

An Analysis of Grammatical Errors in Writing Thesis Proposal of English Department Students in Mulawarman University in the Academic Year 2018/2019

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Abstract

The purposes of the study were (1) To find out the types of grammatical error made by English Department students in writing thesis proposal and (2) To know the most dominant grammatical error made by English Department students in writing thesis proposal. The subjects of this study were the eighth semester students of English Department. The researcher used the students' thesis proposals as the instrument which had a total of 20 thesis proposals. The data was collected through quantitative-qualitative methods. Therefore, this study used document analysis. The findings showed that the students of English Department made errors in singular-plural noun, word form, subject-verb agreement, verb tense, and verb form in writing thesis proposal. There were 47 errors in singular-plural noun or 12.46%, 3 errors in word form or 0.80%, 238 errors in subject-verb agreement or 63.12%, 58 errors in verb tense or 15.39%, and 31 errors in verb form or 8.23%. Therefore, the most dominant error that the students made was subject-verb agreement (238 errors or 63.12%).

Keywords: Grammatical Errors, Thesis Proposal

1. Introduction

Thesis writing subject is the compulsory course for the college students to finish their study at higher level of education to get college degree. It is the end course they must complete after attending several majors which are related to English. Furthermore, writing thesis proposal is the early step they must do that contains of three chapters discussing about introduction, review of related literature, and methodology. However, writing skill is needed and implemented to produce a good writing.

Making a good writing is not the easy matter. Williams (2008:5) says, "Writing is difficult, and being a good writer involves countless skills". In addition, Prommas and Sinwongsuwat (2011) as cited in Deygan (2017) state that writing is more difficult because there is no additional meaning of help in terms of nonverbal expressions such as gesture, facial expressions, and head movement, to ensure that the message is accurately conveyed. Therefore, the writer has to make the reader understand and deliver the meaningful message and purpose of the writing.

Apparently, it is not only about writing skill which is applied in writing thesis proposal but also grammar skill. John Norrish (1983) states, "When writing was the only way of storing information, it was vital that people should be educated to construct grammatically acceptable sentences and be able to spell correctly". In addition, Richards (2015) says, "Grammatical competence refers to the knowledge we have of language that accounts for our ability to produce sentences in a language". It can be concluded that grammar is important in writing and someone is considered successful in learning a language when he/she is able to communicate with well-structured and understandable sentences.

2. Literature Review

The students of English Department in Mulawarman University have learnt Grammar I, II, III, and IV. It will be estimated that the students will pass several English courses and they are good in writing thesis proposal, but it does not always happen. There is one of aspects that the students must have awareness of writing, it is grammatical error. Chandler (2003) states that it is true that grammar is not only aspect that the teacher focuses on when grading students writing, but basic grammar is the most important things to check before checking other aspects such as using good vocabulary and relation between paragraphs. Although grammar lessons have been learnt by the English Department students since they study in the beginning of their education there, grammatical errors cannot be avoided of their language activity, in this case writing.

There are two important terms used to explain the inaccuracy in implementing grammar into writing, namely an error and a mistake. Referring to those terms, Ellis (2005:263) differentiates the error and mistake as follows :

“There are two ways suggested to distinguish between an error and mistake. The first one is to check the consistency of learner’s performance. If he sometimes uses the correct form and sometimes the wrong one, it is a mistake. However, if he always uses it incorrectly, it is then an error. The second way is to ask learner to try to correct his own utterance. Where he is unable to, the deviation are errors; where he is successful, they are mistakes”

In addition, the explanation of error and mistake is given by Gass et al. (2013), “Mistakes are akin to slips of tongue. That is, they are generally one-time-only events.” The learners who make mistakes can correct it by themselves because they are aware of making those mistakes. On the other hand, error is systematic. The errors usually occur repeatedly and are not recognized by the learner. Norrish (1983) argues that an error is “A systematic deviation, when a learner has not learnt something and consistently gets it wrong”

Based on the theories above, it can be concluded that the mistake is usually accidental performance in using language and the learners can correct by themselves, meanwhile the error is an inappropriate of using grammatical rules and the learners do not realize that they have made errors.

Therefore, the researcher was curious to find out the types of grammatical errors and the most common grammatical error that the students made in writing thesis proposal. The researcher used mixed-methods as the method of this research. The data were from the first until the third chapters of students’ thesis proposal to answer these questions: What types of grammatical errors are made by English Department students in writing thesis proposal ? and what is the most dominant grammatical error made by English Department students in writing thesis proposal ?

3. Methods

The design of this study was mixed-methods. Mixed-methods research involved the use both quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study (Fraenkel et al., 2014). The researcher used one of the major types of mixed methods, namely the exploratory design.

The population in this study was 136 students. All of them were the eighth semester student of English Department in Mulawarman University and divided into four classes.

