

ERROR ANALYSIS OF INFLECTIONAL AFFIXATION IN ACADEMIC WRITING OF FRESHMAN STUDENTS

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Abstract

Errors, defined as mistaken application of linguistic theory done by language learners, are generally seen as negative element in language learning. However, several researchers believed that error analysis can be used to understand how students process a target language. Understanding this will give insights on which areas of language the students find it difficult. Therefore, this study was conducted for this purpose. Descriptive qualitative methodology was employed to examine types of writing errors that are related to inflectional affixation performed by 8 freshman students. The errors that were identified in the students' written language were described in linguistic and surface category. Authoritative interpretation was conducted to investigate the cause of error occurrence through interview. The study finds that the students still face difficulty in subject-verb agreement, plurals, and past participle. Furthermore, it was also found that the dominant cause of the error occurrence is interlingual factors, negative transfer from their first language.

Keywords: Error analysis, writing errors, inflectional affixation, academic writing

Introduction

Writing is one of the four skills that students will learn in language learning process besides listening, reading, and speaking. However, mastering the art of writing is difficult because students need to undergo a set of process, such as brainstorming, writing, revising, editing, and publishing (Christine, 2003, as cited in Rahayu & Arrasyid, 2016). It is also considered to be the most challenging language skill that even native speakers exhibit hardship in writing (Johnstone, Ashbaugh, & Warfield, as cited in Javed, Juan, & Nazli, 2013). This complicated process makes writing in English become a challenging task for students, especially learners of English in English as Foreign Language (hereafter: EFL) context (Sermsook, Liamnimitr, & Pochakorn, 2017).

The difficulties in writing English has led learners to commit errors and mistake. In general, error is a deviation of language output from its standard (Ellis, 2008). However, one must be aware of the difference between non-systematic and systematic errors. The term 'non-systematic error' refers to the one-time violation of language rule because of slips due to certain physical or psychological condition, such as fatigue or memory lapse (Corder, 1967). Even an

adult and the most fluent speaker could still commit to this error, even though they have already mastered the language convention. Hence hereafter, this error in performance will be considered as a 'mistake'. The example of 'mistake' is when a student writes the sentence "My mother *work* at that company" when that particular student was already aware that one should add the suffix '-s' for third person singular subject.

On the other hand, systematic error is considered as deviation of language convention that was caused by knowledge gap that is yet to be filled in the learner's understanding (Corder, 1967). These errors occur as a signal that language learning is ongoing because the occurrence of these errors entails the learners' current understanding of the target language. Corder (1967, as cited in Gass & Selinker, 2008) believed that these errors are important because it provides a window to overview learners' understanding of the target language. If these errors are properly analysed, then the result of the study could be used as a tool for learners to improve their target language learning. The example of systematic error is when a student writes the sentence "My father *work* at that factory" because the student never knew about the rule of subject-verb agreement in English language.

There are two main causes of error occurrence, which are interlingual factor and intralingual factor (Gass & Selinker, 2008). The development of second language learning, a process of learning any other language after the first language (Ellis, 2008), is different with the development of the first language. Since second language learning will occur after the first language is largely acquired, the learning process will be interfered with the learner's knowledge of the first language. While first language learning involves the learners to construct their language competency from ground zero, second language learning involves the learners to use the characteristics of their first language as a comparison tool to learn the target language (Ellis, 2008). This phenomenon is the interlingual factor of error occurrence, often referred to as language transfer.

The result of language transfer could be either positive transfer or negative transfer. Positive transfer will occur if the rules of the first language is similar with the target language (Ellis, 2008). For example, French learners of L2 English will learn the target language faster than Persian learners because more language rules of English and French converge compared to English and Persian (Gass, 1979, 1983, as cited in Ellis, 2008). Conversely, negative transfer will occur if the rules of the first language differs with the target language. For instance, half of Chinese learners of L2 English errors were caused by the usage of Chinese grammar in English corpus, in which the two language rules are mostly different (Tran-Chi-Chau, 1975, as cited in Ellis, 2008). Hence, negative transfer is one of the causes of error occurrence in learning new language.

The other cause of error occurrence is known as intralingual factor. Errors that are caused by this factor are errors due to learner's failure to correctly apply certain language rule in certain circumstances (Ellis, 2008). In other words, it is the kind of error that infants made when they learn to use their first language for the first time. These errors are not caused by influence of first language (Lim, 2010, as cited in Al-Khresheh, 2016); it was committed due to learners' inability to fully grasp the target language rule. Consequently, intralingual errors are committed due to overgeneralisation of language rules, ignorance of rule

restrictions, incomplete application of rules, and hypothesis of false concept (Ellis, 2008).

While errors are generally seen as a negative element of language that needs to be eradicated, some researchers believed otherwise through the study of error analysis. As the name suggests, the occurrence of these systematic errors can be utilized as a tool to analyse students' language learning process (Corder, 1967). Only through understanding the students' current language knowledge can a teacher provide comprehensible inputs to make language learning more meaningful to the students (Krashen, 1985, in Gass & Selinker, 2008). In this perspective, the act of committing error is no longer seen as an obstacle of language output, but as a sign that the students are learning more about the target language. Analysing these errors serves several purposes: students are able to know the level of their understanding of the target language, while teachers are able to know the areas of language that the students need to improve and using that knowledge to give comprehensible inputs to the students (Corder, 1967).

The study of error analysis can be done on the students' written language output. One example of writing that bears challenge is academic writing, which refers to any kind of written composition to fulfil assignments in university (Mutimani, 2016). This piece of writing is challenging because it involves complicated intellectual effort to produce a legitimate academic work (Grami, 2010, as cited in Mutimani, 2016). Errors that occur in academic writing could result in low quality of academic writing, which in turn will also lead to low academic achievement. In the perspective of error analyst, the errors occurred in students' writing could be used to remediate students' writing quality, and consequently, their academic achievement.

In several universities, various academic writing (*e.g.* in form of essay, paper, *etc.*) is used as one of examination methods of summative assessment). Subsequently, these students are expected to write proficient academic writing in English to obtain good grades in their academic transcript. However, fulfilling this expectation is challenging for them due to the huge gap between secondary education and higher education (Mutimani, 2016). Therefore, committing error in their writing is common due to this reason. Recurrence of error commitment in academic writing may lower students' academic achievement, which could undermine the students' life in the future.

