Analysing the students errors in using simple present (A case study at Junior High School in Makassar)

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ABSTRACT

The research method used a case study method. The subject of this research included the eighth grade students of Makassar Junior High School, which is comprised of 17 students. In analysing the data, the writer collected the data from the students, identified the grammatical errors, classified the errors of using simple present tense in the students' descriptive text to determine the frequency of errors, and calculated the data into percentages. The results demonstrate that the students' errors can be categorized into four kinds of errors, which include 16.79% errors of omission, 5.11% errors in addition, 75.18% errors in missed formation, and 2.92% errors in improper ordering. The writer observed 137 total errors. The writer concluded that missed formation was the dominant kind of error made by the eighth grade students of Makassar Junior High School. The teachers recommended practicing grammatical rules in simple present tense in order to minimize the errors. Moreover, other researchers can provide techniques to increase students' mastery of simple present tense.

1. Introduction

English consists of four skills, namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing. To develop these four skills, the English language components of vocabulary, structure, pronunciation, and spelling are taught. One aspect of the English language that many students consider very difficult to study is writing. Students find grammar and use of tenses difficult.

The students learning English often make mistakes and commit errors while learning English, especially when they try to arrange sentences or use tenses while writing. As a result, they write sentences with incorrect grammar.

Many kinds of errors arise for students learning English because they do not master English well. They commit errors by not using the rules of the components and elements of the second language (Ramelan, 1992). Brown said, "Second language learning is a process that is clearly not unlike first language learning in its trial and errors nature." It means that the students learning English cannot avoid errors in learning a second language (Gass and Slinker, 1994).

Grammar is one of the basic components of any language, which must be learnt by students (Praninskas, 1980). According to Raja T. Nasr (1988:52), grammar is a very useful and important part of any language. There are many rules in grammar, including articles, parts of speech, sentence pattern, and tense, etc (Cook and Ricard, 1980). Indonesian students find tenses to be most difficult to learn, such as simple present tense.

Frank (1972:66) states, "Simple present tense is used to express a habitual action with adverbs such as usually, always, or often." The use of simple present tense often confuses students, especially when simple present tense is used in descriptive writing. When the descriptive writer makes an error in simple present tense, it means that the writer is not careful enough in making their text vivid and detailed.

Lenny Agustina Indrawati (2004) wrote a thesis entitled, *An Analysis of the Students' Errors in Writing Paragraphs*, and concluded that there are two types of errors in a written paragraph, grammatical and semantic errors. These errors include nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and articles. For semantic errors she divided it into 2 types of errors, sentence errors and inter-sentence errors (cohesion). Then, she explained the types of errors the students had made, including omission, addition, missed formation, improper ordering, and blend, which indicates that the students do not understand the rules of grammar clearly.

Artin Feriana Arjati (2006) wrote a thesis entitled, *An Error Analysis on the Use of Gerund*, and concluded that errors on the use of gerunds in the negative adjective 'No' is the main error most often made by students. The second most common error on the use of gerunds are subjects; third is the use of gerunds as subjective complements; and the fourth is the use of gerunds as direct objects; and the remaining errors include false concept hypothesized, inter-lingual errors, overgeneralisation, and ignorance of rule restriction.

Mochamad Noertjahjono (2007) wrote a thesis, titled, *An Error Analysis on the Use of Simple past*, and concluded that errors should be classified based on error type, using surface strategy taxonomy. He found that the students had continued to make errors using simple past tense. His study found that 23 items out of 50 items had an error percentage of 45%. Thus, it means that the student's mastery of English is still poor since they still faced difficulties with simple past tense. The errors can be categorized into four types: omission, addition, missed formation, and improper ordering.

Based on the aforementioned information, the writer concludes that there are in four types of dominant errors, including omission, addition, missed formation, and improper ordering. This research can be used as a teaching aid to improve the ability of the students to write in English.

