

An Error Analysis of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Students' Works on Simple Present Tense

Rusmiati

English Education Department, IAIN Takengon, Aceh Tengah, Indonesia
rusmiatiza19@gmail.com

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Abstract: Verb tenses in English has been challenging for the students even they have already been studying English for many years. The tense system in students' first language may be very different from English that it takes some more time for the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students to master it. This research, therefore, is carried out to analyze the errors that are committed by the students in learning simple present tense. This study presents qualitative research conducted through analysis of students' answer sheet about changing the sentences into negative and interrogative in the form of present tense. Nineteen English Department students at the first year were taken as the subject of this research. The data are checked one by one by applying error analysis (EA) to identify errors. From this investigation, it is found that there are 288 errors done by the students. These errors are subsequently analyzed and classified based on surface strategy taxonomy: omission, addition, misinformation, and misordering. The number of errors for each category is 68 (23,61%), 23 (7,99%), 143 (49,65%), and 54 (18,75%) respectively. It can be seen that the most frequent error emerged on the students' works is misinformation, more than half of the total errors (49,65%), while the least common error committed is addition, not reaching a tenth of all (7,99%). This finding provides an illustration of students' weakness in learning simple present tense which can be beneficial either for students or for the lecturer in the future. It is suggested that the students be more focused on parts they are weak in when learning grammar to reach a better understanding. The lecturer also can provide a more appropriate teaching material or method highlighting the more demanding part by his or her students.

1. INTRODUCTION

English as an international language is considered extremely essential to be learned by youth today. It has been becoming a compulsory general course which must be taken by the students of any major in every high schools, institutes, and universities in Indonesia. Some institutions even hold an extra language reinforcement program for the first year students which aims at increasing their understanding in basic English. This program attempts to provide a better comprehension of students about basic skills in English, including grammar aspects. Moreover, when starting attending university, Indonesian students have

learned English for about six years or more at high school. This is such a long duration. However, the university students still encounter intricacy in learning English. Indriani concluded that learners' duration of learning English does not necessarily means they are able to use the language appropriately (Indriani, 2019). Sukasame also stated that his students still have a low-standard English even though they have learned that language for about 12 years before they become university students (Sukasame et al., 2014). As it is known that English is a foreign language for Indonesians, so this language is acquired only at school, the students do not exposure it in natural setting.

English consists of four important language skills, namely: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Those skills will be acquired by English Department students in their four-year study period. However, there is another necessary component which affects those four skills thoroughly, that is grammar. Although grammar is not one of four notable skills in English, yet it affects students' works in a great way. Grammar gives a great impact on all four skills since the students' grammar knowledge will appear when they use English in those four skills. Aulia stated that confusion will be produced in writing without grammar (Auliya, 2017). Besides, Zuhriah also argued that grammar is an essential part to be learned by students since it plays a significant role in all language skills (Zuhriyah, 2017). In other words, when students have good mastery on grammar, then it helps them much in improving English four skills.

One definition of grammar is given by Coghill & Magendaz in Simorangkir (Simorangkir, 2018). They state, "The grammar of a language is the set of rules that govern its structure. Grammar determines how words are arranged to form meaningful units." In addition, Swan in Yuliawati (Yuliawati, 2018) argues that grammar is the rules that show how words are combined, arranged, or changed to show certain kinds of meaning. In other words, grammar can be described as the way words are put together to convey certain meaning to others. From this definition, it can be known that grammar is a significant aspect in uttering someone's idea.

Furthermore, one of the components in grammar that should be learned by students is tenses. It tells how an action is expressed based on time which is very different from Indonesia language that does not have nothing to deal with time when producing a sentence. A study by Norhayati in Abdullah (Abdullah, 2013) found that verb-tense was the most common errors committed by the students. Another study by Garrido and Romero also showed the similar finding that students in Chili after one-year learning still face problems using English correctly regarding tense and aspects (Garrido, 2013). The first tense taught to students in learning English is simple present tense. Similarly, the first year students of English

Department of Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Negeri (STAIN) Gajah Putih Takengon still experience difficulties (writing sentence incorrectly) in using this tense. Therefore, this research is done to further analyze in depth the errors produced by students in simple present tense.

There are four kinds of errors based on surface strategy taxonomy by Dulay et al in Indriani (Indriani, 2019), they are: omission, addition, misformation, and disorder. Omission is indicated by the absence of certain item that must appear in sentences. This usually happens in the early stages of second language acquisition. For example: My sisters very pretty. (Correction: My sister is very pretty). Addition is indicated by the presence of an "unwanted" item in sentences. The unwanted items do not appear in a well-formed utterance. This happens when the learners overuse certain grammatical rules of the target language. For example: He didn't to come. (Correction: He didn't come. Misformation is indicated by the use of wrong forms of certain morphemes or structures. For instance: Me dont like. (Correction: I don't like). Misordering is indicated by the incorrect placement of certain morphemes. For instance: She fights all the time her brother. (Correction: She fights her brother all the time.)