This error analysis study focused on morphological errors, specifically in inflectional affixation, due to EFL learners' frequent difficulty in this linguistic feature. This claim is supported by various error analysis study in the context of EFL, which showed that errors related to morphology is one of the most frequent types of error that occur in students' writing. For instance, Andrian (2015) conducted an error analysis study to Indonesian undergraduate students, and he found that error in tenses and subject-verb agreement is the frequent type of errors that exist in students' writing. Karim, Mohamed, Ismail, Shahed, Rahman, and Haque's (2018) study also produce similar result to Andrian, where morphological-related errors such as errors in verbs, tenses, and subject-verb agreement were responsible for 61 percent of all grammatical errors that the Bangladesh students committed. Hence, morphological errors specified in inflectional affixation was focused in this research.

In brief, this research is significant for the lecturers to understand the students' level of language competency (Corder, 1967), to identify the students learning process of language structure so the teachers can aid them to provide comprehensible inputs to make language learning more meaningful (Krashen, 1985, as cited in Gass & Selinker, 2008). Furthermore, the result of this research would be significant for the students because it is used as a feedback to aid their language learning process (Corder, 1967), hence improving their English language skill. After the target language errors have been analysed, the nature of the difficulty experienced by the learners will be uncovered (Al-Khresheh, 2016), thus the students could evaluate their own language learning strategy and avoid committing to the errors that have been explained to them in this research. Therefore, error analysis study is conducted to students' academic writing to improve their English language learning process.

Theory

As the name suggests, error analysis study is a form of linguistic study that puts emphasis on the errors that learners make (Gass & Selinker, 2008). According to James (1998, in Al-khresheh, 2016), error analysis is "a process of determining the incidence, nature, causes, and consequences of unsuccessful language." This study was pioneered by Stephen Pit Corder, whom proposed a point of view where learners' errors are not to be completely avoided, but it could be utilized to investigate the cognitive process on how they process language (Corder, 1967). This knowledge can be utilized further for pedagogical purposes to improve the language learning, which will be beneficial for the learners themselves. Brown (1994, in Al-khresheh, 2016) added that error analysis has significant value in classroom research, as the result could help language learners determine the room of improvement for their language learning process.

Error analysis theory arose to answer the severe criticism toward contrastive analysis study (Al-khresheh, 2016). Contrastive analysis is a method of comparing languages to reveal possible errors for the purpose of differentiating the rule that can be transferred to the second language (Gass & Selinker, 2008). Dulay and Burt (1974) added that contrastive analysis lies on the ideas that language learning is habit formation and old habit of first language will either hampers or eases the new habit of the target language. Following the previous ideas, contrastive analysis holds belief that errors occurred solely due to interference factors.

Despite having the similarity of analysing learners' errors for pedagogical purposes, contrastive analysis was criticized due to its underlying belief that interlingual factor was the only factor of error occurrence (Al-khresheh, 2016). The application of contrastive analysis was not capable to explain the occurrence of errors that was caused by intralingual factor. In contrast, error analysis study had an underlying belief that second language was learned in a similar manner with first language learning (Corder, 1967), thus intralingual factor was also accounted to explain the nature of the errors. Therefore, error analysis was deemed to be the most appropriate tool to analyze learners' errors (Al-khresheh, 2016). Corder (1974, as cited in Ellis, 2008) formulated several steps to conduct error analysis study. Generally, there are five steps, which are collection of samples of learners' language, identification of errors, description of errors, explanation of errors.

The difference between the role of ‘error’ and ‘mistake’ needs to be clarified in when identifying the learners’ errors. Corder (1967) defined error as a systematic deviation that occurs due to lack of language competence, while mistake is caused by poor language performance. While error analysis was argued to focus solely on the learners’ error (Corder, 1967), but in the reality, identifying which are errors and which are mistakes is still a complexity for error analyst (Ellis, 2008), which is important. For instance, if a learner inconsistently uses an incorrect form of a language structure, it does not mean that the deviation can be considered as a mistake, since it is likely that the learners’ knowledge of the target form is only mastered partially.

For example, a learner might write the following sentences to convey plurality in his writing:

- (2.1) My sisters are older than me
- (2.2) My three sister are older than me

If the term ‘mistake’ is solely perceived as ‘an inconsistent deviation of language that is caused by language performance’, then the example (2.2) can be considered as a mistake, since the learner can write the sentence (2.1) correctly. However, it is also possible that the example (2.2) is a form of a learner’s misunderstanding of language structure, where the students perceives that plural ‘-s’ is no longer needed for nouns with specific quantifiers and would lead to redundancy if that suffix is added. If this is the case, then the example (2.2) can be considered as an intralingual errors, not a mistake.

With the issue of confusing distinction between error and mistake, Gass and Selinker (2008) shed light to clarify the role of these terminologies in error analysis. They claimed that deviation in language are only perceivable as ‘systematic error’ from the perspective of teachers or researchers, not from the learners. Along the learners’ language learning process, they actively construct grammatical system of the target language in their mind. Systematic error is caused by the lack of language competency, in other words, their constructed grammatical system of the target language is not in accordance with the correct one. Thus, there will never be ‘systematic error’ in the learners’ perspective because they perceive that those ‘systematic error’ is correct based on their current understanding.

For example, a learner might write the following utterance:

- (2.3) I no speak

Researchers might understand that the example (2.3) is erroneous, hence marking this as an ‘error’, but the learner who write this might perceive otherwise. If the learner has the understanding that the utterance (2.3) is acceptable based on his current grammatical system in his mind, then it is not a ‘systematic error’ in his perspective. However, if the learner initial intention is to write ‘I no speaks’ instead, then the sentence (2.3) can be considered as a mistake, or ‘non-systematic error’, but the utterance ‘I no speaks’ is still a ‘systematic error’ in the teachers’ perspective. The illustration of this explanation can be seen in the following figures.

