

Issues on the Use of Grammar in Students' Final Report Writings in English Department of Sriwijaya State Polytechnic

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ABSTRACT: This study was conducted to analyze the students' final report writings in the English Department of State Polytechnic of Sriwijaya. It was trying to discover if the students were still making grammatical mistakes in their final writing project or if such a thing was already non-existent. When the mistakes had been found, the English grammatical points were referred to to classify the kinds of mistakes that had occurred. Percentage was also made to indicate the most frequently found grammatical errors down to the least. From here it would seem that the students' writings were only full of grammatical mistakes, but that was because this article focused on the mistakes. The correct structures being occupied remained unattended, as it was not the theme of this article. Again, the results of this study could not be interpreted as the students having bad writing skills. It was just that their good structural points were not to be brought up for discussions as it was not the topic in this particular research. In addition, the writing papers being chosen were the ones that had been examined in the students' report presentation seminar and been kept in the library of the English department which anyone could easily access. After the research was done, the findings were rather beyond expectation. The students made wrong use of even the simplest structures like past tense, to be, and plural forms of nouns. However, it was presumably and more likely due to them being careless and not because of their ignorance on the matter.

Keywords: *grammatical errors, writing skills, ignorance*

Students of the State Polytechnic of Sriwijaya must write a final report at the end of their study. Unlike the majority of the other students from the other departments in this institution, the English students have the 'privilege' of writing their reports entirely in English. Therefore, they have to face more challenges than those who are not obliged to write their final tasks in a foreign language.

Writing in one's mother tongue has presented quite a few problems, let alone having to deal with it in a language that is foreign to the students. The word 'foreign' indicates that everything from the diction to the sentence building, from the spelling to the pronunciation is far from being similar to students' daily means of communication. It is not their mother tongue. English is not even a second language in this country. It is still labeled as 'foreign' which may add up to the students' difficulties in communicating their thoughts and ideas in such a formal and scientific written form.

However, they are English students and it is their task to deal with the complexities of the language and make themselves accustomed to the language rules if they have the intention of mastering English. In other words, these students should neither make up excuses to justify their-not-so-good writing by referring to it as a foreign language nor should they say that they are entitled to making mistakes in writing due to their being rather unfamiliar with the language. This kind of reasoning is simply unacceptable and intolerable. When one decides to write in whatever language it is, one is obligated to write properly, especially when the writing is formal in which certain rules need to be obeyed to details.

Students may argue that they are presented with or accompanied by an advisor who would take care of their mistakes and put an end to their writing problems. In other words, they might harbor such rather baseless and groundless ideas that the advisors would be at their service to smooth things out, patch things up, and give them a way to achieving a good piece of writing, claiming it as their (students') original work without much effort on their (students') side. Thus, they need not worry. Unfortunately, that kind of argumentation, if it should exist, is making no sense. The tasks of the two advisors are not to proofread and then simply correct their advisees' grammatical or dictional mistakes from the beginning to the end while the students are just sitting still waiting for the results. Neither should the advisors rewrite the correct sentences for them.

The advisors, as indicated by the term 'advisors', should advise the students on which way to go, what method to apply, what structure fits the writing the most, what words describe the situation the best, et cetera. The point is that it is the advice that the advisors have to offer. They have no obligation to overtake the students' writing tasks when troubles come their way. For more specific information, the advisors' tasks specifications can be read in "Petunjuk Penulisan Laporan Akhir POSRI 2008". It is clear that even though students have advisors on their side, they still have to handle things on their own, be good at their writing skills, and finish their work well under the guidance of their advisors. So, the students still need to worry when they find themselves incapable of constructing English sentences properly in their writing.

There are some crucial elements of writing that students or anyone else should master. According to SkillsYouNeed (2023, pg. 1), Correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling are key in written communications. The reader will form an opinion of you, the author, based on both the content and presentation, and errors are likely to lead them to form a negative impression. Therefore, the correctness of grammar is not to be ignored. This shall communicate how learned or intellectual the writer is. Readers shall not believe in the credibility of a writer whose writing is charred by grammatical errors. It does not take many errors to do the damage, just a few will be sufficient to destroy the writer's image.

