GRAMMATICAL DIFFICULTIES FACED BY SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN WRITING SENTENCES

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ABSTRACT
This research deals with the grammatical difficulties faced by students in their English writing sentences. It begins from L2 students that complains English Grammar as one of the complicated features in writing, especially the students from English Department of IAIN Lhokseumawe. Therefore, the objectives of this research were to find out any grammatical difficulties
faced by the students in their English Writing Sentences and to cover up any reasonable factor occurs in using English Grammar to their English writing. Case study was adopted in this research by using descriptive qualitative approach. English Department students of IAIN Malikussaleh Lhokseumawe in the second semester (2017/2018 Academic Year) were taken purposively as research subjects. The data were student’s written sentence transferred as documentary evidence with retrospective interview transcription; and (2) Focus Group Discussion note. After analyzing the data qualitatively by Interactive Model Technique, it was found that students got some grammatical difficulties related to (1) problems of meaning complexity, (2) problems of form complexity, and (3) problems of form-meaning mapping relationship. Moreover, by five factors contribute to those difficulties, namely: (1) knowledge of syntactic constituents, (2) knowledge of semantics; (3) knowledge of pragmatics; (4) previous grammar teaching and learning; and (5) L1 knowledge. As the implication, it is suggested that L2 learners be aware of the grammatical difficulties that they are referring to and it is also important that lecturers develop some instructional approaches which focus exclusively on one aspect of language or another (e.g., form and meaning) in teaching the writing that associated with its genre.

**Keywords: Grammatical Difficulties, Second Language Learners, Writing.**

**INTRODUCTION**

One of the considerations why writing ability is the most difficult and complicated language skill to be learned by the students in every level of education is because of grammar. Indeed, more than twelve years of school study do not make learners mastery over English. The fact shows that not all the available data in the learner’s environment can be absorbed and used in building the learner’s grammar, and the condition that would enable the conversion of input into intake has been a central point of research.

In addition, grammar is one of the most difficult aspects of a foreign language to master. It is defined as the rules that govern how a language’s sentences are formed. English grammar has been traditionally viewed as a system of syntax that decides the order and patterns in which words are arranged in sentences. It is argued that mastering grammar is a complex process that requires making a series of decisions about when and why to use one form rather than the other. Making the right decisions when writing in the second language (L2) requires grammatical proficiency. Shanklin suggested that grammatical proficiency is both an important pedagogical skill and an important part of target language proficiency. What Shanklin means by “grammatical proficiency” is “the ability to make judgments about the acceptability and appropriateness of an utterance with specific reference to grammatical notions”. Shanklin distinguished between the grammatical
proficiency that native speakers (NSs) have versus the one that nonnative speakers (NNSs) acquire. NSs’ knowledge of grammar is implicit; they are competent in grammar but they do not necessarily know the different rules behind the use of grammar. NNSs, on the other hand, build an explicit awareness of how the different grammar rules are formed. Generating this awareness of grammar knowledge is not an easy process. The variety in forms and usages confuses English as second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) learners. They learn new grammar rules every day, but they have difficulties applying them when they speak or write in English. Shatz and Wilkinson argue that second language (L2) learners often cannot express complex thoughts because of their inability to construct complex sentences showing complicated relationships.

They also highlight some of the common grammar problems that face English language learners such as the misuse of prepositions, articles, past tense, and the third person singular. Nonetheless, it is necessary for English language learners to master grammar in order to be competent in the four language skills because incorrect use or lack of understanding of grammar might hinder communication either in speaking, writing, listening, or reading. It also shows that the problems play a very significant in connection with the process of acquisition. Related to second language learners. In the effort of language learners studying other languages, there have been problems and theories found as well as other issues coming therewith. Thus, dealing with students to this problem at the university level brought the present researchers to find out specific grammatical difficulties they encounter in their effort to learn English as their second language. Little research has been conducted to investigate the issue of grammatical difficulty from the L2 learner’s perspective.

