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IDENTIFYING COMMON CONTRASTIVE ERRORS IN ENGLISH GRAMMAR MADE BY INDONESIAN EFL LEARNERS: CAUSES AND SOLUTION

Abstract

This study identifies common contrastive errors in English grammar made by Indonesian EFL learners, along with their causes and solutions. Such errors often arise from structural differences between the learner's first language (L1) and English (L2), potentially leading to misunderstandings. Using a descriptive qualitative research design, data were collected from eleven undergraduate students in the English Education program at Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara. Data collection methods included grammar tests and surveys to explore the underlying causes of errors. Analysis revealed that common errors included tense usage, subject-verb agreement, article usage, and preposition errors. These mistakes are attributed to language transfer, interlanguage phenomena, and a lack of understanding of English structures. The study recommends teaching strategies such as drilling activities, corrective feedback, context-based learning, and comparative grammar analysis to mitigate these errors. By implementing these approaches, it is hoped that learners will enhance their understanding and application of English grammar more effectively, ultimately improving their communication skills in English.

Keywords : Contrastive Errors, English Language Teaching, EFL Learning

INTRODUCTION

It is undeniable that mistakes are not only unavoidable but also essential when learning a language. Since "a learner's errors provide evidence of the system of the language that he is using (i.e., has learned) at a particular point in the course," Corder (1967) views errors as products of the learner language. Therefore, in order to comprehend the language learning process, it is necessary to closely examine the mistakes made by a foreign or second language learner when creating a new linguistic system. Errors can be regarded as the markers of the stages of the transition between the first language (L1) and second language (L2) or foreign language (FL) systems. Contrastive errors in English grammar represent a significant field of research, particularly as globalization encourages interaction among speakers of various languages. These mistakes frequently occur due to the distinctions between the grammatical frameworks of a learner's first language and that of English, potentially resulting in misunderstandings and miscommunication. Recognizing these contrastive errors can assist

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educators in creating more effective teaching methodologies for English language learners, which is vital in the contemporary interconnected environment.

A prevalent area for contrastive errors is verb tense. In numerous languages, verb tenses do not express the same information as they do in English. For example, languages such as Spanish and French may lack an equivalent to the English present perfect tense. Consequently, Spanish-speaking students might say "I have go" instead of "I have gone" (Xiao, 2022). This confusion emphasizes the necessity of explicit instruction in English grammar, especially concerning verb forms.

Another common origin of contrastive errors is prepositions. Prepositions may exhibit different meanings and uses across various languages. For instance, a French student might utter "I am good in math" instead of "I am good at math," which reflects a direct translation from their native language (Liu, 2021). Such mistakes can arise from learners trying to apply rules from their first language to English, highlighting the importance of focused practice and exposure to correct usage within context.

Additionally, word order poses challenges for non-native speakers. Many languages adhere to a different structure compared to English, which primarily follows subject-verb-object order. A Chinese learner could formulate a sentence as "I yesterday go to the market" instead of the accurate "I went to the market yesterday." This kind of mistake illustrates the need for instructors to offer clear comparisons between the students' native grammar and English conventions (Miller, 2023).

In spite of these errors, it is crucial to approach teaching with sensitivity and an understanding of cultural variations. Educators ought to foster an atmosphere in which students feel at ease making mistakes, as errors can serve as valuable opportunities for learning (Anderson, 2024). Motivating students to engage in speaking and writing without the anxiety of judgment can enhance their educational experience and assist them in internalizing the correct grammar.

In summary, contrastive errors in English grammar are an inherent component of the learning journey for non-native speakers. By concentrating on aspects such as verb tense, preposition use, and word order, educators can prepare learners with the capabilities they require to communicate efficiently in English. Recognizing and addressing these errors in the classroom will ultimately contribute to enhanced fluency and confidence in English language learners.

There have been reports that mistakes made by students in English are caused by both internal and external factors which includes: motivation, the way the frequency of the students used English, the exposure the students have about English from the environment and so on. and shown that the error has a common pattern, which usually in the literal translation problem that caused the mistakes, it is called a common mistake for a reason after all.. This article will focus on talking about the common mistakes, caused and solution for constactive error especially in grammar that might be done by EFL students. Although there are a lot of other articles talking about Error in English, there are only views talking about Constructive error especially made by Indonesian EFL students especially in Medan.

Literature Review

1. Contrastive Analysis Theory in Second Language Learning

Contrastive Analysis Theory (CAT) examines the structural differences and similarities between a learner's first language (L1) and second language (L2) to predict areas of linguistic difficulty or ease. The theory suggests that similarities between L1 and L2 facilitate positive transfer, while differences lead to negative transfer or interference, influencing the process of second language acquisition.