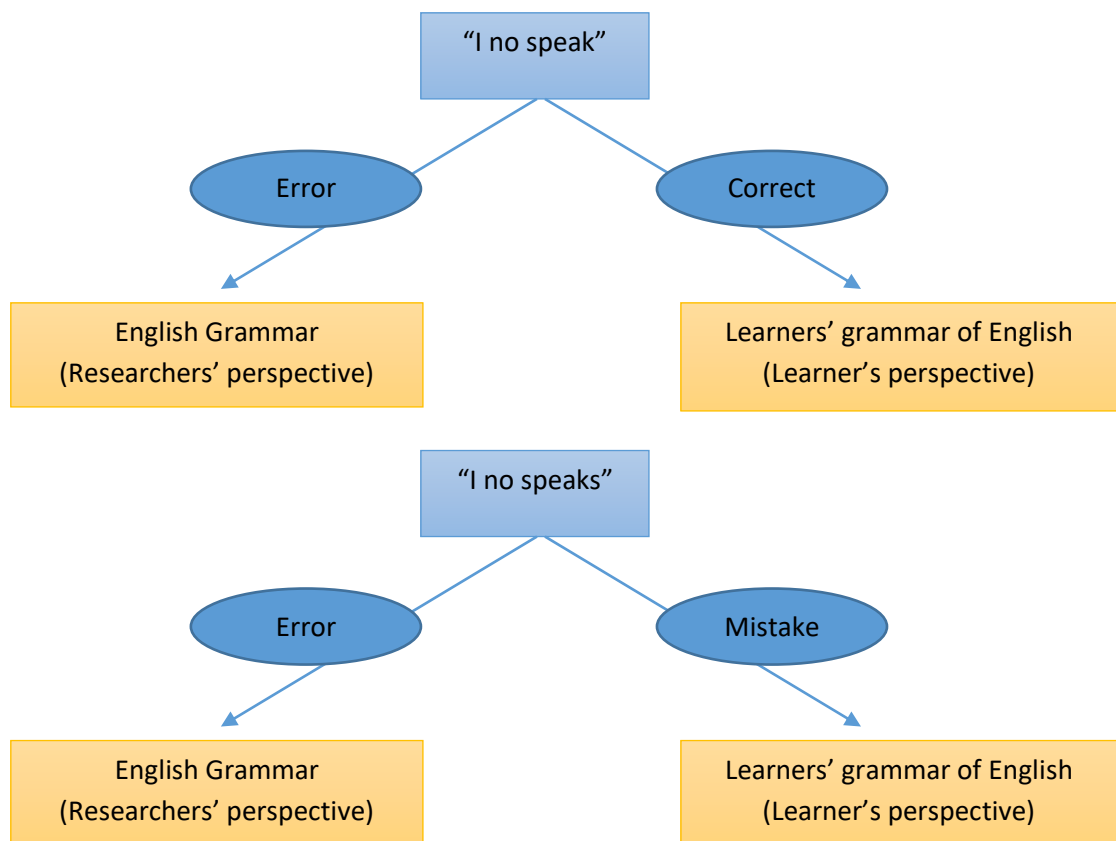


Figure 1: Difference between error and mistake

Therefore, error analysts can identify errors that occurred in the language sample based on their perspective. One of the methods that can be used to justify ‘error’ and ‘mistake’ is to conduct an ‘authoritative interpretation’, where the researcher consults to the learners themselves to determine whether an error is ‘error’ or ‘mistake’ (Corder, 1981). If in the later stage some errors are discovered to be a mistake, then those can be distinguished in the study, since the focus of error analysis is limited only to systematic error (Corder, 1967).

After identifying the errors, they are described based on their linguistic category, which is the description based on the certain language elements such as errors in plural, possessive, subject-verb agreement, and so on. Furthermore, it is also described based on surface category, which is the description based on noticeable surface features of language, such as errors of omission, errors of addition, errors of selection, and errors of ordering.

Table 1: Error taxonomy based on surface strategy

| Category | Description | Example |
|---------------------|---|---|
| Errors of omission | The absence of an element that should be included. | A strange thing happen to me yesterday. |
| Errors of addition | The presence of an element that should not be included. | The books is here. |
| Errors of selection | The use of the wrong item instead of the correct one. | My friend is oldest than me. |
| Errors of ordering | The use of correct item, but in a wrong sequence. | He was get upping from his bed. |

The next step after description of errors is to explain the cause of their occurrence. To explain the errors, Corder (1981) generated a term called ‘authoritative interpretation’, in which the error analyst could directly ask the learners about their intention behind the erroneous utterances that they produced. In brief, authoritative interpretation is similar to an interview, since both involves conversation with purpose. However, in the case where learners are not available for consultation, it is possible for error analysts to interpret the cause of errors by determining the form of errors and its situational context, although it is trickier than authoritative interpretation.

There are two general causes of error, which are interlingual factor and intralingual factor. Interlingual errors, also known as transfer errors, are error that occurred due to interference of the first language, while intralingual errors occurred naturally in the process of developing language, similar to first language error (Al-khresheh, 2016). There are four possible explanation of intralingual errors. First is overgeneralization, which is defined as the use of wrong language structure based on the learners’ knowledge of other forms (Richards, 1974). Second is ignorance of rule restriction, which is defined as the learners; behaviour of ignoring the exception of certain language rule (Richards, 1974), Third is incomplete application of rule, which is the learners’ inability to fully implement the complete knowledge of language rule (Richards, 1974). Finally, there is hypothesis of false concept, which is the result of learners’ wrong comprehension of certain distinction of target language rule (Richards, 1974).

Method

Atmowardoyo (2018) stated that the “studies of learners’ errors in their language production are actually descriptive in nature.” Thus, error analysis research can be included in the umbrella term of descriptive research. Unlike other descriptive research, however, error analysis research has a specific set of procedure, thus these studies are usually classified as ‘error analysis’. Hence, this study employed qualitative descriptive as its research design because the aim of this study is to present a detailed description of morphological errors in students’ writing along with the cause of the occurrence.

Settings and Participants

This study took place in Sampoerna University, a private university located in South Jakarta, because it employed academic writing as one of its examination

methods, such as research paper and research project (Sampoerna University Student Handbook, n.d). The sample learners are freshman students that from Writing Convention and Grammar Analysis class because it was the mandatory course that all English Education freshman should take and it laid foundation of grammatical knowledge to the students' academic writing.

Eight out of twenty-four students of English Education Department of Sampoerna University were chosen to be the participants of this research. These students acquired Bahasa Indonesia as their first language and English as their second language. In regards to their third language, some learned Bahasa Jawa, Bahasa Sunda, Bahasa Palembang, and did not have a third language. Even though their third language were heterogenous, but this will not be a major issue because second language learning is interfered by first language knowledge only, not the third language and so forth (Hammarberg, 2010). Therefore, this research partook eight students to be the participants of this study.

In general, these eight participants have acquired English language since they were still little. Some of the students have acquired English since kindergarten and some have acquired English since elementary school. However, there is one student that acquired the English language since high school, but given the need of communicating in English in his high school, this particular student was more comfortable to address English as his second language instead of his regional language. This is in line with Hammarberg's (2010) claim that multilingual language should be labelled based on language learning experience instead of the order of acquisition.