Therefore, it is important to find out any grammatical difficulties faced by the Students in their English Writing Sentences, and to cover up any reasonable factor occurs in using English Grammar to their English writing.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Case study was adopted in this study by using descriptive qualitative approach where the researcher describes the information process based on natural fact. The subject of the research was the English Department students of IAIN Lhokseumawe in the second semester (2017/2018 Academic Year). The data were taken from student’s written sentence transferred (document evidence) with retrospective interview and transcript of Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The data were very unique to every person since the information processing is affected by various factors in comprehending and processing both language (Indonesia and English).
RESEARCH FINDINGS

1. Grammatical Difficulties
a. Problems of meaning complexity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Sentences</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Reconstruction Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
<td>All people who live on the earth have the responsibility on healthy environment.</td>
<td>Earth (the earth)</td>
<td>All people who live on the earth have the responsibility on healthy environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2</td>
<td>Andri is my best brother, He gave her big bag for me.</td>
<td>Her (his)</td>
<td>Andri is my best brother, He gave his big bag for me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3</td>
<td>She sad because of me.</td>
<td>Sad (is)</td>
<td>She is sad because of me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4</td>
<td>A Teacher who wise and good behavior is loved by many students.</td>
<td>who (is) wise and good behavior is loved by many students.</td>
<td>A wise and good teacher is loved by many students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data above show some Error caused by meaning complexity problem. The using of Article “the” often make them confuse. As it has been known, Grammatically, English has some word order followed by “the”. However, this article does not have any meaning in Indonesia.

“Yes, I really confuse of using “the”, I do not know which word that I have to use “the”. Because, in Bahasa Indonesia, there is no “the” word. Besides, event “the” already put with the word, in Bahasa, the word earth still has the same meaning, Bumi’ (Translated from Indonesia Version). S1/ U (utterances).

It was stated by the S1 that he/she also got confusing on the function of article “the”. It was hard for the S1 to comprehend the use of article “the” in writing a sentence. Therefore, the students tent to avoid the using of Article “the”.

Moreover, feature of personal pronoun (second raw of the table) was also found in the meaning complexity problem. Bahasa Indonesia does not distinguish pronominal reference based on gender. All of pronoun is equal in term of gender. However, English differs the pronominal reference based on gender, male and female (singular). This difference leaded the student made some error in using personal pronoun in English.

“It is really difficult for me, too complicated! In Indonesia, “dia” (Singular person - male/female) is “dia”, but in English, it is changeable, either subject, object, or possessive, all is different form”. (Translated from Indonesia Version). S2/ U4.
Grammatical Difficulties faced by L2 Learners

The S2 also confirmed that it was confusing for the S2 to remember
the English pronoun based on their function syntactically. As it has been
known that all English sentence contains predicator. This rule is a bit
different with Bahasa Indonesia. In Indonesia, Sentence is syntactically
divided into two categories, Verbal and Nominal. Verbal sentence has one
or more predicators in sentence, otherwise, nominal sentence does not have any predicator. However, the rules of attacking predicator (be) in
nominal sentences in Indonesia does not exist. In the third row of the table,
it is showed that the student did not put any predicator (be) in the sentence.
The S3 confirmed that he/she still could not distinguish kind of sentences
from both languages (Indonesia and English) and the function of “be” related
to nominal sentence in Bahasa Indonesia.

“Honestly sir, I cannot distinguish which one verbal sentence or
nominal sentence, I do not know when I have to write down “be” in a
sentence, sometime, I think I cannot distinguish either verb or adjective in
Bahasa Indonesia” S3/ U3.

The same case was also found to the next raw of the table, where
S4 did not put “be (is)” after relative clause “who” as an auxiliary verb to
indicate the predicator of the first clause in the sentence.
All of these errors occurred from the different meaning that some word in
English do not have meaning in Indonesia, however, some words must be
existed when the sentence written.

b. Problems of form complexity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Sentences</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Reconstruction Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S5</td>
<td>I found two mouses in the kitchen.</td>
<td>Two mouses (mice)</td>
<td>I found two mice in the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>kitchen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S6</td>
<td>The letter was sended by my brother.</td>
<td>Was sended (sent)</td>
<td>The letter was sent by my</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>brother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S7</td>
<td>They are a good teacher and wise.</td>
<td>good teacher and</td>
<td>They are a good and wise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>wise.</td>
<td>teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S8</td>
<td>a young lovely teacher is nice.</td>
<td>A young lovely</td>
<td>A lovely young teacher is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>teacher is nice.</td>
<td>nice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows some representative data related to the problem of
form complexity.

