahasa Indonesia*, the adjective comes after noun. Therefore, he translated “*akhirpekan yang takterlupakan*” (in *Bahasa Indonesia*) into “*weekend unforgettable*” (weekend = *akhirpekan*, unforgettable = *takterlupakan*).

From the explanation above, it can be said that the error of word order belonged to interlingual errors in which there was interference of the students' native language (*Bahasa Indonesia*) to the target language (English). The interference made the students unconsciously write English in *Bahasa Indonesia* structure. As what Spillner (1991:9) states "errors produced in the process of foreign language acquisition are thought to be caused by more or less unconscious transfer (in the mind of the learner) of mother tongue structures to the system of the target language." In this case, to make the students conscious about the difference is they should practice continuously to use English structures. The more practice the students do, the more familiar they become with the English structures.

Besides, in misuse of articles, the interlingual transfer happened when the students committed omission error of articles. According to Brown (2000:224) interlingual transfer is a significant source of error for all learners that happened because of interference from native language. Many students omitted the articles because the native language's interference influenced on the learning process. In English, there are three articles that covered definite article (the), indefinite article (an or a) and zero article. According to Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (in Hourani, 2008:32), articles are believed to be a source of difficulty for learners and teachers of English as a second/foreign language, especially for those whose native languages do not have articles or do have articles or article-like morphemes which are used in ways that differ from English articles. It means that articles are difficult elements for foreign language learners who do not have articles as English has. English has complex rule of using articles but Indonesian does not. Indonesian language does not have any specification to indicate the quantity of word numbers that was expressed by using word like "*sebuah*" before the noun in the sentence. So, it affected to the students not to put article before the noun. For example, "We bought

bag”. In this sentence, the student omitted the article “a” before noun “bag”. Thus, the correct sentence should be “We bought a bag”.

Meanwhile, regarding the least syntactical error type made by students was misuse of preposition, it related to preposition in, on, and at. In this case, the students often did error in determining when to use preposition in, on, or at in a sentence. In *Bahasa Indonesia*, there is no such thing as preposition “on” which may indicate place or time. In English, however, preposition “on” may indicate place or time based on the context of the sentence. According to the source of errors, this type of error belonged to intralingual transfer because it dealt with the system of the target language itself. The misuse of preposition was a result of the students’ confusion of English rule, especially in using preposition. They did not fully comprehend a distinction in the target language that made fail to learn the condition under which rule applies. They still needed to understand more that the use preposition in English and *Bahasa Indonesia* are different.

In short, this finding could be used as a reference for the English teacher to pay more attention to the students’ writing especially on the use of grammar so that the students do not only focus on how to develop their writing but also on how to deal with grammar they use in their writing. Touchie (1986: 79) states that “teacher should put more emphasis on correcting errors affecting a large percentage of their students.” In this case, the teacher could focus on how to teach the students so that they could deal with the regular and irregular verbs of simple past tense because the most dominant syntactical error was on the simple past tense errors.

5. Conclusion

Based on the research results, data analysis and discussion in Chapter 4, it could be concluded that the types of syntactical errors made by the eighth grade students of

SMPN 1 Bangsal Mojokerto in their recount text writing consisted of the simple past tense error (57,73%), the error of word order (19,51%), the misuse of articles (12,19%), and the misuse of prepositions (10,57%). The most syntactical errors type shown by the highest percentage (57,73%) made by the eighth grade students of SMPN 1 Bangsal Mojokerto in their recount text writing was the simple past tense errors. Meanwhile, the type of syntactical error that had the lowest percentage (10,57%) was the misuse of prepositions. In short, there were many syntactical errors in the students' recount text writing.

Therefore, the English teacher is suggested to give more explanations on regular and irregular past tense verb and give written feedback in the form of error correction. Thus, the students will not make the same errors in the future. Besides, the research findings can be used as a reference by the future researchers to conduct a further research dealing with error analysis but in other design. For instance, Classroom Action Research or Experimental Research which deals with the way how to treat the students from the errors that students have made.

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