
Grammatical Errors Made by Students in Speaking English

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ABSTRACT

This study is aimed to reveal the types of grammatical and the cause of errors made by students in speaking English in the English department of IAIN Takengon. It is necessary to identify, classify, and describe the various grammatical errors to build the students' awareness of using structured and standardized English rules in speaking. This research used qualitative descriptive. The research founds five types of grammatical errors in their speaking, such as omission, over-regulation, misformation, misordering, and addition. The students' highest grammatical errors were omission; then over-generalization; followed by misformation, misordering and addition. The causes of the errors were the intralingual factors, including omission, overgeneralization, and misformation. The interlingual factors were misordering and addition; such as overuse of prepositions and incorrect word order, which were based on their first language transfer. The last cause was the monotonous learning environment that causes anxiety in which they used the L1 based communication strategies. It is suggested that teachers should re-evaluate students' grammatical errors in their speaking to gradually improve the teaching of speaking method. Most importantly, teachers should provide a stress-free learning environment to reduce anxiety and enhance motivation.

1. INTRODUCTION

English is the most spoken language in the world. It is used to relate people across countries in many parts of life, such as social, science, technology, economy, and education. It is believed that if we want to compete globally, we should speak English well. Therefore, English has become the most recommended language to be learned in every country (Chania & Amri, 2019); (Hervina, 2014).

Indonesia considers English a foreign language because it is spoken after its native languages and its National language, Bahasa Indonesia. However, English is a compulsory subject taught from Elementary up to University level because by learning English, Indonesian people are expected to communicate and interact with the national and international people in any circumstances using written and spoken English. Here, then, why the curriculum is conducted to perform meaningful learning for students from the early education level. On the other hand, given that English is a foreign language in Indonesia, it is challenging for most students to learn it. As Setiyadi (2006) cited in (2014) points out, English tends to be very difficult to understand by Indonesian learners because the Indonesian language has no tenses similar to the tenses of English.

From the four language skills, speaking is the most difficult skill to achieve. Speaking is

considered the most difficult one because it requires the students to master grammar, contents, forms, and pronunciation (Chania & Amri, 2019). Practically speaking happens in real-time spontaneously. It forces the students to produce the utterances in the target language directly. For example, in the classroom, students must use English in the teaching and learning process; when asking questions, clarifying understanding, expressing opinions, and group discussions. Thornbury (2005) as cited in Lai-Mei Leong (2017), learners' correct use of grammatical structures requires the length and complexity of the utterances and well-structured clauses. It is unavoidable that they made many errors. However, references have shown that grammatical errors are common in foreign or second language learning. This is the manifestation of the first and foreign-language gap, which is considered too significant. As R. Ellis (1994) also stated, "errors reflect gaps in a learner's knowledge; they occur because the learner does not know what is correct structure."

Based on the researcher's teaching experience, it was observed that the first-semester students in the English department of IAIN Takengon were having problems in speaking English. Practically the students are fluent when carrying out oral communication but tend to be less accurate; they often speak using less structured language. When speaking, students generally did not realize and understand the classification of errors they were making. Thus, it is deemed necessary to identify, classify, and describe the various grammatical errors and their causes as an attempt to build their awareness of using structured and standardized English rules. As Simbolon, (2015) stated, concerning the crucial existing errors, research, in this case, is important to describe the types of grammatical errors in speaking made by the students together with their sources and causes. Therefore, the current research purposes were to describe; (1) the types of grammatical errors made by students in speaking; (2) the most common error made by students; and (3) the cause of why those errors were made.

1.1 Identifying Grammatical Errors

Many definitions of grammatical error can be found in various studies. (R. Ellis, 1994), for example, defines errors as deviations from the target language. Meanwhile, Tsui assessed the error in the grammar in the class as (1) something that the lecturer rejected because it was wrong or not correct, (2) something that the lecturer did not want, or (3) something that was not under the rules the lecturer intended (Tsui, 1995). Errors are defective forms of speech that appear regularly in the language of learners. They are considered wrong because they violate the norms of language. To refer to the grammatical error feature, Selinker (1972) as cited in Giri (2010) uses the term 'interlanguage', which signifies the gap between the mother tongue and the structure of the target language in the learners' speech.