Instrument and Data Analysis Technique

To answer the research questions, two kinds of data were collected in this study. Firstly, the frequency of the morphological error occurrence was the data needed to answer the first research question. For this purpose, the researcher collaborated with the course lecturer to hold an International English Language Testing System (hereafter: IELTS) academic writing test simulation. IELTS writing test is a timed task, which could guarantee the naturality of the sample language. To identify the error frequency of the collected sample language, two reviewers helped to mark and identify the error in the students' writing. The reviewers that helped in the error identification process are lecturers from English Education Department of Sampoerna University, hence they are credible to identify the errors accurately. In brief, the error frequency data was checked by two experts in English language, thus the credibility of this data was verified.

Secondly, the errors that were identified needed to be classified to understand the cognitive process in language learning (Ellis, 2008). The errors were classified in two categories, which are linguistic categories and surface category. In this research, linguistic categorization is limited only to errors in inflectional affixation, which are errors in pluralism, errors in possessive, errors in subject-verb agreement, errors in past tense, errors in present participle, errors in past participle, errors in comparative, and errors in superlative. In terms of surface categorization, the errors were classified into four categories, which are errors of omission, errors of addition, errors of selection, and errors of ordering (Corder, 1981, as cited in Al-khresheh, 2016).

Finally, the cause students' error was another data that was necessary to answer the second research objective. The instrument used to collect this data was a set of interview questions that will be used to elicit the cause of students' errors in their writing. To achieve this purpose, a semi structured interview was used as an instrument to investigate the cause of students' errors. The interview was proceeded while showing examples of erroneous sentence from the top three frequent errors one by one and asking the participants a set of questions to investigate the cause of the error in that particular sentence. The questions for the interview are illustrated in the following figure:

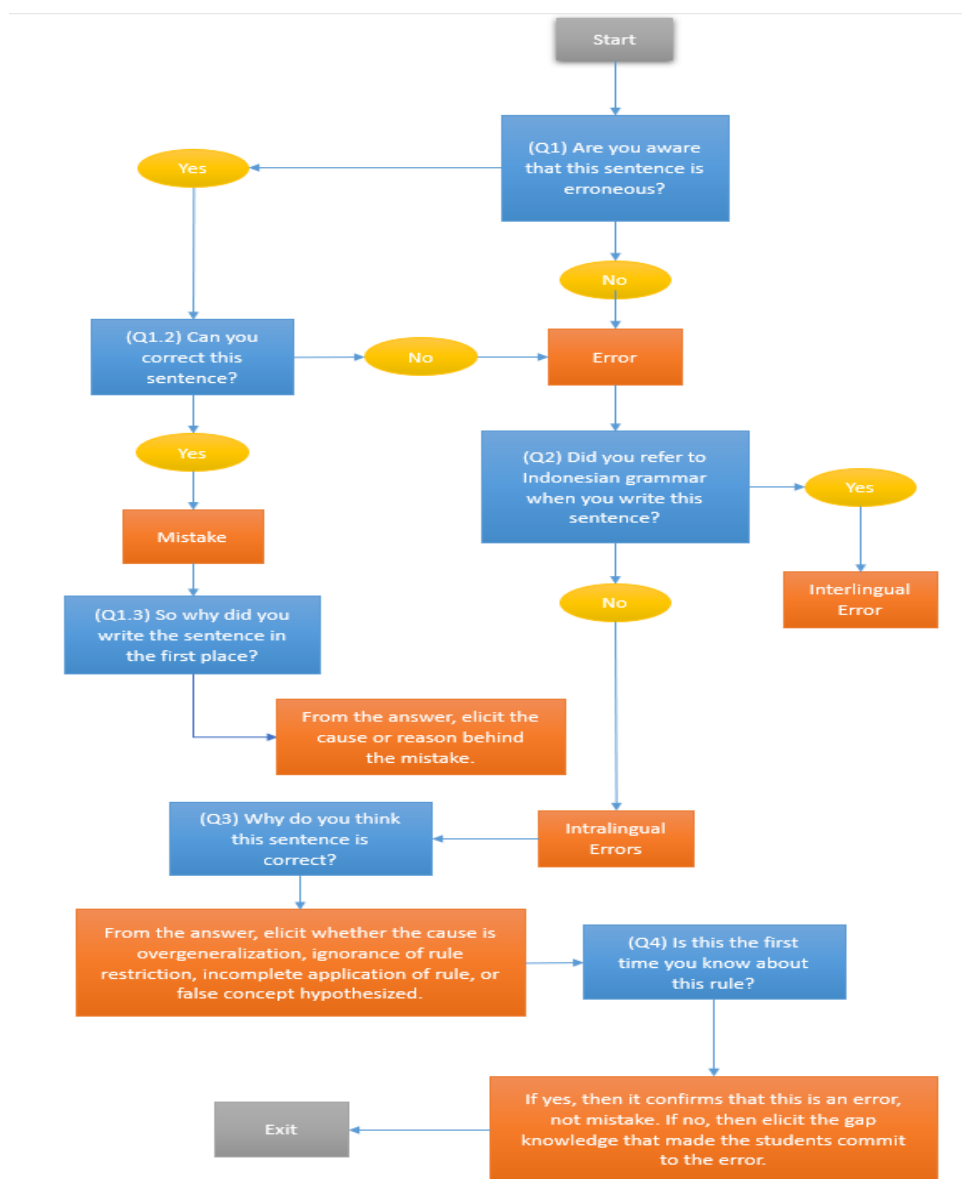


Figure 2: Interview guideline

After the interview was conducted, framework analysis method was used to code and analyze the result of the interview. This method is defined as an approach to qualitative data analysis that enables researchers to systematically organize and manage textual data, particularly in analyzing and identifying

specific themes (Hackett & Strickland, 2018). The predetermined themes that were used during the coding process was based on Corder’s explanation about intralingual errors, which are overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restriction, incomplete application of rule, and hypothesis of false concept.

As shown in Figure 2, the interview questions were indexed into “Q1”, “Q2”, “Q3”, etc. This set of questions was asked for each erroneous sentence that the student commit. For example, in “Sentence 1”, the first erroneous sentence that the student commit, the student was prompted to answer Q1. According to the answer, the question would progress to either Q1.2 or Q2, and so on until the cause of error in that sentence was elicited. After “Sentence 1” is done, then the interview will proceed to “Sentence 2”, the second erroneous sentence that the student commit, and the questioning cycle was repeated. The answer of Q3 (and possibly Q4) was coded based on the predetermined themes based on Corder’s explanation about intralingual errors to elicit the cause of error in each sentence.