Incorrect grammar can make texts difficult to read but it can do even more than that. It can distort the meaning entirely (Dinsdale, 2023, pg. 1). Imagine when a reader reads this sentence "The swimmer stopped breathing when his head went out of the water to grasp for air". He would think that the swimmer had passed away or moved on to another dimension of life. The writer should have written "The swimmer stopped to breathe when his head went out of the water to grasp for air" when he means to convey that the swimmer was not at all near his death. He was alive and kicking.

The importance of grammar in writing was also agreed upon by Moxley (2023, pg. 1). In formal writing contexts, grammatical errors are considered unprofessional because they cause ambiguity, confusion—and the loss of a reader. In business contexts, this translates into lost revenue. Because audiences expect writers to follow the rules of standard written English in formal situations, failure to do so may suggest a lack of effort—or a lack of literacy, a failure to understand the rules and conventions that govern standard written or spoken English. With all being said, writing with grammatical mistakes will lead to its writer being labeled as unprofessional and thus, the contents of his writing are also very close to being considered unworthy of reading.

Good grammar skills are essential for effective and meaningful communication. By understanding the common mistakes made in grammar, you can avoid them and express your thoughts in writing clearly to convey your intended meaning (Northern Illinois University, 2023, pg. 1). This shows that learning from mistakes is not a bad idea. Mistakes can be made by anyone and it is suggestible that writers, especially those in the early phase of learning to write, can learn from them. Knowing the wrong ones will lead to wanting to know the right ones from which future grammatical errors in writing can be prevented.

Compared to Bahasa Indonesia, English grammar is more complicated. Indonesian language does not change its verbforms according to the adverb of time while English does. Indonesian does not change its pronouns to become objective or possessive while in English it is a must. Indonesian does not change its nouns for the plural forms while English does exactly it. These strange linguistic phenomena are also acknowledged by ESLFreeWay.com (2023, pg. 1) which pointed out that English grammar is notorious for creating confusion and despair in people trying to learn it. Many people feel that English is one of the most complex languages in the world. One of the reasons cited is the grammar rules that are complicated enough to make your head swim. People learning English often ask why English grammar is so hard.

English grammar is hard because it is a language that developed from numerous other languages. The many rules are complex, and almost all of them have exceptions. Some have no particular logic and must just be learned. A person's native language grammar will also inhibit learning English grammar (ESLFreeWay.com, 2023, pg. 1). With that in mind, it is safe to say that when one learns the grammar of a foreign language, one need not compare the subject language to one's native language. One should not question the differences and just take them as they are without any complaints.

When things are difficult to learn, they can very possibly be difficult to use. In this case, Indonesian students should write in English in which the complexity of its grammar is piling up. The question is whether they could conquer the challenge and write in English free from all the possible grammatical mistakes or whether they still find it hard to cope with the grammar and mess up their writing as a result.

.According to Hornby (1987, pg. 375) in his Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English, grammar is the study or science of, rules for, the combination of words into sentences (syntax) and the forms of words (morphology). To learn grammar meant to learn how to construct sentences by using the words and the correct forms of words. Without sufficient knowledge of this science, it would be out of the question to create writings that delivered no ambiguities or confusion to readers. Meanwhile, the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English for Advanced Learners (2009, pg. 763) defined grammar as the rules by which words change their forms and are combined into sentences, or the study or use of these rules. Wordforms are subject to change in the English language. The change of word form may change the part of speech of that particular word and change how the word is treated or positioned in a sentence. The meaning may change as well. For example, 'crook' means a bend, but 'crooked' means 'dishonest' or 'illegal'. 'Crook' is a noun while 'crooked' is an adjective.

Grammar and Structure are different words and consequently have different meanings. Before the differences are revealed, the following is the definition of structure from

vocabulary.com (2023, pg.1), A structure is something of many parts that is put together. A structure can be a skyscraper, an outhouse, your body, or a sentence. To add to the information, Collins English Dictionary (2023, pg. 1) stated that a structure is something that consists of parts connected in an ordered way. Both definitions seem to point out the same thing concerning parts of something and how they are connected. Not to differ from the other definitions, the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English for Advanced Learners (2009, pg. 1752) also mentioned that structure is how the parts of something are connected and form a whole, or the thing that these parts make up.