In this study, the researcher used purposive sampling. According to Fraenkel et al. (2014), purposive sampling is the researcher used the judgement to choose a sample that they believed and based on the exist information the sample provided which were needed by the writer. The judgement was the students in the eighth semester class A, B, C, and D had learned writing I-IV and grammar I-IV. Therefore, the researcher believed that they had sufficient knowledge about good grammatical order and experience how to make a good writing especially in writing thesis proposal. For the sample, the researcher used the theory from Arikunto (2002). The population was more than 100 students, so the researcher took 20 students from 15% population.

4. Result

Having analyzed the data, the findings are discussed to answer research questions proposed in the first chapter. The first research question is “What types of grammatical errors are made by English Department students in writing thesis proposal ?” The second question is “What is the most dominant grammatical error made by English Department students in writing thesis proposal ?” The findings related to the first question showed that the five types of grammatical errors by Azar and Hagen (2016) occurred in students’ thesis proposal. The five types of grammatical error were singular-plural noun, word form, subject-verb agreement, verb tense, and verb form.

Number is the form of word to show whether it is singular or plural. Singular can be identified by putting a or an before noun. Plural noun can be added by –s or –es after noun. It has been known that the form of Indonesia singular and plural is different from English form. –In singular-plural noun, the students did not make it to be plural. Azar and Hagen (2016) state that the plural of most nouns is formed by adding –s, then final –es is added to nouns that end in –sh, –ch, –s, –z, and –x, and the plural of word that end in a consonant + –y is spelled –ies. Besides that, there was student failed to recognize the exceptional nouns that did not use adding –s/–es to construct the plural form, for instance: criterion to be criterions instead of criteria

5. Discussion

Word form error occurs when the correct word should be chosen, but an incorrect form of the word is used. In word form, there were some students still confused to choose the correct basic word and it made the word did not suit with its position in the sentence. For instance, using a noun instead of an adjective, using a noun instead of a verb, and using a verb instead of a noun.

Subject-verb agreement also become one of serious problems here. Agreement between subject and verb is influenced by the subject form whether it is singular or plural. If the students did not recognize this, it meant that they did not construct correct sentence structurally. Based on the explanation before, in writing thesis proposal especially in chapter 1, the students should use simple present tense. In this tense, there is an agreement between subject and the verb. When the subject is a singular noun (e.g., Mary, my father, the machine) or third person singular pronoun (she, he, it), a final –s or –es is added (Azar and Hagen, 2016).

Besides that, there are some rules in subject-verb agreement and the students failed to realize it. They made error on singural indefinite pronouns as subjects and the subjects that connected by and. The examples of singular indefinite pronoun as subject are : anyone,

nobody, everything, something, someone, one, each, etc. Azar and Hagen (2016) also explain that two or more subjects connected by and require a plural verb.

Moreover, the students failed to recognize the use of there+be and gerund. There+be introduces the idea that something exists in a particular place (Azar and Hagen, 2016). The subject should follow be when there is used. Then, a gerund used as the subject of the sentence requires a singular verb.

Error in verb tense also occurred in many cases. In writing thesis proposal especially in previous study, the students should use past tense. It is because the previous studies tell about completed action from the earlier researchers. At one particular time in the past, this happened. It began and ended in the past (Azar and Hagen, 2016). Besides, there was student using present continuous tense in chapter 3 of the thesis proposal instead of future tense. Future tense is indicated by will and it expresses predictions about the future (Azar and Hagen, 2016). It is because chapter 3 tells about the methodologies that will be done by the researchers when they present their thesis proposal in proposal seminar.

The last error was verb form. This error occurs when a verb is incorrectly formed. Most of the students made verb form error in passive form, future tense, and modal. They did not recognize the formula of forming passive sentences. Most of them still added –s to the verbs or used the main verb. Form of the passive: be+past participle. Besides that, some students made verb form error in using future tense. They added –s in the main verb after will.

6. Conclusion

Azar and Hagen (2016) explain that will does not take a final –s and it is followed immediately by the simple form of a verb. Moreover, there was student still added a final –s of the main verb in modal. Azar and Hagen (2016) describe that modals do not take a final –s even when the subject is she, he or it and modals are followed immediately by the simple form of a verb). The findings related to the second question showed that the calculation of percentage in grammatical errors at English Department in Mulawarman University in the academic year 2018/2019, subject-verb agreement was the most dominant grammatical error occurred. First, the percentage of subject-verb agreement error was 63.12% with 238 errors. Second was verb tense error, the percentage of verb tense error was 15.39% with 58 errors. Next, the percentage of singular-plural noun was 12.46% with 47 errors. After that, the percentage of verb form was 8.23% with 32 errors. The last was word form, the percentage of word form was 0.93% with 3 errors..

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