

COMMON ERROR IN USING ENGLISH TENSES BY EFL STUDENTS OF PUTERA BATAM UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Most of English foreign language learners (EFL) in the beginning level faced some problems in learning English. They committed different kinds of errors and mistakes in learning English as a foreign language which were due to poor knowledge with grammar. Most of students considered that grammar was difficult, thus their motivation to learn English was also poor. Moreover, problems in foreign language learning especially in English were unavoidable. Therefore, the aim of this study was to identify common error in using English tenses by EFL students in the first semester at Putera Batam University. The analysis of the data contained the categorizations of grammatical errors based on the theory of Krashen (1982) where the grammatical errors were categorized as verb form, preposition, article, plurality, tense, pronoun, question and word order. The instrument that used was a test on basic English tenses and the data were taken from 50 students. The data sources were taken from the result of students' test itself. It showed that students' errors were (1) Subject – auxiliary agreement, (2) Pronoun mistake or subject was wrong, meanwhile auxiliary verb or verb was right, (3) Auxiliary verb was correct meanwhile verb still added –es/s, (4) Auxiliary verb was wrong in sentence, (5) Double subject in sentence, (6) The sentence did not have subject or verb. Based on the result, it can be concluded that some mistakes made by students were caused by their inability to fully understand the pattern of English tenses. Therefore, students should be given more attention and motivation to learn kinds of tenses correctly.

Keywords : English Grammar, English Tenses, Student's Error.

1. Introduction

Language is a tool of communication. People around the world use many kinds of languages to transfer messages or ideas each other. One of languages that is used by people is English. Some countries in the

world use English as a medium of communication among people in different countries. And people who are able to communicate in English will be easier to get more information and knowledge. Moreover, as a foreign language, English is

important to master, since it has been used as a means of international language and communication.

Learning a language means learning structure or grammar of a language. It is necessary because structure is the main capital and an important element in language. Structure or grammar is one of the components of language besides pronunciation, spelling and vocabulary. Moreover, structure is an essential meaning in conducting communication. It is useless studying English without learning structure, because there will be miscommunication or misunderstanding. In addition, language will be acceptable if the structure is correct. Therefore, it is very essential to make the speakers of language understand each other. If a language does not have grammar as a role, it will be difficult for the speakers to communicate and to understand what they are talking about. Nunan (1989) added that grammar existed to enable us to 'mean', and without grammar it was impossible to communicate beyond a very rudimentary level.

In teaching and learning grammar, three aspects have to be considered: grammar as rules, grammar as form, and grammar as resource. For English foreign learners, learning grammar often means learning the rules of grammar and having an intellectual knowledge of grammar. Teachers or lecturers often believe that this will provide the generative basis on which learners can build their knowledge and will be able to use the language eventually. For students, specified rules give a kind of security.

According to Chowdhury (2014), the role of grammar in the acquisition process of the English language has been a debatable issue for the linguists, researchers and the classroom teachers over a long period of time. Some teachers emphasized on teaching grammar so

much and to such an extent that they appeared slavishly loyal to it. Others seemed to ignore it so vehemently that they considered it a negative influence in the ESL or EFL learners' overall production of the integrated skills of the English language (Chowdhury, 2014). In fact, although grammar mastery is necessary, but the mastery of it is still far from ideal expectation.

English grammar is notoriously problematic for EFL learners; its difficulty leads to a great many common mistakes, which speakers frequently fall foul of. But it is not just these basic errors that EFL learners must conquer. English grammar is full of complexity, and it is only with experience that non-native speakers will learn to appreciate its nuances.

Problems in understanding English grammar might come from at least two factors namely linguistic factors and non-linguistic factors. Linguistically, the problem was caused by the differences of the grammatical patterns of their mother tongue and that of the foreign language, especially English. Students sometimes got difficulties in applying English grammatical patterns when they used them in sentence forms. It might happen because of the interference of their mother tongue structure into English grammar. And non-linguistic factors that elicit problems in grammar mastery may consist of elements as internal or external cases. Internally, the mastery is poor because students are not interested and motivated. Most of students consider that grammar is difficult, so their motivation to learn is also poor. They also have negative attitudes to the language so they do not pay attention when their teacher gives explanation about materials and they are reluctant to memorize the materials. Besides that, this is caused by different level of understanding of each student in receiving the explanation. Students who

are always getting lower understanding will consider that grammar is very difficult for them.