In S5, the problem occurs in term of form complexity, where the
plural nouns are indicated by adding s or es. However, some nouns
(irregular nouns) have their own plural form, e.g. man as singular noun
becomes men as plural. The similar rule also occurs to the word “mouse” as
singular noun. It must be “mice” as plural noun.
“What I intended to write was the plural word form of “tikus” in English, because the word must represent two quantities.” (Translated from Indonesia Version). S5/ U6.

S5 knew the meaning of the word, but he/she made an error in term of plural form. This error was confirmed to the subject, it was explained that he/she realized the word “tikus” had to be formed into plural form in English because the animals consist of two quantities. Besides, what subject knows was regular word form added s/es.

The problems of form complexity also found in term of irregular verb, where the form was written down by generalizing the pattern of regular verb form. However, even the S6 made an error by writing “sended” (sent), the subject was aware by the form of sentence tense, but subject6 faced the difficulty in applying the participle form in order to represent past activity.

“I know it was past tense form, as I remember, past tense should use participle verb. Therefore, I use “sended” as participle form.” S6/ U3.

The data above showed that S6 was aware with the meaning, But he/she made an error in term of word form. Grammatically, when more than one adjective comes before a noun, the adjectives are normally in a particular order. Adjectives which describe opinions or attitudes (e.g. amazing) usually come first, before more neutral, factual ones. The data from S7 and S8 showed that the problem arise when more than one adjective comes before a noun. In this case, S7 isolated the adjective “wise” from noun “teacher”. Meanwhile S8 capsized the adjective orders.

“I have no Idea how to compound two or more adjective words with one noun” S8/ U4.

The statement above was exemplified that the subject really has a big problem with form complexity.

c. Problems of form-meaning mapping relationship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
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<th>Reconstruction Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S9</td>
<td>Mom love me so much</td>
<td>Mom love</td>
<td>Mom loves me so much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S10</td>
<td>They put so many sugars for the coffee.</td>
<td>many sugars</td>
<td>They put so much sugar for the coffee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S11</td>
<td>If I was you ....</td>
<td>If I was you ....</td>
<td>If I were you</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table above shows some list of representative data related to problems of form-meaning mapping relationship. It is the problems that arise from students’ confusing in using "s" that goes at the end of a verb when the verb is in the present tense and the subject is a thing or a person. For some students, the "s" makes words look plural, as is the case with most plural nouns. S9 indirectly was unaware that the word love that he/she wrote
as predicator. When the researcher prompted with some qualificative question, the subject confused

“s” makes me confuse, there are so many function “s”, why love used “s”, love is uncountable noun”

S10 showed that the subject could not aware of the quantity of the object and the form of uncountable noun that cannot be pluralized. It was reported by S10 that he/she did not remember it, even in term of Indonesia context.

Moreover, it is also found that S11 did not understand conditional if type-2. The subject reported:

I don’t know, I am really confused sir, I was taught the past tense form use “was” for singular subject, and “were” for plural subject. Somehow, I don’t understand why it the sentence should be like this!

The report above showed that the subject cannot understand the feature of semantic relationship in unreal conditional sentences.

2. Factor occurs in using English Grammar

Based on Data analysis taken from Focus Group Discussion (FGD), it is found that some factors Contributes to grammatical difficulties, namely:

a. L2 Knowledge in Syntactic Constituents.

“Knowledge of syntactic constituents” refers to knowledge of morphosyntactic or syntactic aspects of a grammar feature. Students’ responses such as “the passive is composed of only auxiliary be and the past participle” was coded as “knowledge of syntactic constituents.” Some FGD participants stated that they got problem in term of subject and verb agreement (both active and passive sentences), especially the rule of third person with verb agreement in present tense, quantities agreement with the noun, and conjunction combinations. Yet, they become more depressed when the sentence composing lead them to the complex constructive sentence; e.g. passive in conditional sentence, relative clause, parallel structure, causative sentence.

Data:This feature is difficult for us to learn because conditional sentences have different types with different rules and pattern. Yet, the pattern some time can be replaced or different with the common pattern of tenses. e.g. the pattern of conditional “if” type-2, which refers to counterfactual situations in a present or future time frame, normally, participle form agrees with the subject. However, in this conditional type-2, “were” replaces “was” as “predicator” to all subject. (S15).

b. L2 Knowledge in Semantics

Units of information concerning the semantic aspects of a grammar feature were coded as “knowledge of semantics.” An example of this is the response, “I do not always understand the cause-effect relationship in a real
conditional sentence.” Another example is, “I do not fully understand the meanings of the modal auxiliaries.”

