

AN ANALYSIS OF ACEHNESE EFL STUDENTS' GRAMMATICAL ERRORS IN WRITING RECOUNT TEXTS

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at finding empirical evidence of the most common types of grammatical errors and sources of errors in recount texts written by the first-year students of SMAS Babul Maghfirah, Aceh Besar. The subject of the study was a collection of students' personal writing documents of recount texts about their lives experience. The students' recount texts were analyzed by referring to Betty S. Azar classification and Richard's theory on sources of errors. The findings showed that the total number of error is 436. Two frequent types of grammatical errors were Verb Tense and Word Choice. The major sources of error were Intralingual Error, Interference Error and Developmental Error respectively. Furthermore, the findings suggest that it is necessary for EFL teachers to apply appropriate techniques and strategies in teaching recount texts, which focus on past tense and language features of the text in order to reduce the possible errors to be made by the student.

Keywords: *grammatical errors; sources of errors; recount text*

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, English has been taught as a foreign language. According to *Curriculum of 2013*, English is learnt by students since they are in class seventh. When students learn English, they focus on mastering four macro skills of English; they are listening, speaking, reading and writing. Listening and reading are receptive skills while speaking and writing are productive skills. Among those four, writing is considered as the toughest skill as it requires a thorough process.

As a productive skill, writing is not like speaking or other receptive skills. Writing skill not only needs a lot of vocabulary in composing a paragraph, but also correct grammars, apart from other writing's rules, in order to be comprehensible. Therefore, composing a paragraph in writing activity takes a lot of times. Harmer (2004) states that writing and speaking are totally different, where in writing students have a lot of time to brainstorm their ideas and organize them carefully in contrast to what they do in oral activities. In oral communication process, students can negotiate and confirm the meaning directly to those involved in the process, while to communicate through writing, a writer should carefully organize their ideas by properly using vocabulary and grammatical choices. This has to be done to ensure that the piece of writing can be coherent to any potential readers.

In the context of second language (L2) or foreign language (EFL) learning, the difficulties of writing do not only lie in creating and organizing the idea, but also in translating the idea into readable writing. Richard and Renandya (2002) explain that mastering writing skill is the most difficult for L2 learners. Learners have to get involved on higher-level skills of planning and organizing as well as lower level skills of spelling, punctuation, word choices and so on. The different elements found between two languages are considered as the main problem. This leads students to make grammatical errors in a process of writing because most of the students tend to translate their ideas from L1 to L2.

According to Richard (1974) there are three categories of errors. L2 learners often misuse the element of a language when they speak another language. This is what is called *interference errors*. In addition, they make intralingual errors when generalizing characteristic of learning rules, for examples a general plural form of a

noun in English is by adding –s or –es as the suffix. Last, L2 learners whose basic knowledge is limited try creating a hypothesis of second language they learn. Such an error is what comes to be known as *developmental errors*. These three sources of errors are frequently made by senior high-school students when writing some kinds of text obliged by the curriculum, including recount text.

Recount text is a text retelling past event. It begins by telling the readers who were involved, what happened, where it took place and when it happened. This text aims to list and describe past experiences by retelling events in which they happened chronologically. In order to achieve its aim the text should be written through a different set of stages. The earliest stage is orientation, which let the readers know about the background of the event, including who, when, where and why. The next one is a sequence event which refers to identifying and describing a chronological order. The last stage is a conclusion in which the writer concludes comments expressing a personal opinion about the events described (Derewianka, 2004).

In the process of writing recount text students should be aware of and understand about the language features of recount text. Since recount text retells about past experiences, the text must use a past tense such as simple past, past perfect, past continuous, and past perfect continuous tense. To describe events the verbs used are made of verbs (action words) and adverbs, which describe and more details to verbs. And to describe events in chronological order students should use next, later, when, after, before, first, etc.

There are some problems faced by students in writing recount text as reported by previous research findings. Karani as cited in Marda (2013) says that the grammatical error is the most serious problem made by high-school students in writing recount text. It comes up when students apply past tense with regular and irregular verbs. The organization of the text may also cause difficulty to students, particularly in composing coherent and cohesive texts. Other problems come up in the part of content, vocabulary and spelling. This occurs when students develop the main ideas, focus on diction and concern on mechanism and punctuation. Such a writing problem emerged seemingly due to the differences those two languages have in terms of sentence forms.