Findings and Discussion

After the sample language was marked and identified by the reviewers, 115 errors were discovered in the participants’ written language. This research was specified to analyze eight types of error that were related with inflectional affixes, which are possessive errors, subject-verb agreement errors, past tense errors, present participle errors, past participle errors, comparative errors, and superlative errors. The result of this research showed that the participants committed at least one error in eight of these linguistic classifications.

Table 2: Error Frequency

| Error Types/Participant | P1 | P2 | P3 | P4 | P5 | P6 | P7 | P8 | Total | Percent | Rank |
|-------------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|-------------|------|
| Possessive | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2% | 7 |
| Plural | 2 | 3 | 6 | 0 | 2 | 6 | 12 | 7 | 38 | 33% | 2 |
| Subject-verb Agreement | 10 | 3 | 1 | 6 | 2 | 1 | 10 | 10 | 43 | 37% | 1 |
| Past Tense | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2% | 6 |
| Present Participle | 2 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 9 | 8% | 4 |
| Past Participle | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 14 | 12% | 3 |
| Comparative | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | 5% | 5 |
| Superlative | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1% | 8 |
| Total | 15 | 17 | 9 | 10 | 5 | 11 | 28 | 20 | 115 | 100% | |

Table 4.1 exhibited that the error occurrence in this study was somewhat variative among the participants. For instance, Participant 2 committed six errors in comparative, despite other participants did not commit to that error type. Similar case was evident in Participant 5 who committed a superlative error when the other participants do not have trouble with. Regardless of the variation, however, most of the participants of this research share similar problem in

subject-verb agreement errors, plural errors, and past participle errors. In contrast, superlative errors, possessive errors, and past tense errors were the types of error that the students have least problem with.

Description based on Surface Category

This section will elaborate the errors that were identified in this research and describe them based on surface categorization, as cited from Corder (1981). There will subtopics to describe the error commitment based on the error types to give insights on how the students commit their error in inflectional affixes.

Subject-verb Agreement Errors

In case of subject-verb agreement errors, there are 43 errors that were identified in the participants’ language, and it accounted as the most frequent errors to appear in the writing. After describing these 43 errors into surface category, it was found that error in omission, error in addition, and error in selection were behind these erroneous sentences. Similar to plural errors, there were no error in ordering in subject-verb agreement errors, possibly due to this linguistic feature revolves around modifying either the subject or verb, not ordering them in particular sequence. Several samples of those subject-verb agreement errors can be seen in the table below:

Table 3: Surface Category of Subject-verb Agreement Errors

| No | Surface Category | Percentage | Sample of Erroneous Sentence | Corrected Sentence |
|----|-------------------|------------|--|--|
| 1 | Error in Omission | 47% | ...if every country in the world stop their nonsense such as wars and conquers attempts towards others and start focusing to renew the home of humanity... | ...if every country in the world stops their nonsense such as wars and conquers attempts towards others and starts focusing to renew the home of humanity... |
| | | | If the country supportive in preventing the disasters, so the natural disaster can be solved. | If the country is supportive in preventing the disasters, so the natural disaster can be solved. |
| | | | Environment problems requires an international solution or an international movement. | Environment problems require an international solution or an international movement. |
| 2 | Error in Addition | 14% | In many other cases, other countries also often show their concern and offered their help by giving food supplies, donations, etc. | In many other cases, other countries also often show their concern and offer their help by giving food supplies, donations, etc. |

| No | Surface Category | Percentage | Sample of Erroneous Sentence | Corrected Sentence |
|----|--------------------|------------|---|---|
| 3 | Error in Selection | 40% | Environmental problems has always been around, no matter which part of the globe... Most countries' land are close to each other and in other meaning... | Environmental problems have always been around, no matter which part of the globe... Most countries' land is close to each other and in other meaning... |

It could be seen that error in omission of suffixes related to subject-verb agreement is the most frequent error in the scope of subject-verb agreement errors, with the percentage of 47 percent. The example of this kind of error is in the sentence “...if every country in the world stop their nonsense such as wars and conquers attempts towards others and start focusing to renew the home of humanity...” In this sentence, the word “stop” and “start” was written without the suffix ‘-s’, despite the subject of this sentence is “every country”, which is singular. Thus, this sentence is considered erroneous. Another example would be the sentence “if the country supportive in preventing the disasters, so the natural disaster can be solved.” This sentence is missing a main verb, which is an essential element in making a proper sentence, thus this is also considered erroneous.

Furthermore, error in addition of suffixes related to subject-verb agreement contributed to 14 percent of all error in subject-verb agreement. The example of this kind of error is evident in the sentence “Environment problems requires an international solution or an international movement.” In this sentence, the writer added the suffix ‘-s’ in the verb “require”, which is unnecessary since the subject is in plural form (environment problems). Hence, adding the suffix ‘-s’ makes the sentence erroneous, since the verb did not agree with the plural subject. Another example can be seen in the sentence “In many other cases, other countries also often show their concern and offered their help by giving food supplies, donations, etc.” In this sentence, the student also added the suffix ‘-ed’ in the word “offer”, which was not parallel with the other verb “show”. In this case, the student should choose whether to write in present tense (“other countries also show their concern and offer their help”) or in past tense (“other countries also showed their concern and offered their help”). Accordingly, the reviewer decided that the present context of the sentence is more suitable than the past tense, hence the correction is “other countries also show their concern and offer their help”.

In regards to the error in selection of elements related to subject-verb agreement, the errors that were categorized under this surface structure were mostly the cases of the student choosing the wrong be verb in place of the correct one. This error contributed 40 percent to all subject-verb agreement error. The example of this error is evident in the sentence “Environmental problems has always been around, no matter which part of the globe.” Here, the writer mistakenly chose the verb ‘has’ instead of ‘have’, since ‘has’ does not agree with the plural subject “environmental problems”. The same case was applied in the sentence “Most countries’ land are close to each other and in other meaning,”

where the writer chose the verb ‘are’ in place of ‘is’. This sentence was considered erroneous because the verb ‘are’ does not agree with the uncountable noun ‘land’.