People do make mistakes and errors while speaking a foreign or second language. Given that not all the incorrect grammatical uttered by students were referred to errors, it is necessary to differentiate between errors and mistakes made by students. Rod Ellis (1997) points out that errors are gaps in learners' knowledge due to lack of competence (They do not know what is correct); mistakes are occasional lapses in performance (learners unable to perform what they know). Furthermore, according to Dulay (1982) a mistake refers to a performance error that is either a random guess or "slip". It is a failure to utilize an available system correctly. An error is caused by the learners who are incompetent and usually unable

to recognize their errors or correct them. They do not understand the linguistics system of the language. However, Brown (1994) stated that learning involves a process in which success comes by profiting from mistakes by using mistakes to obtain feedback to make new attempts that successively approximate desired goals. In conclusion, mistakes are favorable to language learning, and errors are harmful to language learning

Errors can be classified into several types. In the book *Language Two* Dulay (1982) classified errors into four classes; error based on linguistic category, error based on surface strategy taxonomy, error based on comparative taxonomy, and error based on communicative effect taxonomy.

a. Error Based on Linguistic Category

The language components include phonology, syntax and morphology, semantics and lexicons, and discourse. Constituents include elements that consist of each language component. Syntax errors can be in primary or other clauses, for example, noun phrases, verb phrases, prepositions, adverbs, and adjectives.

b. Error Based on Surface Strategy Taxonomy

This classification highlights the altered surface structure. This type of error is classified into several parts, namely: Omission, Addition, Misformation, and Misordering.

1. Omission

The omission is the loss of an essential grammar item in sentences due to a lack of knowledge of a particular grammar system. Thus, the sentence in question becomes less structured.

2. Addition

This error is contradicting the previous one. This error is known as an item that does not have to appear in a sentence. This error usually occurs in the second language acquisition process stage (L2), when students have acquired some knowledge of the target language rules.

3. Misformation

This error is indicated by the emergence of a new language structure that the target language does not agree with. This structure's appearance results from initial knowledge integrated with a new understanding of the target language.

4. Over-generalization

Over-generalization refers to choosing a one-word class to represent another class without the particular characteristics of all stages of knowledge of the target language structure.

5. Misordering (Error arranging)

The wrong placement of morphemes or groups of morphemes in speech is the character of this error.

c. Error Based on Comparative Taxonomy

This classification is based on comparing the second language error structure (L2) and other constructs. For this classification of errors, there are four types of errors which are:

1. Development Error

Developmental errors are similar to those of children learning the target language

as their first language.

2. Intra-language error

Intra-language error is similar to the structure of semantic phrases or sentences in the learner's native language.

3. Ambiguous Error

Errors that reflect the structure of the student's native language are called ambiguous errors. These errors can be classified as the same as development or intra-language errors.

4. Other Errors

Another error is the error caused by the student's native language since students use it in their second language form.

d. Error Based on Communicative Effect Taxonomy

The taxonomic error for communicative effects is divided into two parts:

1. Global Error

Global communication errors prevent students from understanding some aspects of the message.

2. Local Error

Local errors themselves do not interfere with speech comprehension, usually because there is only a minor violation of a sentence segment.

1.2 Cause of Errors

(Brown, 1994) stated that there are four sources of error in language, namely first, Interlingual Error, which means errors associated with the original language (L1); and second, Intralingual Error, which is an error caused by a misunderstanding of the language being studied (L2). Errors are preceded by students who do not reflect the mother tongue's structure but generalizations based on partial exposure to the target language. Students try to ignore the actual rules, thus developing incompatible hypotheses with their mother tongue and target language. Furthermore, the learning context refers to the lecturer's classroom situation where this situation can encourage students to make wrong hypotheses about language. The lecturer's explanation encourages students to make errors because sometimes they provide inaccurate information with misleading definitions or grammatical generalizations. Finally, the communication strategy; According to Brown (1994), "it is clear that students are using production strategies to improve their ability to convey their entire message. But at the same time this technique can be a source of error in itself". Harmer (1983) also suggests four types of causes of intra-lingual error: 1). overgeneralization, 2). ignorance of the rule, 3). incomplete application rules, 4). semantic errors, such as constructing false concepts/systems.