In doing this research, the writer applies this surface strategy taxonomy in categorizing errors produced by students. In reaching this goal, an error analysis (EA) is performed. Brown in Sinkala (Sinkala et al., 2020) defined EA as the process to observe, analyze, and classify the deviations of the rules of the second language and then to reveal the systems operated by learners. It is supported by Richards et al in Moe (Moe, 2020) stating error analysis can make teachers able to identify strategies which learners use in language teaching, identify the causes of learner errors, and provide information about usual difficulties in teaching language.

The students' errors should be analyzed since they provide new insights and techniques to the language teachers and linguists in sorting out the problems related to language learning (Jabeen et al., 2015). Corder in Heydari & Bagheri (Heydari & Bagheri, 2012) stated,

"Learner errors are significant in three ways: First, to the teacher, in that they show how far towards the goal the learner has progressed. Second, they provide to the researcher evidence of how a language is acquired, what strategies the learner is employing in his learning of a language. Thirdly, they are indisputable to the learner himself because we can regard the making of errors as a device the learner uses in order to learn". Therefore, this study was carried out to identify errors of EFL learners in writing present tense sentences and to get an overview of the areas in which the students are lack of capabilities so that it can be beneficial for both teachers and learners for future learning.

Simple present is the first tense that learners usually find when learning English. It expresses habits (Azar & Hagen, 2017). There are two forms of uttering sentences, they are verbal and nominal. Verbal means that a sentence uses a verb to complete the sentence, while nominal sentence uses a to be to complete the idea in the sentence.

Example:

- My mother and sister serve delicious food to our family. (Verbal)
- My father works hard to earn money. (Verbal)
- Rina is a good student. (Nominal)
- Andi and Anton are my classmates. (Nominal)

Furthermore, a sentence is also divided into three: positive, negative, and interrogative. The examples given above are positive. In order to change the sentences into negative and interrogative, different ways are applied to either verbal or nominal. In verbal, do is used for pronoun I, you, we, and they and does for pronoun she, he, and it. While nominal does not use these auxiliaries (do and does) since it has to be (am, is, and are).

Example:

Verbal:

- My mother and sister do not serve delicious food for our family.
- My father does not work hard to earn money.
- Do my mother and sister serve delicious food for our family?

- Does my father work hard to earn money?

Nominal:

- Rina is not a good student.
- Andi and Anton are not my classmates.
- Is Rina a good student?
- Are Andi and Anton my classmates?

Besides those provisions, there is another rule that arranges the use of verb for the third singular person (she, he and it). As can be seen in the examples that when using she, he, or it, an s/es is needed to add after the verb.

From the explanation above, it can be seen that English has its own characteristics in how to express an idea in a sentence, particularly simple present tense. It is considerably different from Indonesian language which, for instance, does not distinguish the use of verb for the 3rd singular person or not. This different language system, presumably, evokes complicity for students when learning English which potentially cause them to make errors when producing sentences. It is as Bhela suggested in Nemati & Taghizadeh (Nemati & Taghizadeh, 2013) that we might expect more learning difficulties and thus more likelihood of performance interference at those points in L2 which are more distant from L1, as the learner would find it difficult to learn and understand a completely new and different usage.

Error is something natural that occurs in language learning. Understanding needs process and time, so every student most likely make errors when learning. Error analysis is essential for educators, EFL teachers, linguists, researchers, and EFL learners (Al-halawani, 2018). It provides for them a better insight which is beneficial to the process of learning (Suhono, 2016).

Related to errors, Hendrickson in Moe (Moe, 2020) defined that errors are 'signals' that indicate an actual learning process taking place and that the learner has not yet mastered or shown a well-structured competence in the target language. It is supported by J.Richard et al in Anefnaf (Anefnaf, 2019) who stated that an error is the use of a word, speech act, or grammatical items in such a way it seems imperfect and significant of an incomplete learning.

When students commit errors, the teachers should pay attention greatly on those errors. Those errors should be evaluated by the teachers and then they seek the source that leads students to produce so. By knowing the cause, they can anticipate in the next time to explain more and emphasize on errors-potentially caused aspects so that the students can avoid making errors for a better learning. Related to this, Brown in Siswoyo (Siswoyo, 2016) argues that error analysis is the fact that learners do make errors, and that these errors can be observed, analyzed, and classified to reveal something of the system operating within the learner, led to surge of the study of learners' errors.