A number of grammatical analysis studies have been carried out to analyze the grammatical errors phenomena in writing. First, a study entitled “*Grammatical errors Analysis in Students’ Recount Text (The Case of Twelfth Year Student of SMAN 1 Slawi, Tegal in the Academic Year 2006/2007)*” was conducted by Tony Haryanto, a student of Language and Art Faculty Semarang State University. In this study the writers found that the total number of errors is 235 in which the most common errors in form of verbs. Another previous study was conducted by Fajarani Emmaryana, a student of Tarbiyah and Teacher’s Training Faculty of Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University on the title “*An Analysis of Grammatical Errors in Students’ Writings (A Case Study of First Year Students of SMAN Cidegud Bogor)*”. The results show that 90% of students made errors in capitalization and punctuation.

Despite similarities that this study shares with the previous studies, there are still differences that make this study worth doing. The present study uses Betty S. Azar’s classification to classify types of errors in students’ writing recount texts. Besides, the writer also uses Richard’s theory to identify sources of errors. The Richard’s theory consists of three sources; they are *Interference Error*, *Intralingual Error*, and *Developmental Error*. Based on the problem that has been elaborated, this study aims at identifying the most common types of grammatical errors made by the students in writing recount texts and the sources of the identified errors.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is an error analysis study, which uses inquiry approach useful for exploring and understanding a central phenomenon. To learn about this phenomenon, the inquirers ask participants broad and general questions, collects the detailed views of participants in the form of texts or images, and analyze the information for description and themes. From this data, the researchers interpret the meaning of information, drawing on personal reflection and past research. The final report is flexible, and it displays the researcher’s biases and thought (Cresswell, 2008).

Moleong (2013) adds that qualitative research aims to understand something specifically, not always looking for the cause and effect of something, and to deepen comprehension about something that is being studied. In interpreting the findings of qualitative research, the writer employs descriptive analysis design. It is a study which gives a picture or description of a situation without giving a certain treatment (Kountur, 2008).

Research Subject

The population of this study is the first year students of SMAS Babul Maghfirah, Aceh Besar. The students are divided into two classes (A and B). The writer took one of the two classes to collect the data using purposive sampling. It is used for specific purpose to generate a more efficient non-probability sample in term of monetary and/or time resources (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). The standard used in choosing group of participants is whether they are "information rich" for the research (Patton, 2002, as cited in Creswell, 2008). The "information rich" means that participants where data are collected have information that the writer needs for the research. In this case, the writer collected the data from class A. Based on the writer's observation and the interview with the teacher show that students of class A have abilities to write recount texts based on their own experiences to be analyzed by the writer.

However, the subject of this research is document taken from the students' assignment sheets (recount texts). According to Creswell (2008), document consists of public and private document, which can include newspaper, journals, letters, notes, personal writing, and others. These sources provide valuable information in helping the researchers understand the phenomena in qualitative studies. The student's recount text writings can be categorized as personal or private document in which the writer can use document analysis technique to obtain the data from the texts.

Research Procedure

In collecting the data of the research, the writer used a document analysis technique. Some procedures or steps are explained as follow;

1. The writer observed two classes (A and B) to determine the subject of research. He chose class A to collect the data because this class has criteria that are predetermined by the writer.
2. He came to school to ask the principle's permission who has the authority to allow the writer in collecting the data. After getting the permission, the writer was allowed to meet the English teacher to consult about recount text materials and to make sure that the teacher teaches the recount text in his teaching.
3. The writer conducted his research in the class VIII-A on May 01, 2016 by collecting the students assignment sheets (personal document) from the English teacher of the class.
4. After collecting the students' assignment sheets, the writer checked the texts by circling the wrong words or sentences.
5. The writer returned the texts to the students on May 08, 2016. He commanded students to revise the words or sentences in the classroom that were circled.
6. Then, the texts were collected and the writer checked them to find whether the students could correct the words or not, if students could correct it that means he/she did a mistake and vice versa means he/she did an error and then the writer identified the errors.
7. Next, the writer analyzed the students' errors to find the most common types of errors made by students based on Betty S. Azar's classification of errors.
8. The writer calculated the total errors by drawing them up in a table based on the classification of errors then he made the result of total errors into percentages and charts.
9. The writer analyzed and classifies the sources of errors based on Richard's theory and then he explained the sources of errors that made by the students. The total number of the sources of errors were drawn up in a table and converted into percentages and chart.