Hubbard (1983), suggests simpler causes of errors such as 1). mother tongue disorders, 2). excessive generalization, and 3). error is driven by the teaching method. The type of error that Hubbard puts forward is almost the same as the three previous theories; it is just simple Norrish (2004) stated three main things that caused the error, including the following:

a. Carelessness

Carelessness is often closely linked to a lack of motivation. Many professors will admit that a student's Grammar mistake does not always happen if he does not lose interest; maybe the material being taught or the presentation is not suitable. One way to reduce the number of 'clumsy' errors in the paper is to involve students in an active search for errors made and discussing these errors in class.

b. First Language Interference

A definitive statement of the behaviorist theory of language learning states that language is fundamentally a set of habits. When we try to learn new practices, old ones become a distraction. The idea of mother tongue disorders as a significant contributor to errors in students' use of foreign languages is strongly related to views on how humans learn a language.

c. Translation

One of the most common situations is when a student is asked to say something in writing but realizes that they do not know an appropriate expression or structure. So, when he wants to communicate his ideas, he will fall back on the language system he is familiar with, namely from his mother tongue.

1.3. Error Analysis

Given the fact that the students made errors in their language learning process, some references suggest that the errors committed can be analyzed using a method named error analysis (Safrida, 2016); (Helmanda et al., 2018). To define error analysis, Richards (1977) stated that error analysis is the study of second and foreign language learners' errors. Error analysis can be carried out to (a) find out how well a person knows the language, (b) know how someone learns language, and (c) obtain information about common difficulties in language learning, as an aid in teaching or in preparing teaching materials. This definition emphasizes the error analysis function.

Brown (1994) gives another concept of error analysis. It defines error analysis as a process for observing, analyzing, and classifying deviations from the second language rules and then for revealing the system operated by the learner. It seems that this concept is the same as that proposed by Crystal (1987), error is a technique for identifying, classifying, and systematically interpreting the unacceptable forms produced by someone learning a foreign language, using linguistically provided principles and procedures. The three definitions above explain that error analysis is an activity to identify, classify and interpret or describe errors made by someone in writing or speaking. That is done to get information about common difficulties faced by someone in writing and speaking English sentences.

Error analysis was carried out in four consecutive stages, as mentioned by Coder (1981), namely (1) identification, (2) description, (3) explanation, and (4) classification. First, to identify an error, one must know what is meant by the term 'error.' Corder uses the word 'error' to mean utterances that are either superficial or grammatically distorted. He distinguishes between mistakes, deviations, and mistakes. Second, Corder states that the object of error analysis is to explain errors both linguistically and psychologically to help students learn. Systematic errors must be found so that we can understand the rules. This is a difficult task because students may be very inconsistent in their errors. Third, the explanation remains largely speculative due to limited knowledge of language learning's psychological and neurological processes. Fourth, Corder classifies errors in terms of

differences between student speech and the reconstructed version. In this way, the errors fall into four categories: omitting some of the necessary elements, unnecessary or incorrect addition of some elements; incorrect selection of elements; and wrong setting. It includes the linguistic level of error under the sub-fields of morphology, syntax, and lexicon.

The previous research results of errors analysis studies showed various types and causes of errors made by students. For example, Helmanda et al., (2018) research in Tarbiyah Faculty of Muhammadiyah University, Aceh; found four types of grammatical errors that classified into omission, misformation, disorder, and overgeneralization. In errors of omission, the students mostly omitted use of verbs, subject, object, prepositions, plural nouns, articles, conjunctions, superlatives form, passive verbs, and to be. The students made incorrect form of verbs, noun, articles, object pronoun, and chosen words in misformation type. For misordering type, the incorrect placement of verbs, adjectives, nouns, and modals was committed. Last, the students overused the adverb, objects, articles, prepositions, and to be, in overgeneralization. Also, the finding indicated that interlingua and intralingua transfer are two main factors that caused students' grammatical errors in speaking.