In addition, it is supported by Richards and Selinker in Murad & Khalil (Murad & Khalil, 2015) who recognized that errors become interesting area for researchers since they are regarded to provide essential information that could be used to find/develop appropriate strategies for students in learning a language.

2. METHODS

This research is conducted by using qualitative research method. Test is type of instruments used in this study. It consists of ten questions about simple present tense asking students to write/change the positive statements into negatives and interrogatives. Hence, these statements in form of negative and interrogative are analyzed in this investigation. The sample in this research is 19 first year students of English Department who participated in "Language Reinforcement Program" in 2018. Hence, nineteen pieces of answer sheet were collected and analyzed. It takes place in STAIN Gajah Putih, Takengon, Aceh Tengah.

There are several steps which are carried on in finding and analyzing students' errors. Firstly, the students' works are checked carefully to find the errors. Second, those errors which are detected from students' works are counted to obtain an illustration in form of statistical description. Then, the errors are classified into four categories (based on surface strategy taxonomy) and the percentage statistical counting is applied. And lastly, the most frequent error that emerge in the students' works is to come across.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

From the data analysis of students' works, it is found that there are 288 errors in total committed by the students. These errors are then classified into four categories based on surface strategy taxonomy: omission, addition, misinformation, and misordering. The number of errors according to that classification is 68, 23, 143, and 54 respectively. To illustrate more clearly, the number of errors of each category is further described by using percentage. The formula of percentage, as pointed out by Arikunto (Arikunto, 2012) is

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\% \quad (1)$$

Where:

P : Percentage

F : Frequency of a particular type of error

N : The total number of errors

1. Omission

There are 68 errors belongs to this category. So, this number is inserted into percentage formula and is obtained as follows:

$$P = \frac{68}{288} \times 100\% = 23,61 \%$$

2. Addition

There are 23 errors belongs to this category. So, this number is inserted into percentage formula and is obtained as follows:

$$P = \frac{23}{288} \times 100\% = 7,99 \%$$

3. Misinformation

There are 143 errors belongs to this category. So, this number is inserted into percentage formula and is obtained as follows:

$$P = \frac{143}{288} \times 100\% = 49,65 \%$$

4. Misordering

There are 54 errors belongs to this category. So, this number is inserted into percentage formula and is obtained as follows:

$$P = \frac{54}{288} \times 100\% = 18,75 \%$$

Table 1. The result of calculation

Types of Error	The Number of Errors	Percentage
Omission	68	23,61 %
Addition	23	7,99 %
Misinformation	143	49,65 %
Misorder	54	18,75 %
Total of errors	288	100%

From the table above, it can be seen that the most frequent error committed by the students is misinformation, almost half of all errors (49,65 %), while the least common type of error that emerges is addition, not reaching a tenth of all errors (7,99 %).

The following pie chart illustrates types of errors committed by the students and the frequency of each that appears in their works.

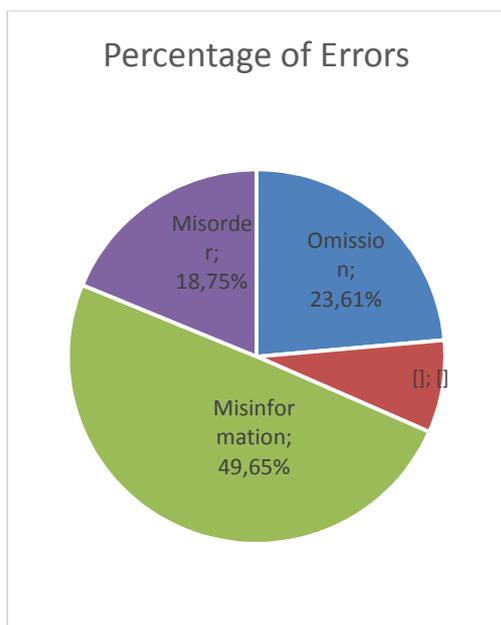


Figure 1. Types of Errors and Percentage Committed by the Learners

3.1. Omission

Omission errors are indicated by the absence of certain item that must appear in sentences. The example of sentences that contain this error in this investigation are:

- Your friend not study hard for the exam.
- My brother and I not like to play basketball.
- Rina and Andi wear nice uniform?

From the examples above, it can be noticed that the certain item which must appear in those sentences cannot be found. As explained before that negative sentence in verbal should has an auxiliary (do or does) that precedes not. Due to this reason, those sentences are considered wrong. To make them right, an auxiliary is needed as in the following:

- Your friend does not study hard for the exam.
- My brother and I do not like to play basketball.
- Do Rina and Andi wear nice uniform?

