An Investigation of Errors Committed by the Students of English Language Teaching Department in Writing Narrative Text

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Abstract

In the EFL context, an error analysis is a paramount study. This type of research might bring many advantages to the success of the teaching and learning process itself. This study investigates the types and causes of student errors in writing a narrative text. Furthermore, this research provides several suggestions for decreasing the occurrence of the errors. The research method employed was descriptive qualitative, and the researchers completed this study through several phases called data gathering, data analysis, and data presentation. The data analysis reveals several significant findings. First, there are six types of errors that emerged called the use of tenses, the use of articles, the use of relative pronouns, mistyping, confusing words, and agreement of singular/plural nouns. Second, the interlingual transfer is the most significant factor causing errors. Third, decreasing the errors might be done by paying more attention to global errors, the errors with high frequency, the most influential error type, and the most problematic topic. In this present study, the kind of error requiring more attention is English tenses, and one of the suggested solutions for teaching tenses well is using attractive teaching media such as English songs. Applying effective ways of teaching is an alternative to reduce student errors.

Keywords: error analysis; narrative text; English as a foreign language.

Errors made by students are normal things that happened in the teaching and learning process of English. In Indonesia, English is a foreign language normally learned only at school. This condition causes a lack of English exposure that might also influence the errors. Irawansyah (2017) points out that many kinds of errors appear when a student learns a foreign language. The errors committed by the students during the teaching and learning process are essential sources to understand more about the learning process itself. Investigating student errors might be conducted through a study called error analysis.

Error analysis is an activity used to understand student errors so that those can be handled or anticipated. Kharmilah & Narius (2019) note that in doing an error analysis, we try to identify, classify, and interpret or describe

the errors committed by someone in speaking or in writing. In short, by conducting error analysis, English teachers might understand well about their students' problems and provide some solutions for overcoming those problems.

It is undeniable that error analysis has some benefits for learning success. Error analysis might provide a deep understanding of the teaching and learning process (Irawansyah, 2017; Jabeen, Kazemian & Mustafai, 2015). Al-Khresheh (2016) also points out that the results of error analysis are crucial matters in giving feedback. By doing error analysis, the teachers will understand the types of errors then comprehend the linguistics reasons for those errors. In short, doing error analysis brings many benefits to the success of the teaching and learning process.

An interesting topic that is possible to examine is errors made by English Language Teaching students. As the candidates of English teachers, the students must master English well including writing texts. As a part of productive skills in English, writing is essential yet problematic. Mastering writing skill is generally hard for learners (Kharmilah & Narius, 2019; Murdliyana, 2019). Ahamed & Othman (2019) explain that writing is a challenging skill for native speakers and non-native speakers alike since writers should balance many aspects such as content, organization, purpose, audience, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, and mechanics.

In doing writing activities, the students commonly ask to master many types of text in English including narrative text. This text is the most common text taught on many levels of education like senior, junior, and vocational high school. All English students are required to master this type of text. This indicates that narrative might be considered as important text. Purba (2018) points out that narrative is the most common of writing because the writer just tells his/her story without any purposes. Narrative has been and continues to be such a popular genre, there is a belief that it is a genre that students pick up and write naturally. Narrative also has a powerful social role beyond that of being of medium for entertainment, and it is a powerful medium for changing social opinion and attitudes.

Narrative text itself has several language features. According to Joyce & Feez in Mulyaningsih (2013), there are several language features used in narrative. They are the use of specific often individual participants with defined identities, action verbs, thinking verbs, past tense, saying verbs in dialogue, descriptive language, and first or third person.

Based on the aforementioned explanation, the present study aimed at investigating the types and causes of error in writing narrative text, then provide several ways to minimize those errors in the teaching and learning process. By giving some solutions to assist the students, this research is possible to provide new information in error analysis study.

Method

The method employed is qualitative method with descriptive textual analysis. It was chosen because this study describes the phenomena observed in written form or words. As Miles, Huberman & Saldana (2014) suggested that qualitative research focuses primarily on data in the form of words.

The first step in collecting the data was asking students to write narrative texts. In this case, the researchers hold examinations that required students to write narrative texts. Data collection was carried out in the Transactional Writing class (second-year students) where one of the topics discussed was narrative. The second step was analyzing the data by classifying the types of error that appeared in the texts into several categories, identifying the source or cause of the errors, and finding the right solutions for overcoming the errors. The third phase was presenting the result through words and tables.