The difference between grammar and structure lies in the scope of discussion. The structure can cover the whole thing consisting of parts supporting one another in harmony to create a thing with a certain functionality or use. This can take the form of a building, a bridge, a road, or even a sentence in a linguistic discussion. The structure seems to have broader meanings that cover both topics in language learning and non-linguistic subjects. However, when both structure and grammar are presented in the field of language learning, they are referred to as follows: Grammar and structure are related, but they are not the same thing. Grammar refers to the rules that govern how words are used in a sentence. This includes things like verb tense, subject-verb agreement, and word order. Structure, on the other hand, refers to how sentences are put together to convey meaning. This includes things like sentence length, sentence type (declarative, imperative, etc.), and the use of punctuation. So, grammar is about the individual words and their relationships to each other, while structure is about the overall organization of the sentence (Quora, 2023, pg. 1).

This study analyzed the grammar used in chapter IV and chapter V of the students' writings only. These chapters required students' good command of English to be able to represent their thoughts in words after the data had been accumulated, and the findings had been processed. The students had to discuss the results of their work while interpreting the outcomes related to their research objectives and research questions. Skills in constructing sentences were, therefore, very much needed in this chapter. The possibility of just quoting other people's statements or copying other writers' sentences to describe their thoughts was next to impossible at this point because it was their work they needed to elaborate on, not other people's work. With that in mind, the writers decided to find out how far the students had managed to build their sentences in these most crucial and most challenging phases of their writing process.

Learning from mistakes was indeed the whole idea of this concept of study. After the results of the analysis came out, the writers were able to identify the students' spot of grammatical weaknesses in their writings and take the next steps to anticipate the repetition of the same unexpected occurrences from happening again. This would also provide some information for the advisors to be more alert for certain grammar points that students were inclined to use wrongly. Besides, lecturers who taught grammar in classes could benefit from the information gained from this study. Knowing their students' insufficient knowledge of certain grammar points, they could have priorities on which part of the grammar points they needed to spend more time with their students. In addition, this study emphasized the importance of learning grammar and its functionalities in writing decent English reports. In this case, it is a final report.

FINAL REPORT:

1. Final Report (Laporan Akhir/LA) is an academic activity performed by the individual student before ending his/her study term to apply his/her knowledge and skills that have been gained in the form of a scientific writing report.
2. The writing report is made by the students as proof of their academic and professional ability to apply the theories learned in classroom hours to handle or solve practical problems in the industry or field that fits their line of study.

Generally, after accomplishing their task of writing the final report, the students can apply their knowledge and skills comprehensively and systematically to solve a problem in the field scientifically and independently. Specifically, the purpose of this final report writing is to enable the students:

1. To collect data and information to be practically and systematically analyzed;
2. To formulate a problem, conduct the analysis and synthesis, as well as do the problem-solving;
3. To Perform field tasks according to the qualifications and available standards;
4. To make a report based on rules in scientific writing;
5. To present their scientific paper and stand up for it.

Translated from *Pedoman Pembuatan dan Penilaian Laporan Akhir* (2008, pg. 3-4)

METHOD

A descriptive research design was employed in doing this research. According to ResearchGuides (2017, pg. 1), Descriptive research was used to obtain information concerning the current status of the phenomena and to describe "what exists" concerning variables or conditions in a situation.

There was only one variable in this research namely Students' Final Report writings in the English Department of State Polytechnic of Sriwijaya.

The population was all the third-year ex-students of the English department who finished their study last year in 2022 and had submitted their final report papers to the library of the English department of State Polytechnic of Sriwijaya. There were 8 samples of scientific papers produced by this population comprising four papers from ex-morning class students and four from ex-afternoon class students.

Proofreading was done on each of the eight final reports and grammar mistakes were written down based on grammar rules they had broken. The mistakes in the form of tally marks were grouped according to the classifications of grammar mistakes they had made. The percentage was used to see the majority of grammar mistakes by comparing the total number of tally marks in the classification columns.

FINDINGS

The data were taken from direct analysis of the students' report writings. Chapters IV and V of the student's final report paper were read through and proofread. Any errors found along the way were jotted down in groups. The groups were varied in accordance with the mistakes being made. The variation referred to the kinds of errors that had been made. Due to

ethical considerations, the names of the students whose work was being observed were withheld from display. Only the improper results of their work were revealed in percentage to be analyzed, interpreted, and finally concluded.