Khansir and Pakdel (2019) provided an extensive overview of CAT, emphasizing its significance in second language pedagogy, curriculum development, and instructional practices. Their findings indicated that CAT remains a valuable tool for understanding and addressing linguistic challenges in L2 acquisition. Building on this foundation, Al-Rickaby (2022) revisited CAT's role in modern language learning, acknowledging its critiques while advocating for its continued relevance in research. He suggested revisiting foundational studies to gain deeper insights into the theory's applicability.

A study by Perkins and Zhang (2022) explored the intersection of CAT and modern neuroimaging techniques. The research examined how first-language transfer influences second-language acquisition, demonstrating that CAT remains relevant in understanding linguistic transfer in contemporary contexts. Similarly, a study by Wu, et al. (2023) analyzed the role of CAT in comparing first and second language acquisition processes. This research highlighted strategies for leveraging insights from L1 learning to enhance L2 acquisition.

Moreover, a study by Rahal (2021) provided a comprehensive discussion on CAT as a framework for identifying structural similarities and differences between languages. The study underscored the theory's importance in designing language teaching methodologies tailored to learners' specific needs. Collectively, these studies affirm the enduring relevance of CAT in second language education, particularly in understanding cross-linguistic influences and designing effective pedagogical interventions.

2. Common Grammatical Errors in EFL Learners

EFL learners often struggle with grammatical accuracy, and analyzing their errors provides valuable insights for improving teaching strategies. Common grammatical errors reflect recurring challenges that hinder learners' proficiency in the target language.

Zewitra and Fauziah (2020) investigated grammatical errors in the final project writings of EFL students. Their analysis revealed that misformation, omission, addition, and word order errors were the most frequent, emphasizing the need for targeted instruction in these areas. Similarly, Nguyen (2020) examined grammatical errors in the writings of Vietnamese EFL students. The study identified prevalent issues with nouns, articles, verbs, word classes, and prepositions, highlighting the influence of L1 interference on learners' performance.

In 2024, a study Ehsanzadeh & Dehnad published in BMC Medical Education categorized high-frequency grammatical errors in EFL learners' written texts, focusing on recurring linguistic patterns. The findings emphasized the importance of structured grammar instruction tailored to learners' specific needs. Another study, Gazioğlu & Aydın (2023), analyzed the writings of Turkish EFL learners, revealing challenges with singular and plural forms due to L1 interference and varying levels of proficiency.

Additionally, a 2020 study by Kampookaew examined grammatical errors among Thai EFL learners, categorizing errors into ten types, including issues with nouns, articles, verbs, word classes, and prepositions. The study attributed these errors to factors such as first-language transfer and insufficient grammatical instruction.

These studies underscore the persistent grammatical challenges faced by EFL learners and provide a foundation for developing effective pedagogical approaches. By addressing the most frequent error types, educators can design interventions that enhance learners' linguistic accuracy and overall proficiency.

3. Interlanguage and Language Transfer

The influence of the mother tongue, specifically Indonesian, on English language learning is a significant phenomenon in second language acquisition. Mother tongue interference affects various aspects of learning English, including phonology, vocabulary, and grammar.

- **Interference in Word Choice** : Geria and Bawa (2019) revealed that hotel and restaurant staff in Bali often experience interference from Indonesian when using English. They tend to directly translate words or phrases from Indonesian into English without considering the correct context, leading to errors in word choice. For example, using the word "use" in the sentence "You cannot use that clothe to the temple" should be replaced with "wear," which is more contextually accurate.
- **Phonological Interference** : Phonological interference includes intonation, rhythm, pausing, and articulation. Hotel and restaurant staff in Bali display intonation and articulation influenced by their mother tongue, resulting in English pronunciation with strong Indonesian or Balinese accents. Certain English sounds, such as /th/, /f/, and /v/, are often mispronounced because they either do not exist or are rarely used in the Indonesian phonological system.
- **Grammatical Interference** : Grammatical interference occurs when the structure of the mother tongue influences the use of a second language. Fundamental differences in grammar between Indonesian and English can lead to errors, such as misuse of articles, word order, and sentence structure. For instance, in Indonesian, the subject of a

sentence can often be omitted without changing the meaning, whereas in English, omitting the subject can result in incomplete or unclear sentences.