Meanwhile, the students' understanding of grammar and chosen vocabulary were indicated as the problems faced by students in speaking performance. Next, in the research by Chania and Amri, (2019), it was revealed that the most type of errors made by the SEA Debate students was omission error which consisted of 77 errors or 50.66% of errors. The causes of errors were affected by the students were inadequate learning, overgeneralization, and simplification. The first research showed four types of errors, named omission, misformation, disorder, and overgeneralization. The four errors were broken down into specific category of errors like omitting, misformatting, misordering, and overgeneralizing particular category of part of speeches when speaking. Furthermore, the errors were caused by first and second language transfer, supported by the incompetency in understanding grammar and choosing appropriate vocabulary. While, the second research concluded that the most common type of errors is omission with more than 50% of all errors committed by the students. The causes of errors are incompetency in understanding grammar and first or second language transfer. Both researches presented a quite similar findings related to types of errors and the cause.

2. METHOD

The current research type was descriptive with a qualitative approach. The type and approach of this research were chosen following the research objectives, such as identifying types of grammatical errors, highlighting the most common errors, and describing the cause of the errors. The instruments of the research were observation, interview, and document analysis. The data source used for the analysis resulted from the first-semester students' speaking performance during the final test in the English Department of IAIN Takengon. Twelve students participated in the research. The students were asked to talk about the topic "my experience" in front of the class. This topic was chosen because most students would likely have a strong interest in talking about this issue, encouraging them to share their life experiences.

All recorded transcriptions of student speaking performance were analyzed to identify each sentence with grammatical errors. This process is part of the analysis that requires a lot

of time and in-depth investigation because every sentence with grammatical errors must be codified. As the concept of error analysis proposed by Crystal (1987), error is a technique for identifying, classifying, and systematically interpreting the unacceptable forms produced by someone learning a foreign language, using linguistically provided principles and procedures. Based on the Surface Strategy Taxonomy, a specific code is used for each error, such as underline, circle, single arrow, checklist, and question mark.

Additionally, to know the most common errors, the formula used was as follows:

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100$$

Description:

P = percentage of errors

F = Frequency of the errors N = Total number of errors

As some of the data collected were in percentages, these numbers were not used as a means of judgment on the research subject but rather to describe the data qualitatively. As Fraenkell, J.R. & Wallen, (1993) stated, "Although there are some figures in the form of percentages, these figures and percentages are not simplified into judgments. Instead, they are discussed, analyzed, and explained using a qualitative approach".

The causes of the errors were based on Brown (1994) four sources of errors, such as Interlingual Error (L1); Intralingual Error (L2); Learning context and method; and Communication Strategy. Therefore, based on the Brown (1994) theory, an interview was conducted to reveal the cause of the errors made by students. By analyzing and providing descriptions, some recommendations and future pedagogical implications are expected to be presented.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Through speaking performance transcription, then the researcher analyzed the data provided by identifying, classifying, and describing the student grammatical errors. After several analysis stages, the researcher found that all students showed some problems in conveying meaning by using correct grammar. From the total number of 12 students who participated in the research, there were 245 errors committed, such as student 1 with 24 errors, student 2 with 17 errors, student 3 with 24 errors, student 4 with 23 errors, student 5 with 17 errors, student 6 with 27 errors, student 7 with 27 errors, student 8 with 14 errors, student 9 with 15 errors, student 10 with 16 errors, student 11 with 17 errors, and student 12 with 24 errors.

3.1 Classification of Errors

From the data shown above, it is understood that the number of student errors is very high. We can see the grammar errors classification by grouping the types, examples, and frequency of these errors. Based on the Surface Strategy Taxonomy, the results of the analysis show that there were five types of errors found, as summarized as follows:

Table 1. Total Data of errors

No	Name	O	Error Classification				Total of Errors
			A	MF	O-G	M	
1	Student 1	16	1	-	5	2	24
2	Student 2	13	-	-	4	-	17
3	Student 3	15	2	3	3	1	24
4	Student 4	11	2	-	7	3	23
5	Student 5	15	-	-	2	-	17
6	Student 6	15	1	3	6	2	27
7	Student 7	15	1	3	6	2	27
8	Student 8	13	-	-	1	-	14
9	Student 9	15	-	-	-	-	15
10	Student 10	13	-	2	1	-	16
11	Student 11	14	-	-	2	1	17
12	Student 12	15	1	3	3	2	24
		170	8	14	40	13	245
Total		72%	0.3%	11%	14%	0.6%	100%