In addition, grammar might be used to show how a language works and regarded as an essential requirement toward the success of language learning. Language without grammar will be disorganized and will cause some communicative problems, such as grammatical errors in writing and speaking. By identifying student's grammatical errors, it can help the teacher focus on his or her teaching and learning process, because the teacher has already known about the students' difficulties in arranging sentences. It will make the teacher easier to select material which is suitable to students' competence.

Based on the explanation above, it can be said that English language learners especially EFL students often make mistakes and even errors in learning English, especially when they are trying to arrange sentences or using tenses. Moreover, making Errors are a natural and unavoidable part of the process of learning English. Many kinds of errors arise because of learners do not master the English structure well. Also, errors are the inability of the students in using rules of the components and elements of the second or foreign language. Brown (1988) said that second language learning is a process that is clearly not unlike first language learning in its trial and errors nature". It means that the learners cannot avoid errors in learning second language. Some learners make errors when they are learning English because it is difficult to separate error in the process of learning English. Therefore, this study investigate what common errors in using kind of English Tenses by EFL Students. Students that became the responden were first semester students in English Department of Putera Batam University.

2. Literature Review

The study of grammar or structure has had a long and important role in the history of second language and foreign language teaching. For centuries, to learn another language means to know the grammatical structures of that language and to cite prescriptions for its use. It was used to mean the analysis of a language system, and the study of grammar was not just considered an essential feature of language learning, but was thought to be sufficient for learners to actually acquire another language (Rutherford, 1988). Besides that, Richards stressed that structure was still important to be taught in English class where teaching and learning took a place, he furthermore said that now teaching structure has controversial issues in teaching English, but in recent years, grammar teaching has regained its rightful place in language curriculum (Richards, 2008). People now agree that grammar is too important to be ignored, and that without a good knowledge of grammar, learners' language development be severely constrained. It means that teaching of grammar should be determined by the needs aims in learning English.

One important aspect of teaching grammar is that it helps learners discover the nature of language, i.e., that language consists of predictable patterns that make what we say, read, hear and write intelligible. Without grammar, we would have only individual words or sounds, pictures, and body expressions to communicate meaning. Grammar is the weaving that creates the fabric (Azar, 2007). In the teaching and learning process, understanding of grammar can be seen in the writing result. Pazaver and Wang based on their research explained that the students saw a positive connection between grammar instruction

and their writing abilities. They needed to apply different grammatical rules to identify the mistakes and to write properly in their writing assignments. This was because the teaching of grammatical features like tenses and linguistic elements, including capitalization, commas and other punctuation helped them write effectively. Regarding the necessity of grammatical competence for writing competence as previously mentioned, the teaching of grammar is introduced to the writing class worldwide (Pazaver & Wang, 2009).

There are several types of English grammar that should be known, but the most basic of English grammar is tenses. Based on Webster's dictionary, tense is any of the forms of a verb expressing the time of the action or the state of being present tense, future perfect tense; a set of forms for the various persons for a given time. According to Pardiyo (2007), tense was a variation of the change of verb form included full verb, be and auxiliary that were usually used as predicate in the sentence, which should be appropriated with the kinds of time expression. The words tense stood for a verb form or series of verb form used to express time relation. Tenses might indicate whether in action, activity, or state was past, present or future (Hornby, 1987).

In learning English, one of the general and base problems that were usually faced was tenses problem. Most of students did not understand what was spoken in tenses problem (Pardiyo, 2007). Moreover, many teachers found that tenses were far more difficult to teach than vocabular, although planning a lesson around a tense was obviously easier, actually teaching it might be a different matter. Despite their best efforts, students consistently misused, misunderstood and misapplied tenses

(Aitken, 1998). Therefore, considering the essential role of tenses, teachers should consider what kind of method was appropriately used in teaching tenses. According to Pardiyo (2007), if you understood the rules about the change of verb form and also understood about the grouping of time expression, you had not gotten difficulties in using tenses.