10. Then he interpreted all of the data descriptively.

11. The last step, the writer made conclusion of his research.

The Technique of Data Analysis

The writer used qualitative research in his study which the method is conveyed in descriptive analysis way to describe and to interpret the result of qualitative data. To present the percentage number of the findings, the data are calculated and drawn up in the table of percentage which the formula as follows;

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$$

P= Percentages

F= Frequency of errors

N= Number of cases (total frequent, total individual)

This formula is used to calculate the types of errors and sources of errors that students made in writing recount texts into percentages. Before using this formula, the writer has to classify the students' errors into thirteen categories as suggested by Betty S. Azar.

DISCUSSION

Having analyzed all collected data, the writer intends to discuss the findings and how they answer the research questions proposed in this study. There are two research questions that are concerned respectively with the common types of errors and the sources of errors that student made in writing recount texts.

The first question is about the common types of errors that the students made in writing recount texts. The findings of the analysis suggested that the thirteen classifications proposed by Betty S. Azar (1989) were found in the students' recount

texts. The thirteen types are respectively singular-plural, word form, word choice, verb tense, add or omit a word, word order, incomplete sentence, spelling punctuation, capitalization, article, meaning not clear and run-on sentence. The two most common types of grammatical errors out of those thirteen types in the students recount texts are verb tense and word choice. The first one is found 117 times or 27% of the total errors. The students mostly performed these errors due to the misuse of verbs in the texts. Since the recount text talks about past experience, the students must use past tense in the texts. The following type of error is word choice. This error appeared in 48 times or 11% of the overall number. This kind of error happened when the students used inappropriate words in writing such as *collected* for *gathered*, *studying for training* and *focused to* for *focused on*, etc.

Moreover, the second research question is about the sources of errors that the students made in writing recount texts. Based on the finding of the analysis, the three sources of errors that proposed by Richard (1970) were found in the students' recount texts; they are Interference Error, Intralingual Error and Developmental Error. Intralingual Error is the majority of source of error in which the students made 197 errors or 45% of the total number. This error deals with the faulty of characteristic of the second language itself, in this case is English. Mostly, the misuse of verb tense or verb tense error is considered as the cause of Intralingual Error.

The second source of error is Interference Error. This kind of error is caused by the influence of students' first language. Its number is highly different from the first one; it is only 127 errors or 29% of the total errors. According to the findings, the students tended to translate their ideas into the second language word by word, and they created the unclear meanings due to the different structure of the two languages. In addition, the words they used are out of the context.

The last one of error that the students made in their recount texts is Developmental Error. This is the lowest number of sources of errors. Its number is only 113 or 26% out of 436 errors. This source of error is caused by students' hypotheses about the English language from his limited experience of it in the classroom or the text-book. Most of this error laid in the used of comma in writing,

along with use of capitalization in mentioning the name of the specific things such as the names of places and people.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

In conclusion, the two most common types of errors in students' recount texts are Verb Tense and Word Choice. Regarding the sources of errors, the findings of the analysis suggest respectively that there are three sources of errors made by students in writing recount texts namely Intralingual Error, Interference Error and Developmental Error.

The main aim of this study was to find empirical evidence of the most common types of grammatical errors and the sources of errors made by students in writing recount texts. The results from this study suggested that verb tense and word choice error are the frequent errors, and intralingual error, interference error and developmental error were found in students' recount texts. This finding was supported by the previous study conducted by Haryanto (2006) in regarding the common errors made by students in writing.

Accordingly, some important implication of this study derives from the findings of the present and the previous study. The first implication pointed out that the appropriate strategy and techniques in teaching recount text should be applied, past tense in particular. This implication leads the teacher to be aware of the students' errors in writing to anticipate the errors to be made by students, either in types of errors or in sources of errors. Applying effective strategies and techniques in teaching writing texts guides the students to be a good writer with minimal errors they make. Consequently, the aim of learning writing texts is possible to be achieved by the teacher.

In addition to the implication of the research, further research is suggested on Error Analysis in other specific areas of writing and grammar. Also, the writers recommend the quantitative researcher to test these findings with certain theories as an attempt to increase learning and teaching quality for the students.

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