From the data display above, we can see several types and the percentage of each error that was found in students speaking performance. The data tabulation shows that the error in omission gets the highest value, namely 170 or 72%, next is over-generalization with 40 errors or 14%, then followed by misinformation with 14 errors or 11%, misordering with 13 errors or 0.6%, and the last addition with 8 errors or 0.3%. Additionally, it can be concluded that the most common errors category made were misused or misplacing of verbs, nouns, conjunctions, pronouns, and preposition. To make the data clearer, the categories and sub-categories of grammatical errors are presented in the following table:

Table 3. Categories and Sub Categories of Grammatical Errors

Category	Subcategory					
Verbs	Missing	Tense	Single/Plural Pattern	Incorrect positive form	Incorrect negative form	Gerunds, infinitives, participles
Nouns	Missing	Single/Plural	Incorrect			
Conjunctions	Missing	Misplace	Incorrect			
Articles	Missing	Misuse	Not right			
Pronouns	Missing	Misuse	Not right			
Prepositions	Missing	Misuse	Not right			

Based on the data display, it can be seen that students' grammatical errors vary from one student to another. After analyzing student grammatical errors, the researcher

found that first semester students' highest grammatical errors are omission. The next is over-generalization, followed by misformation, misordering, and addition. Each type of error was discussed as follows:

a. Omission

Omission errors are indicated by missing an item that should appear in a speech. In short, an omission is the lack of form or grammar that is supposed to have in the sentence. Still, the students omit it—for example, missing article, verb, helping verb, preposition, punctuation, possessive case, object, and subject (Helmanda et al., 2018). In this research, the omission is the error with the highest frequency with 170 errors (72%). Here is an example: *Yesterday I join a cycling contest (False)*, *Yesterday I joined a cycling contest (True)*.

From the example above, students' significant error was in speaking in Past Tense. Time signals like "Yesterday" did not help them understand tense usage; therefore, they immediately use the first form of the verb, such as "join" instead of "joined".

b. Over-generalization

The selection of one grammar element to represent other grammar aspects is a general characteristic of the effort to generalize the grammar used. Over-generalization, amounted to 40 errors or 14% of the total errors made by students. From the above error, the students' first language causes the errors because they are not familiar with the grammar system of the target language; they make an error in pairing the subject with the verb "both Rossa and Lia ... is"; the reconstruction is "both Rossa and Lia were". The following is an example: *Both Rossa and Lia is going to Library (False)*, *Both Rossa and Lia are going to Library (True)*.

c. Misformation

This error category is a formation error regarding the use of regular markers used in places of irregular markers. Misformation, consists of 14 errors or 11%. Here is an example:

My father is old, and my grandfather is more old than my father (false). *My father is old, and my grandfather is older than my father (true)*

From the example above, the students' word to word translation causes errors because they ignore the correct word in the comparative sentence, "My father is old and my grand-father is older than my father", most of them make an error with "more old than...".

d. Misordering

The placement of one of the morphemes or groups of morphemes in speech is a feature of this error. Misordering means that one word cannot be arranged into another; it is not arranged in any order. Misordering (wrong setting), consisting of 13 errors or 0.6%. Here is an example: *What time you are going to be home? (True)* and *What time are you going to be home? (False)*.

e. Addition

This error is indicated by an item that does not necessarily appear in a sentence. this error consists of 8 or 0.3%. Here is an example: *It was too dark in there. (False)*. *It was too dark there. (True)*. From the above error, it can be seen that the

student made addition, she used the preposition "in" before "there" which was unnecessary.

3.2 Cause of Grammatical Errors

The interview result showed that the students' unawareness of the target language rules, primarily related to the verb forms, cause errors related to the use of verbs that far exceeded the other categories. The students' lack of target language knowledge dominantly causes the errors because they were not familiar with verb forms. They did not seem aware of the use of Verb 1 and Verb 2 for a particular type of sentence, especially in past tense. It indicated by the omission of past tense signals like "ed" or the irregular form of verb two, and the ignorance of the time signals such as "yesterday", "just now", and "an hour ago". According to Dulay (1982), missing the past tense marker is a kind of intralingual error.