Plural Errors

In terms of plural errors, there are 38 errors that were found in the students’ language, and it is the second most frequent error in the participants’ language. Based on surface category, these 38 errors were described as errors in omission, errors in addition, and errors in selection. According to the result of error description process, no plural errors were described as error in ordering, most likely since plurality is only conveyed through noun modification, such as using suffix ‘-s’ or through vowel mutation. A conclusion of these errors is presented in the table below:

Table 4: Surface Category of Plural Errors

| No | Surface Category | Percentage | Sample of Erroneous Sentence | Corrected Sentence |
|----|--------------------|------------|--|---|
| 1 | Error in Omission | 68% | One of the case that shows that environmental problems are an international problems is when Indonesia’s forest is on fire... ...there are many international movement that is being held to save the environment. ...it reduce the use of plastic, stuffs that cannot be recycle, and several one-time use stuffs . | One of the cases that shows that environmental problems are an international problem is when Indonesia’s forest is on fire... ...there are many international movements that is being held to save the environment. ...it reduce the use of plastic, stuff that cannot be recycle, and several one-time use stuff . |
| 2 | Error in Addition | 26% | The environmental ethics should be more evaluated by every developed and developing countries because it is... | The environmental ethics should be more evaluated by every developed and developing country because it is... |
| 3 | Error in Selection | 5% | For instance, if the country makes a law & regulations about the trash issue. | For instance, if the country makes laws & regulations about the trash issue. |

As seen in Table 4.3, omission of suffix ‘-s’ is the most frequent kind of plural errors in the participants’ language, with the percentage of 68 percent. The example of this kind of sentence is “*One of the case that shows that*

environmental problems are an international problems is when Indonesia’s forest is on fire...” In this sentence, the writer did not add the suffix ‘-s’ in the word “case”, which is required because this phrase gives meaning of exemplifying one case out of many other cases. Another case of error in omission of plural affixes is evident in the sentence “...*there are many international movement that is being held to save the environment.*” In this sentence, the writer wrote “international movement” without the suffix ‘-s’, despite following plural determiner “many”, which is erroneous.

Besides error in omission of plural, error in addition of unnecessary plural form is also apparent in the participants’ language. This kind of error contributed 26 percent to the total of plural errors. For instance, the sentence “...*it reduce the use of plastic, stuffs that cannot be recycle, and several one-time use stuffs*” was erroneous because the word “stuff” is written with the suffix ‘-s’, despite being an uncountable noun. Uncountable nouns does not have a plural form, hence adding plural to the noun was unnecessary and it makes the sentence erroneous. Another case of this kind of error can be seen in this sentence “*The environmental ethics should be more evaluated by every developed and developing countries because it is...*” In this sentence, the student wrote “developed and developing countries” with a suffix ‘-s’ to convey pluralism, even though the phrase was following the singular determiner “every”, thus this sentence is considered as error by the reviewer.

Lastly, error in selection of plural form also contributed slightly to the plural errors in the students’ corpus. Out of all 38 plural errors, there are only two errors that were categorized as error in selection, with the percentage of 5 percent. One example of error in selection of plural form can be found in the sentence “*For instance, if the country makes a law & regulations about the trash issue.*” In this sentence, the writer chose the wrong form of singular noun phrase (a law) instead of plural noun (laws) when forming the sentence. This is erroneous because it made the two nouns not parallel with one another. To make it correct, the two nouns must be in the same form, it could be “a law and a regulation”, or “Laws and regulations.” Based on the reviewer’s note, the latter is more appropriate, hence the correct sentence would be “*For instance, if the country makes laws & regulations about the trash issue.*”

Past Participle Error

Errors in past participle was identified to be the third most frequent errors to appear in the participants’ written language, with 14 errors under the description of error in omission, error in addition, and error in selection. Table 4.7 shows several samples of past participle errors that existed in the participants’ language,

Table 5: Surface Category of Present Participle Errors

| No | Surface Category | Percentage | Sample of Erroneous Sentence | Corrected Sentence |
|----|-------------------|------------|--|---|
| 1 | Error in Omission | 57% | However, we have to think twice that natural disaster/environmental problems can be reduce by the government/country. | However, we have to think twice that natural disaster/environmental problems can be reduced by the government/country. |

| No | Surface Category | Percentage | Sample of Erroneous Sentence | Corrected Sentence |
|----|--------------------|------------|---|---|
| 2 | Error in Addition | 14% | The motivation or awareness expected to increase the participant awareness also. If there is global warming, the North and South pole will melted and it will cause many animal did not have any place to live. | The motivation or awareness is expected to increase the participant awareness also. If there is global warming, the North and South pole will melt and it will cause many animal did not have any place to live. |
| 3 | Error in Selection | 29% | ...for humanity keeps on expanding their polluting areas , destroying parts of the forest for the sake of economical profit without considering the risks for nature and humans themselves. | ...for humanity keeps on expanding their polluted areas , destroying parts of the forest for the sake of economical profit without considering the risks for nature and humans themselves. |

Table 4.7 shows that there are 8 errors in omission of necessary elements in forming the past participle, with the percentage of 57 percent. Most participants who commit to this kind of error mistakenly omitted some elements that are required to form a correct sentence with past participle and passive voice with past participle. For example, in the sentence *“However, we have to think twice that natural disaster/environmental problems can be reduce by the government/country,”* the student omitted the suffix ‘-ed’ to form past participle, which is necessary when one wants to form a passive voice. Another example is evident in the sentence *“The motivation or awareness expected to increase the participant awareness also.”* Similar to the previous example, this sentence is missing the essential be verb to precede the past participle ‘expected’, hence this sentence is also considered as erroneous.

For the error in addition, there are only 2 errors recorded under this surface category, with 14 percent of occurrence out of all past participle errors. One example of this error can be seen in this sentence *“If there is global warming, the North and South pole will melted and it will cause many animal did not have any place to live.”* In this sentence, the students who commit to this error added the suffix ‘-ed’ in a verb that follows modal ‘will’. This is erroneous because modal verb should not precede modified verbs, they can only precede verbs in their base form. It is most likely that the student attempted to write “will be melted,” however the reviewer believes that the correction that is provided in Table 4.7 is more suitable and effective for academic writing.

Finally, the error in selection of past participle contributed to 29 percent of all errors in past participle. Students who commit to this error usually chose the wrong verb that is related with past participle. For example, in the sentence *“...for humanity keeps on expanding their polluting areas, destroying parts of the forest for the sake of economical profit without considering the risks for nature and*

humans themselves,” the student mistakenly chose the gerund form of ‘polluting’ to modify the noun ‘areas’ instead of using the past participle form ‘polluted’. Although gerund may also be used to modify noun, but the reviewer judged that the context of this sentence is more suitable if the noun modifier is in past participle form, hence this sentence is erroneous.