Results and Discussion

Based on the result of the error analysis of the students' narrative writing, six types of errors appeared. Those are the use of tenses, the use of articles, the use of relative pronouns, mistyping, confusing words, and agreement of singular/plural nouns.

The se of Tenses

Tenses became the most problems found in the students' narrative writing. It reached 47 data or 50% of all errors appeared. The students made mistakes in using the past simple in their narrative writing. Most of the students used the past simple in inappropriate contexts.

Table 1. Examples of errors appeared under tenses issue

Error	Correction
Bejo was runs toward the forest and enters the cave.	Bejo ran toward the forest and entered a cave.
When the commonly children played and doing something…	When the commonly children played and did something…
Then, the princess go out of the castle…	Then, the princess went out of the castle…

The three examples of error as presented in Table 1 show that the students still used present tense, while narrative used past simple except for the direct sentences. This is in line with Joyce & Feez in Mulyaningsih (2013) who state that narrative text generally uses past simple expect for dialogues which use saying verbs. The tenses commonly used in the dialogues are present or future. From 47 mistakes found, most of the sentences used present simple instead of past tense. Moreover, the present modal (can) were used in students' narrative instead of the past form (could).

The Use of Articles

English has three kinds of articles; a, an, the, which often confuse the Indonesian

Table 2. Examples of errors appeared under article issues

Error	Correction
Bejo was runs toward the forest and enters the cave.	Bejo ran toward the forest and enters a cave.
Once upon a time, lived a poor family in the small village.	Once upon a time, lived a poor family in a small village
Everyday dinosaurus is looking for …	Everyday the dinosaur is looking for…

students. In this study, the researchers found that students made errors by using the three articles in inappropriate way. They used article the when it was supposed to be a/an and vice versa. Table 2 presents the examples of the mistakes found.

In the first example, the most appropriate article used is a because the word cave is first stated and it does not refer to a specific cave. In the second example, the appropriate article used should be a because village is newly stated in the sentence. In the last example, the appropriate article used should be the because dinosaur had been stated previously.

The Use of Relative Pronouns

Based on the data analysis, the mistakes found under the relative pronoun issue reached 4.3% or 4 times appeared. The example of mistake can be seen in the following sentence:

(7) The second kingdom called Hoka who lead by a mouse…

The relative pronoun that should be used in the sentence is that because the pronoun refers to the second kingdom or Hoka which is a kingdom not a person. From 4 mistakes appeared, the use of relative pronoun who constantly appeared. It might happen because the name of person appeared before the relative pronoun.

Mistyping

The mistakes under mistyping issue appeared 10 times in this study. The researchers assume that the mistakes appeared because students wrote the words based on how they pronounce them. The examples of mistyping can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Examples of errors appeared under mistyping issue

Error	Correction
She can go back to heaven wit a requirement.	She can go back to heaven with a requirement.
Friendship dinosaurus and snakes are…	Friendship dinosaur and snakes are…

Confusing Words

There are many words in English vocabulary which confuse the learners because they have similar way to read and write. This issue becomes a problem for Indonesian learners. See Table 4 for examples.

Table 4. Examples of errors appeared under confusing words

Error	Correction
One day, Bejo and his friends maked strength potion.	One day, Bejo and his friends maked strange potion..
…became a king ten years letter.	…became a king ten years later.

In the first example, student was supposed to write strange instead of strength. The mistake appeared because both words have similar pronunciation and writing. In the second example, the student meant to write *later* rather than *letter*.

Agreement of Singular/Plural Nouns

Inappropriate use of singular/plural noun appeared 8 times or 8.5%. The most possible reason causing the mistakes is because the absence of such system in Indonesian language. The examples of the mistake can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. Examples of errors appeared under singular/plural nouns agreement

Error	Correction
…open those box…	…open those boxes…
…both of his brother…	…both of his brothers…

In the first example, suffix -es should be added to the word box because it shows plural form. While in the second one, the word brother should be added by suffix -s to show that the word is plural.

In conclusion, all the errors appeared in this study are displayed in Table 6.

Table 6. Mistakes appeared on students' narrative writing

Type of mistakes	Frequency	Percentage
The use of tenses	47	50%
The use of article (a/an/the)	17	18.08510638%
The use of relative pronoun	4	4.255319149%
Mistyping	10	10.63829787%
Confusing words	8	8.510638298%
Agreement of singular/plural noun	8	8.510638298%

Causing Factors

Based on the analysis of the six types of mistakes, interlingual transfer is the most possible significant factor causing the mistakes appeared. The six types of mistakes appeared; the use of tenses, article, relative pronoun, confusing words, plural/singular noun and mistyping are basically affected by the first language of the students.