The students' incompetency could indicate the other intralingual cause of error in making correct sentences in their speech. One of the cases was shown by students' errors in making a subject-verb agreement in a sentence; they usually overgeneralized the language rules. For example, the use of "is" instead of "are" for plural subjects in a sentence. This is in accordance with Simbolon (2015), who stated that overgeneralization deals with overgeneralizing the verb inflections, the use of article and preposition, simple present and present progressive pattern, and agreement between subject and verb or auxiliary verb.

The students also made errors in regular and irregular markers in a sentence, such as comparative adjective "more" and "er". This error is caused by the students' generalization of the grammar rules in which they felt confused with the using of comparative adjective "older and more old". It is called misformation, as Ruminar, (2018) states that misformation errors happen when the learner cannot produce the correct structure or morpheme in a sentence. The variations in English grammatical structures can cause the immense of misformation errors. The writer regarded this as part of intralingual errors.

Wrong order in the misordering classification of errors also committed by students. Some sentences were made by directly translating the first language grammatical rules into the target language. As Simbolon (2015) states wrong word choice, literal translation, and misordering let us know that the students still do not master the rules on applying the correct form of sentences well. The direct translation of Indonesian sentence structure into English is clearly visible in this error's classification. The student interlingual factor caused these errors.

Students commonly used the addition of preposition. For example, the use of preposition "in" before adverb of place "there". This addition was not necessarily be included in the sentence because that is going to be redundant and incorrect. This is due to Indonesian usually use the phrases like "masuk kedalam", "naik keatas", or "mundur kebelakang", so they also practised it in their English speaking. This example was also found in Ruminar (2018) research, in which she points out that the common error of addition in preposition, which Indonesian speakers often say, is the phrase "in here". They over-included the preposition "in" for the word "here". Those errors might be caused by the negative transfer of L1 translation (Interlingual).

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that there are two factors influence of students' grammatical errors in their speaking performance. The students' knowledge of grammatical rules and vocabulary is still poor. Therefore, they made errors based on the intralingual factors which include omission, overgeneralization, and misformation. Meanwhile, the interlingual factors are misordering and addition which were based on their first language transfer.

In the detailed description, the students admitted that they did not understand the grammar rules comprehensively; even though they have learned them in the class, they felt loss of words when speaking in a real-life context. Their hesitation causes this because the learning happens only in the classroom; they have very limited time to use English outside of the classroom in which the natural context to practice speaking was available. Furthermore, the use of L1 based communication strategies to overcome their communication problems such as literal translation and code-switching/mixing become the other cause of errors. Thus, errors such as omission, over-generalization, misformation, misordering, and addition occur in their speaking.

4. CONCLUSION

The writer also concludes that the most common error for students is grammar in omission with 170 errors or 72%, and it is caused by the first language and carelessness of students. Next was over-generalization with 40 errors or 14% caused by the student's first language and overgeneralization. Next is the error in over-regulation, with 14 errors or 11% caused by the teaching method and student translation. Then, misordering, there were about 13 errors with 0.6% caused by carelessness and their first language. There is also a type of Addition error caused by student carelessness with 8 errors or 0.3%. The errors they made were caused by the intralingual factors, including omission, overgeneralization, and misformation in the categories of verbs, nouns, conjunctions, pronouns, and prepositions. Additionally, the interlingual factors are misordering and addition in the category of overuse of prepositions and incorrect word order, which were based on their first language transfer. The last cause was the monotonous learning environment that causes anxiety in which they used the L1 based communication strategies that triggers grammatical errors.

Finally, this result suggests some valuable suggestions for strengthening and improving the method of teaching grammar classes, particularly for students to understand more comprehensive grammar rules. Teachers should use this finding to develop a program to improve grammar skills in various aspects and create more meaningful classroom activities to improve student grammar and encourage them to use it to communicate. Teachers should provide a friendly learning atmosphere so that the students will feel comfortable learning to speak English. In addition, teachers should know when and how to correct their learners' errors and mistakes and encourage them not to be afraid of making errors and mistakes. For further researchers, these study results are expected to provide new insights for future researchers about the urgency of re-evaluating student difficulties in using grammar. Then, this could be a new issue for in-depth research to present more valuable recommendations for grammar teaching.

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