Explanation of Error

To explain the cause of error, an interview was conducted to participants to gain the reason of error occurrence directly from the writers themselves. Thus, this section will elaborate the result of the interview as a method to explain the cause of the students’ errors. For this section, only the three most frequent error types which will be explained further in this section, which are subject-verb agreement errors, plural errors, and past participle errors. The justification for this decision was that those three error types have accounted to 82% of the total errors in the sample corpus. The high percentage presented by the three most frequent error types was believed to be sufficient to represent the majority of the students’ weakness in writing.

In cases where one error is recurrent in several sentences, only one or two sentence that were questioned during the interview. For example, not all subject-verb agreement errors were questioned, but the causes of error in questions that were not included were still represented. Furthermore, only seven out of eight participants that were interviewed in this process, due to one participant was unavailable to be interviewed at the time. However, the absence of this participant in the interview process did not significantly alter the result of the interview, since this one particular student only committed 4 out of 95 errors that will be explained in this section (subject-verb agreement errors, plural errors, and past participle errors). Summary of the error frequency based on their cause of occurrence is presented in Table 4.10 below.

Table 6: Cause of Error Occurrence

| Cause of Errors /Error type | Subject- verb Agreement | Plural | Past Participle | Total |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------|--------------------|--------------|
| Mistake | 11 | 11 | 4 | 26 |
| Interlingual | 14 | 10 | 4 | 28 |
| Overgeneralization | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Ignorance of Rule Restriction | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Incomplete Application of Rule | 3 | 2 | 1 | 6 |
| Hypothesis of False Concept | 4 | 8 | 1 | 13 |
| Unidentifiable | 2 | 0 | 2 | 4 |
| Total | 35 | 31 | 12 | 78 |

As shown in Table 4.10, interlingual factor was the main reason why the students commit errors, which followed with unintended errors (mistake) and hypothesis of false concept. Therefore, a total of 78 sentences out of 95 sentences

that were erroneous in subject-verb agreement, plural, and past participle were questioned to investigate their cause of occurrence in this interview. Several causes of errors were unidentifiable because the students were unable to give proper reasoning behind his/her error, or the given answer was contradictive, making it tricky to determine the real cause of the occurrence. Detailed explanation about those errors will be reviewed in the discussion section.

Discussion

Based on the result of the research finding, the most frequent errors that are related to inflectional affixes that appeared in the students' written language are subject-verb agreement error, plural error, and past participle error. Summary of the research result is shown in Table 4.11 below.

Table 7: Result of the Error Analysis

| Frequent Errors | Frequent Description | Surface | Dominating (excluding mistakes) | Causes |
|-------------------------------|--|----------------|--|----------------------|
| Subject-verb agreement errors | Error in omission of necessary element related to subject-verb agreement | | | Interlingual factors |
| Plural errors | Error in omission of suffix '-s' to convey plural expression | | | Interlingual factors |
| Past participle errors | Error in omission of necessary element related to past participle | | | Interlingual factors |

As summarized in Table 4.11, the surface description of the three most frequent error types are described as error in omission of certain element related to the respective linguistic feature. According to Corder (1981), description on surface strategy should not end only to that extent; the description should incorporate linguistic theory in order to be a meaningful information. With this regard, the summary in Table 4.11 can be read as: the students have omitted certain element in three linguistic features, which are omission of suffix '-s' in verbs to agree with third person singular subject, omission of suffix '-s' in nouns to convey plural expression, and omission of be verb to use past participle for passive voice formation. In conclusion, the students were yet to master subject-verb agreement, plurals, and past participles of English grammar.

Furthermore, the result of the interview found that the interlingual factors are the most frequent cause of the students' error occurrence. This means that the participants who participated in this study committed their errors due to negative transfer from the first language. However, the participants who participated in this study commit to various kinds of errors with various explanation behind their occurrences. For instance, some students consistently committed to interlingual errors, some students consistently committed to intralingual errors, and some students have mixed explanation between interlingual and intralingual errors. However, interlingual errors are the most frequent cause of the error occurrence.

The dominant cause of errors in the students' language is interlingual factor, followed by hypothesis of false concept and incomplete application of rule. Thus, only errors in omission of the three most frequent error types are discussed in this section. Further elaboration of these explanations can be viewed in the subsections below.

Interlingual Errors

In the interview, it was found that there are 28 erroneous sentences that occurred due to interlingual factors. Specifically, there are 14 interlingual errors in subject-verb agreement errors, 10 interlingual errors in plural errors, and 4 interlingual errors in past participle.

In case of subject-verb agreement, it was found that there are four students who have committed at least one interlingual plural errors, while one of them consistently committed interlingual errors in his/her language. Out of 35 sentences with subject-verb agreement error that were questioned, 14 sentences were considered as interlingual errors, based on the response from the participants. The features of subject-verb agreement interlingual errors are omission of suffix '-s' in verbs to agree with subject and error in selection of be verb.

Firstly, participants who commit interlingual errors in subject-verb agreement omitted the suffix '-s' in verbs because of interference from Indonesian language system. In Indonesian, verbs are not inflected to agree with the subject in any way. For instance, the participant who consistently committed interlingual errors, wrote the following sentence: *"The writer agree about this, global warming is classified as international problem because of its cause and effect."* This sentence is erroneous due to the phrase *'The writer agree'*, which has uninflected verb *'agree'*, which did not match with the singular verb *'writer'*. When the participant was asked further, he/she explained that:

"Iya, ini aku merujuk ke bahasa indonesia. Jadi disitu the writer kan aku, jadi 'aku setuju' tentang hal ini, global warming diklasifikasikan sebagai masalah internasional karena sebab dan akibatnya" [Yes, I refer to Indonesian language. Thus, in that (sentence), the writer was me, so (what I meant to say was) 'I agree about this matter, global warming is classified as an international problem because of its cause and effect']"

As seen in the underlined phrases, the writer referred to Indonesian rule that does not inflect the Indonesian word *'setuju'*, which means *'agree'* in English, to agree with the subject. Although the translation of the phrase *'aku setuju'* is acceptable in English (*'I agree'*), but if the erroneous phrase *'The writer agree'* was translated into Indonesian, the result, *'Sang penulis setuju'*, is still acceptable in that language. In conclusion, the participant negatively transferred this Indonesian rule to English, which is not acceptable.