Since the 1960's to 1970's an error study or analysis is a method used to find the answers to the problems. As stated by Corder and edited by Richards, errors are significant in three ways:

"A learner's errors …are significant in three different ways. First to the teacher, in that they tell him if he undertakes a systematic analysis, how far towards the goals the learner has progressed….Second, they provide to the researchers evidence of how language is learned and acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in his discovery of the language. Third, they are indispensable to the learner himself because we regard to the making of errors as a device the learner uses in order to learn."

Because of the significance of the errors themselves, foreign language teachers, in this case English teachers, have to realize that errors made by their students need to be analysed correctly in order to be able to arrange an effective learning strategy. As stated by Corder, Error Analysis (EA) is a procedure used by both researchers and teachers, which involves collecting samples of the learner's language, identifying the errors in the sample, describing these errors, classifying them according to their nature and causes, and evaluating their seriousness.

The purpose of EA is to find what the learner knows and does not know, and to uncover the problems faced by students. The data can be obtained by conducting a test with the students as the respondents. Learners make errors in both comprehension and production. Second language learners are not alone in making errors. Children learning their first language (L1) also make errors. They regularly produce utterances such as the following:

* He go see Auntie Marry. (He goes to see Auntie Marry.)
* Eating ice cream. (I want to eat an ice cream.)

Additionally, even adult native speakers sometimes commit errors. For example, they may sometimes omit a grammatical morpheme, such as the following:

* My friend live Wellington. (My friend lives in Wellington.)

The study of errors is carried out by means of EA. An error occurs when the deviation arises as a result of knowledge. A mistake occurs when learners fail to perform their competence. Brown (1980):163 stated, "A mistake refers to a performance error that is either a random guess or a slip in that it is a failure to utilize a known system correctly."

It is the result of processing problems that prevent learners from accessing their knowledge of a target language rule and causes them to fall back on an alternative, non-standard rule that they find easier to access. Mistakes are performance phenomena, and are of course regular features for the native-speaker's speech, reflecting processing failures that arise as a result of competing plans, memory limitations, and lack of automaticity (Richards, Jack C. 1974:47).

Mistake and error have different meanings. They both exist in learning process. When the students study a foreign language, they sometimes do something wrong, which is a so-called mistake or an error. A mistake refers to a performance error that is either random on a slip of the tongue (Hornby, 1989), in that it is a failure to utilize a known system correctly (Brown, 1980:134). The students cannot correct their mistake by themselves.

According to Ellis, errors reflect gaps in a learners' knowledge. They occur because the learner does not know what is correct. While, mistakes reflect occasional lapses in performance, they occur because the learner is unable to perform what he or she knows (Ellis, 1997:17). The definition above shows that mistake is a fault that is made by the learner, and they can make a correction. Meanwhile, error is a fault that is made by the learner, and he or she is unable to make a correction.

However, when the student commits an error, they can correct it. The teacher can explain to the students the causes of the error so that they can refine their error. According to Norish (1983:7), error is a systematic deviation. It occurs when the learner has not yet learnt something, and consistently gets it wrong. Along this line of thought, Brown (1980:165) says that errors refer to a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, which reflects the inter-language communication of the learners. Learners usually do not recognize it, and cannot correct it.

There are two sources of errors namely, inter-lingual errors and intra-lingual errors. Richards (1974:35) states that inter-lingual errors are errors caused by the interference of the learner's mother tongue. Errors of this nature are frequent, regardless of the learner's language background. Therefore, inter-lingual errors are caused by interference from native language to the target language that they learn. Before someone masters the concept of the target language they will always use the concept of their native language. This kind of error is called inter-lingual errors.

The other kind of error is intra-lingual errors. According to James (1998:183), the less the learner knows about the target language, the more he is forced to draw upon any other prior knowledge he possesses. It is mostly because the learners do not know much about the target language.

Intra-lingual errors can be classified into four categories:

1) Overgeneralisation

Overgeneralisation addresses items that are constructed in the grammar of the language. It leads to overindulgence of one member of a set of forms, and the underuse of others in the set. For example, "he is walks quickly" instead of "he walks quickly."

2) Ignorance of rule restriction

In this case, the learner fails to recognize the restriction of existing structures. For example, "I enjoy to learn about English language." It is better to change 'to learn about' with the word 'learning'.