The following table shows the kinds of grammatical mistakes the students made in eight of their final report papers, arranged from the biggest to the lowest percentage.

Table 1. Students' Grammatical Mistakes in Percentage

No.	Grammar Points	Mistakes in Percentage
1.	Tenses	77.60 %
2.	To be	6.01 %
3.	Singular-Plural	4.92 %
4.	Verbforms	4.37 %
5.	Passive Voice	2.19 %
6.	Relative Pronoun	1.64 %
7.	Subject – Verb Agreement	1.09 %
8.	Gerund	1.09 %
9.	Preposition	0.55 %
10.	Parts of Speech	0.55 %
TOTAL		100%

DISCUSSION

Not only did tenses go on the top of the list of trouble, but it also gained a 77.60% share of difficulty, much higher than all the other grammatical mistakes which only shared the rest 22.40 % among themselves. Let us see what kind of grammatical mistakes in the following sentences that they had written:

- The writer reads some e-books.....
- He provides suggestions.....
- The writer must find the information.....
-English expert verify.....
- The writer puts some pictures.....

The underlined verbs were supposed to be in past forms, including the modal 'must' should have been in its past which was 'had to'. However, the students still wrote those in the present forms. The above sentences were just a few examples of the many 'past tense' errors they, whether they realized it or not, had made. Strangely enough, in the same paragraphs where the errors had occurred, they also used other verbs in the correct past forms. That meant that they understood what past tense was, and how it was supposed to be used but they were not careful enough with the application of this past tense to their entire paragraphs in their writings. That was when the errors came into existence.

In most cases, they alternately used the present tense and past tense in the same paragraphs while explaining their activities in the past. This tense called past tense did not seem to have attached itself to the students' realm of 'emotional bond'. They did not feel disturbed or alarmed when they wrote in present forms while the time indications referred to the past. One who got accustomed to the use of past tense would have gotten the signals of one's being wrong when one used present verb forms instead of past forms in describing past activities. However, that was not the case with the students in question.

The grammar point 'to be' was something that the writer had assumed for the students

to have no trouble with, but turned out to rank the second most made errors. Just like the simple past tense which was the basic English grammar, the students had also stumbled over something so simple as the use of 'to be', which was rather unexpected. Some could have argued that it was due to the non-existence of 'to be' in Bahasa Indonesia, but still since they majored in English, they should have known better. 'English to be' was the basic English lesson being introduced first at the beginning of English study. Elementary students could have answered questions on the proper usage of 'to be'. Let us now look at some examples of the errors they made in using 'to be'.

- All the facilities are provided free for visitors.
- The price of attractions in 3D stable ranges from.....
- The respondents agreed.

If 'to be' was to be used correctly, the above sentences should have been written this way:

- All the facilities provided were free for visitors.
- The price of attractions in the 3D stable ranged from....
- The respondents agreed....etc.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Three easy lessons in English grammar usually were introduced at the level of elementary which covered: Simple Past Tense, To Be, and Singular-Plural. Those topics were easy to understand due to their simplicity in their usage, and yet some students still made errors involving the use of those three grammar points. Those students were supposed to have advanced in the level of their English knowledge because they were writing their final reports after studying in the English department for almost three years. However, those errors had succeeded in making their appearance in their writings quite so many times. This was presumably caused by carelessness on the side of the students themselves, not for the reasons of their being ignorant of the topics. The other possibility was that they trusted their advisors so much that they entertained the idea that their advisors would clear up all the mess they had made in sentence building involving structure and grammar. In addition, the students could have worked on their final paper based on just wanting to fulfill an obligation. In other words, they were not motivated to showcase their capability in English writing for others or their juniors to look up to. However, all this would require further research and investigation.

Finally, the writers suggest that the students be more careful about writing their papers, especially with the use of grammar. Proofread everything and do not take things for granted. The details like word usage and word form, tenses, and the like should be put into consideration to create a good piece of writing. Remember, your writings represent you, your proficiency in English, and your professionalism at work. It is not just a matter of you performing a certain kind of obligation but more of you leaving the image that you create for yourself from which people would remember you.

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