Besides that, learning English as second or foreign language, error often occurs. It is known that foreign language learners which have been acquiring a foreign language sometimes make errors and mistakes when they are producing the language in oral and written form (Brown, 1994). Mochamad Noertjahjono (2008) explained on his paper, "Error Analysis on the Use of Simple past Tense among the Ninth Year Students of SMPN 3 PARE", error of making English sentences was caused by the fact that students did not pay attention enough in English grammar. He classified errors into four types, they were:

- 1) Errors of omission: the absence of an item test must appear in a well-formed utterance.
- 2) Errors of addition: the presence of an item, which must not appear in a well-formed utterance.
- 3) Errors of miss formation: the use of the wrong form of the morpheme or structure.
- 4) Errors of disordering the incorrect placement of a morpheme or a group of morpheme in an utterance.

Richards (1986) explained that the study of learners' errors was significant in three different ways. First to the teacher by analyzing the learner's errors the teacher known how far the goals the learners had progressed and what he should do to eliminate the learners' errors. Second, the learners' errors were very significant as an evidence of how

language was learned and acquired and what strategies or procedures the learners used in studying the target language. And the third, the learners' errors were very significant for the learners themselves because by making errors they know what they had to do next and how to overcome the errors by learning more the target language that they learned.

Related to this study, there were several researchers have done analyzing problems in grammar. First research by MD. Mahmud Hasan Chowdhury, he analyzed about "Teaching Grammar in the English Language Classroom in Saudi Universities". In his research, he explained that teaching English Grammar in non-native countries is an arduous task because of a number of factors causing the lack of motivation and concentration of the learner in acquiring the grammar-based inputs of the English language in the classroom. In view of the core issue this research attempts to critically assess the situations and experiences the English language teachers and the students have to go through in teaching and learning grammar at the university level in Saudi Arabia and seek a solution to the crisis engulfing the potential growth of the English language learners. Of course, the picture presented here is not meant for a generalization in the context of all universities in the EFL or ESL countries. It mainly focuses on the problems typically facing the non-native learners in their efforts to master the grammar skills of the English language. The effectiveness of different approaches to the teaching of English Grammar to the relatively inattentive Saudi students is critically evaluated as well (Chowdhury, 2014).

Second research was written by Incecay, he analyzed about foreign language learners' beliefs about grammar instruction and error correction. The aim of his research was to investigate the

beliefs of foreign language learners in relation to the role of grammar teaching and error correction. For the purposes of the study 26 students at a private university responded to a questionnaire. As a result of the analysis, it can be said that foreign language learners believed grammar was an important aspect of the language. However, they held beliefs about it to be taught in a more communicative way. On the other hand, participants thought that error correction was useful in language learning process (Incecay, 2011).

The next research by Rahman and Ali, they analyzed about "Problems in Mastering English Tense and Aspect and the Role of the Practitioners". They reported that although tense and aspect occupy a major part in the language teaching materials, many EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners continue making mistakes in those areas even when they are in advanced level studies. Tense cannot distinguish between expressions, especially when the expressions were in the same tense. Therefore, understanding the aspect was essential in order for the language users to use expressions properly. Traditional EFL grammar books had ignored lexical aspect. As a result, many EFL learners faced semantic problems as they attempt to produce the target language. This article examined some problems which may encumber learners' attempt to master tense and aspect, and emphasized that language teachers and teaching materials must also focus on the lexical aspect so that learners can be aware of meaning apart from the form and the function of an expression (Rahman & Ali, 2015).

3. Research Method

This research was qualitative research and the analysis of the data collected

without any calculation. Source of data in this research was taken from grammar test that was given to first semester students in Putera Batam University. Moreover, Data was a mistake which made by students in the grammar test. Once all the data had been collected, the researcher analyzed the data by identifying common mistakes or criticize. It also analyzed the ability of students to use kind tenses in English.

4. Result and Discussion

The result of this study based on data that had been collected from the result of students' test. The analysis of the data contained the categorizations of grammatical errors based on the theory of Dulay & Krashen (1982) where the grammatical errors are categorized as verb form, preposition, article, plurality, tense, pronoun, question and word order. It can be an analysis on the fundamental reasons why those kinds of grammatical errors while the participants of this research were expected to produce accurate grammatical outputs. It was presented after identifying the most request occurrence to provide a rich understanding of grammatical errors. Students' score of English Test could seen as below.