The use of tenses in English becomes the biggest problem faced by the Indonesian learners since Indonesian language does not have such language system. There is no verb alteration in Indonesian language. The use of articles also becomes problematic for the students. The use of article a/an and the has many rules and exception which cause confusion even for advanced learners.

Interlingual transfer also causes confusing words since Indonesian words are pronounced and written in the same way. It is different from English which has different writing and pronunciation. In addition, the interlingual transfer also cause inappropriate use of relative pronoun in students' writing. English has several relative pronouns (that, which, who, whom, whose, which) which have certain usage rules. On the other hand, Indonesian language has yang that replaces those English relative pronouns. Further, Indonesian language does not have certain rules for plural/singular nouns as well. There are no rules for adding suffixes to nouns to show that the noun is plural. When it comes to plural nouns, the words are just repeated, e.g. teman-teman, siswa-siswa, etc or they remain the same without suffixes addition, e.g. lima siswa, beberapa buah. On the other hand, English has complicated rules and exceptions for plural/singular nouns like suffixes addition and word alteration.

Some Suggested Solutions

It is undeniable that students' mother language can affect their target language learning if they cannot recognize the major changing between both languages. Touchie (1986) stated that there are two major sources of errors called interference from the native language and intralingual and developmental factors. Therefore, the students need to put their focus more on the pattern changing on both languages. The teachers can function as a helper by doing certain treatments.

Touchie (1986) stated that teacher should not correct all errors committed by the students. Teachers can help their students by correcting the major errors committed by the students. The following are general guidelines in correcting second language learning errors suggested by Touchie.

1) Trying to focus on correcting global errors more than local errors.
2) Teacher should focus on errors with high frequency and generality.
3) Focusing on the errors which affect the students in the largest percentage.
4) Give more emphasis on the most problematic topic.

Based on the four suggested treatments from Touchie (1986), it can be concluded that English teachers might handle the student error by focusing more on the global errors, the errors with high frequency, the most influential errors, and the most problematic aspect. In this study, the researchers concluded that the type of error requiring more attention is the first type named tenses.

Babu & Raj Kumar (2017) notice that it is most essential to master over the tenses then only it is practical to have good command on communication skills. Tenses are key to learn speaking and writing of English Language. In addition, Aniuranti & Rizkina (2019) point out that the students commonly face difficulties in mastering English if they do not have any sufficient notion about tenses. Even though its importance is undeniable, tenses are often problematic for most of English learners. That is why, the result of this study reveal that the use of tenses becomes the biggest problem in writing narrative texts especially past simple as one of its language features.

One of interesting media suggested for teaching tenses like past simple is authentic material like English songs. Suwartono & Oktavia (2019) explain that as an authentic material, song lyrics contain samples of language in use, including sentence pattern. In addition, songs are precious media to teach four skills in English namely speaking, reading, listening and writing as well as the elements of English like vocabulary and grammar (Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi, Singh, Azman & Souriyavongsa 2001; Neila, 2013).

Using English songs in EFL classroom might also motivate the students well. According to Aniuranti & Rizkina (2019), songs play a significant role in motivating students to learn a language. In addition, songs often offer a new atmosphere in classroom

activities. Suwartono & Rahadiyanti (2014) note that songs are alternative media for facilitating language learning. In short, English songs might be suitable for teaching tenses like past simple in narrative text.

Conclusion

In the EFL context, every teacher is demanded to always look for the best way to assist their students mastering English as the target language. Doing error analysis in EFL context is totally recommended. A prominent topic that is possible be examined in error analysis study is error analysis committed by the students of English language teaching department in composing narrative texts. The analysis shows several essential findings. Firstly, there are six types of error made by the students. They are the use of tenses, the use of articles, the use of relative pronouns, mistyping, confusing words and agreement of singular/plural nouns. Secondly, interlingual transfer is the most possible significant factor causing the errors appeared. Thirdly, the teachers are suggested to more concern on the global errors, errors with high frequency, the most influential errors, and the most problematic topic. In this present study, the types of error requiring more attention is tenses, and the most suggested solution for teaching tenses used in narrative text is using interesting media like English songs.

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