- Factors Causing Interference : Mother tongue interference in learning English is caused by linguistic and non-linguistic factors. Linguistic factors include differences in phonological and grammatical systems between the two languages and a lack of understanding of English structures. Non-linguistic factors include attitudes toward language, motivation, and learning environments. A positive attitude toward English encourages learners to study and use the language accurately.

Indonesian mother tongue interference impacts English language learning in terms of vocabulary, phonology, and grammar. Understanding the differences between the two languages and raising awareness of potential interference can help learners overcome challenges stemming from their mother tongue.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a descriptive qualitative design, which aims to describe and analyze participants' performance and perceptions. As defined by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), qualitative research involves a systematic exploration of phenomena within their natural context, focusing on understanding participants' experiences and perspectives.

The participants of this research are eleven undergraduate students enrolled in an English Education program at a state university in North Sumatra, Indonesia. These students, aged between 21 to 23 years old, consist of both male and female individuals. All participants have been learning English since K-12, making them experienced learners who have undergone formal instruction in the language.

The data is collected using two instruments: Grammar Test and Survey. Firstly, participants will do a test to identify contrastive errors made. According to Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982), contrastive errors arise due to the influence of a learner's first language on the target language. The test includes grammar exercises covering common areas prone to interference from the participants' native language. Secondly, participants will answer open-ended questions to explore the causes behind the errors identified in the grammar test. As Patton (2002) suggests, open-ended questions provide participants with the opportunity to explain their perspectives, allowing researchers to gain deeper insights into their experiences and challenges. The collected data is analyzed through the following steps:

1. Error Identification: Errors in the grammar test are identified and categorized based on the taxonomy of errors proposed by Corder (1974), which includes omission, addition, substitution, and misordering.
2. Error Classification: Errors are classified into interlingual errors (caused by native language interference) and intralingual errors (stemming from difficulties within the target language itself) as suggested by Richards (1971).
3. Thematic Analysis: Data from the open-ended questions are analyzed thematically, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps: Familiarizing with the data; Generating initial codes; Searching for themes; Reviewing themes; Defining and naming themes; and Producing the report.

Participants' consent is obtained before data collection, and their responses are anonymized to ensure confidentiality and ethical compliance.

This methodology ensures a comprehensive exploration of contrastive errors and their underlying causes, providing valuable insights into the participants' language learning challenges.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Types of Common Errors

After conducting and analysing the test, the researcher find ot several data based on the analysis of participants' grammar test results and survey responses, several types of errors were identified:

Errors in Tense Usage:

Participants often struggled with using the correct tense, particularly in distinguishing between past, present, and future contexts. For instance, a common error was writing "I am go to school yesterday" instead of "I went to school yesterday."

Explanation: In this type of error, the participant tends to have difficulty in determining the tenses, and the auxiliary verbs usage. The word "am" Can't be used when we got to be after the auxiliary verb. This is one of the most common mistakes which can generally be found because students are still confused about auxiliary verb and tenses usage.

Errors in Plural and Singular Forms:

Misuse of plural and singular forms was frequently observed. An example is "She have two cat" instead of "She has two cats."

Explanation: The next error occurs due to the subject (She, He, It) form being supposed to change the form of the auxiliary verb 'have' into 'has'. Another error is the plural form which is supposed to change the noun into a plural noun. So it should be 'Cat+S' which turn into 'Cats'

Subject-Verb Agreement Errors:

Participants showed difficulty in aligning subjects with their corresponding verb forms, especially in sentences with singular or plural subjects. For example, "He go to the market" was used instead of "He goes to the market."

Explanation: This kind of error is rather similar to the last point, regarding the change of verb form due to certain subject. In this case, we should put S/es when the subject used are (She, He, and It) But we have to be aware that this kind form change only occur in Present Tense.

Incorrect Use of Articles:

Mistakes in the use of articles (e.g., "a," "an," and "the") were also prevalent. A common example is "I see apple" instead of "I see an apple."

Explanation: In English we supposed to use certain articles related. In this case, A singular noun is used to followed by article an/a to show that the noun is in singular form. Another case than the plural nouns that should be added by S/es

Preposition Errors:

Participants often made mistakes in using prepositions, such as writing "I go in the school" instead of "I go to the school."

Explanation: The preposition error is also commonly found in EFL students' writing test. Some words is supposed to have common preposition which is following the word. Most of the EFL students who don't have strong exposure to english would probably find some difficulty in determining the suitable preposition. As the verb 'Go' is used to be followed by preposition 'to'. So we could tell that each words has the suitable preposition following after.

Word Order Issues:

Errors in word order, especially in questions or complex sentences, were identified. For instance, participants wrote "What you are doing?" instead of the correct form, "What are you doing?"