Table 4.1 Students' Score of English Test

Students	Score	Grade
1	90	Very good
2	70	Satisfactory
3	65	Poor
4	64	Poor
5	80	Good
6	70	Satisfactory
7	65	Poor
8	75	Satisfactory
9	90	Very good
10	65	Poor
11	55	Failed

12	85	Good
13	70	Satisfactory
14	70	Satisfactory
15	50	Failed
16	45	Failed
17	50	Failed
18	45	Failed
19	55	Failed
20	57	Failed
21	60	Poor
22	70	Satisfactory
23	75	Satisfactory
24	60	Poor
25	55	Failed
26	80	Good
27	55	Failed
28	45	Failed
29	80	Good
30	76	Satisfactory
31	79	Satisfactory
32	82	Good
33	50	Failed
34	47	Failed
35	75	Satisfactory
36	60	Poor
37	62	Poor
38	70	Satisfactory
39	72	Satisfactory
40	87	Good
41	59	Failed
42	48	Failed
43	90	Very good
44	70	Satisfactory
45	77	Satisfactory
46	87	Good
47	56	Failed
48	54	Failed
49	45	Failed
50	81	Good

From table above, it can said that more that 50% students got score under Good chatagory. Related to those findings

above, it could be analyzed that there were many parts where the participants produced grammatical errors in English Test. The analysis of some common errors in using English tense can be seen as below.

- 1) Subject - auxiliary agreement. If subject was right, meanwhile auxiliary verb or verb was wrong. The mistake of this type are 28 students, it meant that level of error on this type was 58 %.
- 2) Pronoun. If subject was wrong, but auxiliary verb or verb is right. The mistake of this type are 10 student, it means that level of error on this type is 20 %.
- 3) Subject – Auxiliary – Verb agreement. Auxiliary verb was correct meanwhile verb still added –es/s. it was usually found in negative form. The mistake of this type were 22 students, it meant that level of error on this type was 44 %
- 4) Wrong Auxiliary. If wrong in arrange subject. The mistake of this type were 11 students, it meant that level of error this type was 22 %.
- 5) Double subject in sentences. The mistake of this type were 10 student, it meant that level of error this type was 20 %.
- 6) The sentence had not subject or verb. Sometimes students did not assert subject or object in sentence or even more both of them. The mistake of this type were 4 students, it meant that level of error on this type was 8 %.

Based on the analysis, most of students still had problems to understand English grammar especially kinds of Tenses which have different characteristics each of them. In analyzing the causes of errors, it refers to the theory that proposed by Littlewood (1984)

Interlingual errors – caused by the interference of mother tongue. The following description was provided to explain the possible causes or errors produced by students. Errors regarded as Interlingua when the deviant structure was caused by the influence of the students' first language acquired, as seen in the example that was produced by a student, *My years 14 old*. This sentence classified into interlingua error after translating it into Indonesia "*umurku 14 tahun*". In Indonesia pattern, there were not only S + Adjective/ Noun, therefore, the students did not need them in forming non verbal sentence of English.

Moreover, the problems above might occur in language learners' productions while their process of acquiring a new language or second/foreign language the errors were mostly influenced by their mother tongue/ L1. From the error categories, it could be said that those errors were affected by the Indonesian grammar which all the participants had already acquired since they started to learn Bahasa. In Indonesian grammar, there were no different tenses in different ranges of time. In order to express idea in different time frame, Indonesian needs to add time signals, such as "yesterday", "tomorrow", "this morning". These time signals were very common for Indonesian learners. That kind of difference could be a serious problem for Indonesians who learn English as foreign language. That was why, most of the participants, even when they already had a very good proficiency of English grammar, they still had difficulties when they had to construct and combine any kinds of English outputs with combination of correct tenses.

5. Conclusion

Based on the analysis of common error made by the students, it can be said

that they had problem in mastering and understanding grammar even they had already learned it. The problems may be caused by several factors such as: (1) The method used was not appropriate; (2) The teaching of grammar could be occasionally boring because it was taught seriously and statically, there was no variation made by teacher to make students interested and motivated to learn; (3) Students usually created competitive situation that made poor motivation for the most low achievers. However, motivation was one of the most important factors that will influence students' English achievements or performance. It had a close relationship with students' success or failure in English teaching in college. Gardner (1995) emphasized that the motivation constructed the primary factor to influence students on English learning. He asserted that motivation for language learning can not only include goal orientation but the combination of effort, desire to achieve the goal of learning the language and favorable attitudes toward learning the language.

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