According to Al-khresheh (2016), interlingual error is also known as transfer error, which occurs when the students' first language interferes with the production of the target language. In this case, Indonesian language as the participants' first language is interfering the production of written English language. In terms of subject-verb agreement errors, the students have negatively transferred Indonesian grammar system that do not have inflectional '-s' in verbs

to agree with third person singular subjects. Furthermore, Indonesian language does not use various be verb to agree with third person singular, and the participants of this study have shown to transfer this habit into English, making them select the wrong be verb to agree with the subject.

Hypothesis of False Concept

Hypothesis of false concept is the second most dominant error cause in the students' writing. It was found that there are 13 erroneous sentences due to this factor. Specifically, there are 4 errors of this kind in subject-verb agreement errors, 8 in plural errors, and 1 in past participle. The example is taken from one of the plural errors that the student commit. During the interview process, the participants gave reasoning behind their errors that can be considered as 'hypothesis of false concept' on 8 sentences out of 31 sentences that were questioned. In overall, there were various false concepts that were formulated by the students that leads to erroneous sentences, one of them is uncountable noun vocabulary and the use of determiner.

Firstly, some participants have gap knowledge in deciding which nouns were considered as countable and uncountable. One case of this error is seen on this sentence: *"There are some effort that can be done to help slower the deforestation."* In this sentence, the error lies on the phrase "some effort", since the noun should be inflected with '-s' to agree with the plural determiner 'some'. When the student, P2, who wrote this sentence was questioned, he/she responded with:

"Gimana ya, soalnya aku ngiranya kalo ini tu kaya, itu 'effort' itu aku kiranya uncountable gitu, kan kaya aktivitas jadi gabisa dihitung, jadi mikirnya ga pake -s. [How should I put it, I thought that this was like, 'effort', I thought it was uncountable, like it is an activity that cannot be counted, so I thought it should not use '-s']."

From this response, it can be assumed that the student decide which noun is countable or uncountable based on personal judgement whether the noun is concretely countable or not, which was a false understanding.

Secondly, another false concept that was hypothesized by the participants was the use of determiner. In this case, P3 wrote this sentence: *"Is all of those natural disaster really a huge problem for the life of human?"* This sentence is erroneous in the phrase "all of those natural disaster", since the noun phrase should be inflected with '-s' to agree with the plural determiner 'those'. In his defense, P3 reasoned that

"Kalo gua sih setiap ngetik 'those' itu kan gw gini sih pemahamannya kalo 'that' gitu yang kita bisa liat gitu, yang bisa ditunjuk. 'that table', 'that chair', gitu. 'Those' itu sesuatu yang kita gabisa liat ato ga keliatan. makanya disitu gw pake those natural disasters karena kan natural disasters ngga terjadi. [In my case, when I write 'those', my understanding was (the word) 'that' is used for something we can see, we can point, (such as) 'that table', 'that chair', something like that. 'Those' is for something that we cannot see or invisible.

That is why I used *'those natural disasters'* because natural disasters are not happening (not something that can be seen)].”

In this response, it can be inferred that the student has false perception that the determiner ‘those’ is used only for abstract nouns, while actually, it is used for plural nouns, hence explaining the occurrence of that erroneous sentence.

Incomplete Application of Rules

During the interview process, it was found that there are 6 erroneous sentences due to this factor. Specifically, there are 3 errors of this kind in subject-verb agreement errors, 2 in plural errors, and 1 in past participle.

The example of this error is taken from the past participle error that the student commit. In the sentence “...*coordination & prevention is the best solution to do before the main issue can be fixed,*” the reviewer marked the phrase *'before the main issue can be fixed'* as an error. According to the reviewer, the use of passive voice in this phrase was not suitable, hence that phrase was supposed to be revised as *'before fixing the main issue'*. In response to this correction, P4 said during the interview that:

“I just write what I think sih, jadi kalo udah kerasa bener aku ga akan kepikiran kaya ini aktif apa pasif ya, gitu. [I just write what I think, so when I think it is already correct, then I will not mind whether it (the sentence) is in active or passive voice.]”

From this statement, it can be inferred that the participant did not have the knowledge about the appropriacy on when to use passive voice and when to not use it. This can be concluded from how he/she highlighted that he/she has written the correct version of the sentence. Moreover, the statement “I just write what I think” could imply the idea that the writer was focusing to communicate his/her thought in his/her writing, even though his/her subject matter in the use of passive voice was not yet complete. Thus, this error can be considered as an error due to incomplete application of rules.

Conclusion

There are two conclusions that can be summarized from this study. Firstly, the result of this research showed that the freshmen of English Language Education in Sampoerna University still have hardships on three types linguistic items related to inflectional affixes, which are subject-verb agreement, plural, and past participle. Specifically, the hardship related to omission of certain elements which are required to produce a grammatically correct sentence.

Secondly, the causes of the error occurrence were investigated through authoritative interpretation or interview, and it was found that interference of the first language was the dominating reason behind the erroneous sentences. Negative transfers of Indonesian language system to English language system were responsible to most of the errors that the students committed. Besides interlingual errors, there were several instances where intralingual factor played role, such as overgeneralization, incomplete application of rule, and false concept

hypothesized. There were no errors that were caused by ignorance of rule restriction.

There are several recommendations that were derived from the result. Firstly, the lecturers of English Language Department, specifically in English grammar-related course, are recommended to focus more on complementing the students' comprehension regarding subject-verb agreement, plurals, and past participle. This recommendation derived on the answer of the first research question, which showed that the students are still facing difficulties in those linguistic features. Secondly, the lecturers are also recommended to point out the difference between Indonesian language system and English language system to avoid errors occurrence due to interlingual factors, such as negative transfer of Indonesian rules that is not compatible with English rules.

There is also a recommendation for future error analysis research based on the current research limitation. From the experience of this research, having more than one reviewer to identify errors have its own benefits and drawbacks. The benefit includes a more credible data (error occurrence) that can be extracted from the students' written language, since the reviewer were experts in fields of linguistics and English language. However, there is a drawback that needs to be considered, which is the differing opinion between the two reviewers about certain errors. For instance, there was a case where a sentence was considered erroneous and was given correction by one reviewer, but the other reviewer deemed that the correction was erroneous. To deal with this issue, it was decided to disregard both opinion in the research. Hence, it is recommended for the researcher to have only one credible reviewer to identify and mark the errors of the students' language to avoid this kind of issue to arise in future research.

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