Features that students perceive as “abstract” were reported to be more difficult to learn. One evidence that interested when one of the participants arise the question related to perfect tense, what does mean have/has/had in perfect form? They cannot associate with Bahasa Indonesia that direct them into problem in their writing.

I know that present perfect should be used when we refer to an action that has already taken place. That’s my understanding of present perfect. But sometimes in my readings I see that present perfect is used where I don’t think it is needed. It confuses me. Present perfect is too abstract and difficult for me to understand. (S4)

Features with “multiple” semantic meanings were also reported by some students to be more difficult to learn. For example, a number of students reported that they have difficulty fully understanding the meanings of the modal auxiliaries. They all made comments similar to Kay’s remarks:

I cannot always distinguish the meanings expressed by different modal verbs. Well, I can tell that can and may are different in their meanings, but how about could and might? Do they have the same meaning? I am not sure. (S7).

c. L2 Knowledge in Pragmatics

The responses associated with when and why to use a grammar form were coded as “knowledge of pragmatics.” A couple of examples of such responses are like:

“I don’t know when to use the type of tenses, conditional sentence,” or “I avoid using conditional sentences because they are difficult for me.”

Many students reported that they are not always clear on when or why to use certain features.

Take the perfect tenses sentences as the example, they cannot distinguish both simple past tense or present perfect tense regarding to Indonesia context activity. Another example is the use of modal auxiliaries. A number of students reported that they are not always clear on when or how to use modal auxiliaries.

“I am not really sure which modal auxiliary I should use. Should I say “you can visit me” or “you may visit me”? According to me, their meanings are almost similar. I am not really sure which one I should use. Another feature that a number of students reported to be difficult in terms of its use is the article system. 25 participants reported that it is not easy to add or omit the article “the.”

d. L2 Grammar learning experience (Previous Grammar Teaching and Learning).

Previous grammar teaching and learning refers to the grammar instruction that students received in high school. According to the students,
in high school, they did not consider real conditionals to be difficult to learn when they were learning only real conditionals. However, after they were taught unreal conditionals, they confused real conditionals with unreal conditionals, and thus, they came to consider real conditionals to be difficult to learn. The reason the students confused real conditionals with unreal conditionals appears to be due to their teachers’ instruction of conditional sentences.

A number of students said that their teachers took a lot of time and effort to teach the syntactic constituents of unreal conditionals because the teachers thought that these are complex and thus difficult for the students to learn. The students were also provided with a lot of decontextualized practice of the unreal conditionals. However, the teachers did not provide much instruction on the syntactic constituents of real conditionals because they considered the syntactic constituents of real conditionals to be easy for students. Since more instruction, practice, and testing focused on unreal conditionals rather than on real conditionals, the students were less clear about the syntactic constituents of real conditionals, or they confused real conditionals with unreal conditionals after receiving what they perceived to be unbalanced instruction on the two features. Even though the teachers took much time and effort to teach unreal conditionals, the students still reported that this feature is difficult to learn.

e. L1 Knowledge.

Language transfer designates the interference of the mother tongue in second language learning. Learners apply knowledge from their native language to learn a second language. While this can help in understanding and using the target language, this can also hinder the proper internalization of the L2 (target language) rules. They map their L1 grammatical patterns inappropriately onto the L2 as a result of syntactic differences between L1 and L2.

“To us, if we don’t have any idea to translate what in our minds, we will generalize the word structures / sentence structures based on our first language, sir. e.g. (S1).

The reported above show that when the students try to solve their difficulties, they will transfer the pattern of L1 to L2.

CLOSING

Based on the analysis of all types data, it was found that students got some grammatical difficulties related to (1) problems of meaning complexity, (2) problems of form complexity, and (3) problems of form-meaning mapping relationship. The three problems as described in point one was affected by five factors, namely: (1) knowledge of syntactic constituents, (2) knowledge of semantics; (3) knowledge of pragmatics; (4) previous grammar
teaching and learning; and (5) L1 knowledge. As the implication, it is suggested that L2 learners be aware of the grammatical difficulties that they are referring to and it is also important that lecturers develop some instructional approaches which focus exclusively on one aspect of language or another (e.g., form and meaning) in teaching the writing that associated with its genre.

REFERENCES