Explanation: Some EFL Students still have difficulty in arranging the words sequences. Basically, the formula of english sentences are formulated by it's tenses or situation. But the related data above shows about how we use the interrogation form so the formula would tell us to use the grammatical form. Whis is (Question words +Auxiliary Verb). Basically, to ask question we should put the auxiliary verb first then we can put the subject after.

Spelling and Morphological Errors:

Mistakes in spelling or forming words also appeared, such as "He don't likes it" instead of "He doesn't like it."

Explanation: This error is kinda

Based on the analysis, these are several common errors which were found in the participants' test. These errors, identified through grammar tests and supported by participants' survey responses, reflect the challenges they face in understanding and consistently applying English grammar rules.

Causes of Errors

1. Language Transfer

Language transfer occurs when learners transfer rules or patterns from their first language (L1) to the target language (L2). In the context of Indonesian EFL learners, errors often arise due to structural differences between Bahasa Indonesia and English. The primary causes include:

1. Differences in Tenses
Bahasa Indonesia does not have a complex tense system like English, leading to difficulties in using the correct verb forms. For example:

- Incorrect sentence: He go to school yesterday.
- Cause: Lack of understanding of the past tense structure.
- 2. Verb Conjugation and Plural Forms
In Bahasa Indonesia, verbs do not change based on the subject or time, and plural forms are often indicated by context rather than explicit markers. This results in errors such as:
 - Incorrect sentence: She walk every day.
 - Cause: Failure to apply subject-verb agreement rules.
- 3. Articles (a, an, the)
Bahasa Indonesia does not use definite or indefinite articles, causing learners to omit articles in English sentences:
 - Incorrect sentence: I saw cat in park.
 - Cause: Ignorance or neglect of articles due to their absence in the native language.

2. Interlanguage

Interlanguage refers to a temporary language system developed by learners as they acquire a new language. Errors in interlanguage often reflect faulty learning strategies or limited knowledge of the target language. Common examples include:

1. Overgeneralization
Learners apply a rule valid for specific cases to all situations:
 - Incorrect sentence: He goed to school.
 - Cause: Overgeneralizing the past tense rule by adding "-ed" to all verbs.
2. Simplification
To avoid mistakes, learners simplify sentence structures:
 - Incorrect sentence: He no like it.
 - Cause: Lack of knowledge about negative structures in English.
3. Influence of Other Languages
Learners who study more than one foreign language sometimes transfer patterns from another language:
 - For example, using He is going school due to the influence of third languages like Hindi or German.

Proposed Solutions

To overcome the errors identified in the grammar tests and surveys, the following teaching strategies are suggested:

Drilling Activities:

Conducting repetitive and focused practice sessions on specific grammar rules, such as tenses, subject-verb agreement, and the use of articles. This method is designed to strengthen learners' familiarity with grammatical structures and enhance their accuracy through repetition.

Corrective Feedback:

Providing immediate and detailed feedback on learners' errors, including explanations of the mistakes and the correct usage. This approach allows learners to understand their errors and learn how to avoid them in the future.

Context-Based Learning:

Embedding grammar instruction within practical and meaningful contexts, such as role-plays, storytelling, or discussions. This strategy helps learners apply grammar rules in realistic scenarios, improving their understanding and retention.

Comparative Grammar Analysis:

Highlighting the differences between English grammar and learners' native language (e.g., Indonesian) to reduce the influence of native language interference. This comparison helps learners better understand the unique features of English grammar.

Collaborative Learning Activities:

Encouraging group work and discussions where learners can share their mistakes and collaboratively identify solutions. Peer learning promotes active engagement and reinforces correct grammar usage through mutual support.

By combining these strategies, learners can develop a deeper understanding of English grammar while improving their practical application of the language in diverse contexts.

CONCLUSION

Indonesian EFL learners often face common contrastive errors in English grammar due to significant differences between their first language, Indonesian and English. These errors include issues with verb tense usage, subject-verb agreement, article application, prepositions, and word order. The primary causes of these mistakes are language transfer and the development of interlanguage, where learners apply rules from their native language or simplify complex structures.

To effectively address these challenges, it is essential for educators to implement targeted teaching strategies. These may include repetitive drilling, immediate corrective feedback, context-based learning, comparative grammar analysis, and collaborative activities. By focusing on these areas, teachers can help students improve their grammatical accuracy and overall proficiency in English. Understanding and addressing these common errors not only enhances learners' fluency and confidence but also supports their ongoing language acquisition journey.

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