3.2. Addition

This type of error is signified by the presence of unwanted item in sentences. Some sentences with this error are:

- Am I not hungry?
- Are my parents are at home?
- I am do not hungry

In the first sentence, it can be seen that the student adds “not” in interrogative sentence which in fact is not needed, so this sentence is wrong. In the second sentence, an unwanted word also appears, that is to be “are” in the middle of sentence while an interrogative sentence places to be at the beginning of the sentence. The last sentence also can be seen that it contains auxiliary do after to be “am” which must not appear in nominal sentence. The sentences above should be revised as in the following:

- Am I hungry?
- Are my parents at home?
- I am not hungry

3.3. Misinformation

This error is indicated by the use of wrong forms of certain morphemes or structures. This error is found in the following sentences in this study.

- Do my sister wash the dishes every weekend?
- Is my parents at home?
- Do you hungry?

In sentence 1 which is interrogative, it can be seen that auxiliary “do” precedes subject “my sister”, whereas the auxiliary for the third singular person is does, then this sentence is considered wrong. Sentence 2 also shows that to be “is”

appears for subject "my parents", while we know that "parents" refers to "they" which to be "are" should be used. The last sentence indicates the similar thing, too. For nominal sentences, to be must be used, yet in the above sentence auxiliary "do" is preferred, then this sentence becomes incorrect. Those sentences are revised as follows:

- Does my sister wash the dishes every weekend?
- Are my parents at home?
- Are you hungry?

3.4. Misordering

Misordering is indicated by the incorrect placement of certain morphemes. Several sentences containing this error are as follows:

- Your car not is blue.
- My parents not are at home.
- Your not car is blue.
- Car is your blue?

In the first sentence, it can be seen that "not" precedes "is". In fact, it should come after the other. Sentence 2 contains exactly the same error, but using to be "are". Sentence 3 indicates that possessive pronoun "your" is separated from its noun by "not" which should be avoided and word "not" should follow to be "is". The last sentence which is interrogative shows that to be "is" is preceded by "car", whereas this kind of sentence needs to be in the beginning of the sentence. Those errors can be avoided in the following sentences:

- Your car is not blue.
- My parents are not at home.
- Your car is not blue.
- Is your car blue?

From the finding above it can be noticed that all types of errors based on surface strategy taxonomy are detected in the students' works. Of all, misinformation error is the most common type which is committed by the first year students of English Department. It is similar with (Muhsin, 2016), (Lestari, 2020), (Siswoyo, 2016), and (Subroto, 2015)'s findings that misinformation was the most common type of error committed by the investigated

students. However, a study in a TESL college in Malaysia showed a discrepant finding that the students performed good in using present tense (Hidayah, 2013).

As stated before that misinformation error is signified by the use of wrong form of certain morphemes or structure, it can be hypothesized that the students are still strongly poor in recognizing this. They are still confused in choosing the appropriate word in writing sentences in simple present tense. This finding can give an illustration of students' strength and weakness which can be beneficial either for students or for the lecturer. By knowing this, students can later be more focused in their weak aspect when learning grammar. The lecturer also can provide a better and more appropriate teaching material emphasizing aspect the students are still weak in.

4. CONCLUSION

From the result and discussion above, there are several points to be concluded:

First, there are 288 errors done by the first year students of English Department, STAIN Gajah Putih Takengon, Aceh Tengah. Those errors are detected in students' works on simple present tense both in negative and interrogative statement.

Second, those errors are then studied more deeply and classified into four groups based on surface strategy taxonomy classification. From this study, it is found that misinformation is the most common error committed by the students in simple present tense. Of 288, 143 errors belong to misinformation, almost half of the total (49,65%). While the least frequent error appears in their works is addition, not reaching a tenth of the total (7,99%).

Third, the finding about the most and the least frequent errors coming in this study can be advantageous both for students and the lecturer. It provides an illustration about the students' weakness in understanding simple present tense. The students can concentrate and practice more in their weak aspect when learning grammar. The lecturer also can prepare a more appropriate teaching material highlighting the more demanding part by his/her students.

Finally, by doing an error analysis study, the students' hardship in learning can be discovered which is then certain solution should be looked for to overcome the problem.

After looking at the finding of this study, several suggestions are proposed for both the students and the lecturer:

First, the students must study harder to cope with the intricacy encountered when learning grammar. They should be more active, more enthusiasm, and more careful in understanding simple present tense, especially in the aspect that they are still poor at.

Second, the lecturer can improve teaching material or teaching methodology stressing the aspects that the students are still weak in.

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