SALEE
STUDY OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND ENGLISH EDUCATION

Error analysis of Descriptive writings by Pre-service EFL teachers: A case study in Indonesia

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Abstract

This research investigates pre-service EFL teachers' writing proficiency by analyzing errors made in their descriptive essays. Conducted in one teacher training university in Indonesia, 40 randomly selected writing products assigned for the Writing course of 160 pre-service teachers, who are novice writers, were qualitatively analyzed. The result of the analysis showed that there were sentence fragments with 21 times or 42 %. It means that sentence fragment was the most dominant error done by students. Sentence fragment appeared due to the absence required in a complete sentence. Run-on sentence and comma splice existed 16 times or 32 %. Run-on sentences and comma splices appeared due to the wrong in combining two independent clauses. Choppy sentence were found 10 times or 20 % due to the use of too many short sentences, sometimes often repeating the same word at the beginning of a sentence. Stringy sentence were identified 3 times or 6 % of the whole essays due to the use of too many clauses with connected words. These clauses strung together forming one very long ineffective sentences. The findings are expected to reveal a comprehensive evaluation of writing proficiency of pre-service teachers and call for students, teacher educators, and policy makers to more concern with this crucial issue.

Keywords: Descriptive text; grammar; sentence error; writing proficiency

1. Introduction

The impetus of writing proficiency currently plays important role As only as a foreign language, English is an important subject that we have been taught at the elementary school level until university, as the highest education level. Learning English has the main concern on the mastery of language competence to achieve a functional level for communication both spoken and written. Therefore, students are demand to earn spoken and written products such as essays, short functional text, transactional text, etc. There are four language skills to be mastered by students as the goal of learning English. There are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among the four skills above, writing is a difficult skill to be learned by students. Writing need board knowledge and thinking process to produce the words, sentences, and paragraph with good English grammar which put in written form. Sharples (1999) states that writing is an opportunity; it allows students to express themselves, explore, and explain their idea. It means that writing is an excellent communication tool. Because communication is not only spoken form but also written form.

In fact, in the writing process, students cannot avoid making mistakes and commit errors when they are trying to make sentences or use tenses. Consequently, they write sentences grammatically incorrect. If their writing has incorrect grammar, the reader cannot understand the meaning inside. In order to compose good writing, the students should understand grammar well. According to Alufohai (2016), grammar at the sentence level is fundamental for the writing of composition in the English language. In addition, Bereiter and Scarmadalia, (1987) states that writing require higher-oerder thinking as this comprises purposeful, complex, and problem-solving activity. It means that writing requires capability at organizing and combining information into cohesive and coherent texts in order to be understandable. So the students need to practice a lot in writing to make meaningful writing and readable.

Knapp and Watkins (2005) stated that there are twelve types of texts in learning English, those are descriptive, recount, narrative, procedure, report, discussion, explanation, exposition, news item, anecdote, and review. The researcher focused on descriptive text. Descriptive text is a text type that describes people, things, and places are like where create image visual of people, place, and things. From this statement, it can be interpreted that descriptive text is a kind of writing that is consistent with description, characteristic, and definition of people, objects, and something the reason of the writer choose the topic because there are still some students make mistake on writing descriptive text. Then the descriptive text is using the simple present tense. It is necessary for the teacher to teaching writing descriptive text that is more interesting.

There are six areas in process writing. All of the process area: (a) generating idea; (b) ordering ideas; (c) writing the first draft; (d) revising (improving content, the expression of ideas); (e) correcting errors (correcting errors in grammar, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation); and (f) proofreading (making correction in the final copy). A sentence is a group of words that expresses an assertion, a question, a statement, instruction, or exclamation, that in writing usually begins with a capital letter and concludes with appropriate end punctuation. There are four types of sentences in writing, those are simple sentences, compound sentences, complex sentences, and compound-complex sentences.

In this study, there is intention to discover how student techers in the second year write descriptive text successfully. The empirical report and close inspection by examining type of

sentences and errors made by EFL students can offer a lot to the literature. From this study, the development of students' writing can be further focused on the common shortcomings in students' writing (Hosseinpur & Kazemi, 2022). Therefore, the aims of the study are formulated in the form of research questions as follows: (1) what are types of error sentence found in written descriptive text? (2) What are dominant sentences errors found in written descrpitive text?

2. Method

The researcher used a descriptive qualitative approach in this research. The qualitative research presented the data of the research in form of qualitative description. Qualitative research can be described as an effective model that occurs in a natural setting that enables the researcher to develop a level of detail from being highly involved in the actual experiences (Cohen et al., 2007)

In this research, the researcher would merge qualitative and quantitative. The qualitative approach was analyzing the data of descriptive text made by students at one of university in Semarang in the academic year 2019/2020. Therefore, the data can be easier to understand. The descriptive method was used to collect the data, analyze, classify, and conclude.

2.1 Population and sample

The population in this study were all the second year students in a teacher training university in Semarang, Indonesia, consisting of 4 classes with a total of 160 students. In this study, purposive sampling was employed to determine the sample because there was a specific goal, students who had written descriptive texts to fulfill the Writing course assignments. The sample taken was in one of the classes in the same batch, which amounted to 40 descriptive texts.

2.2 Methods of Data Collection

There were various kinds of techniques of data collection that the researcher applies in this research. First, the researcher had to collect the data of descriptive text from the forty (40) students. The students were instructed to make descriptive text consist of a minimum of ten sentences with random topics. Second, the researcher analyzed the data. Finally, as a data reporter, the researcher reported the result of data analysis by providing a detailed explanation.

2.3 Methods of Data Analysis

The researcher applied qualitative data analysis. Cohen et al. (2007)stated that analyzing qualitative data requires understanding how to make sense of text and images so that you can form answers to your research questions. There were several steps that the researcher used in analyzing the data: (1) analysing type of sentences and errors by following the framework proposed by Oshima and Hogue (1998, 2007); (2) finding dominant error; and (3) drawing conclusion.

3. Findings and Discussion

This research has classified based on the common sentence structure errors proposed by Oshima and Hogue (1998), the errors were classified into four types; sentence fragments, run-on sentence and comma splice, choppy sentences, and stringy sentences. In addition to Bram (1995:26), a sentence can be called a sentence fragment when it does not have one of the following: 1) Subject, 2) Verb , 3) Subject and verb, and 4) Main or independent clause.

The descriptions of each error of each types of sentences found in this research as follows:

Table 1. Findings

Type of sentence		**Simple sentence**	**Compound sentence**	**Complex sentence**	**Compound-complex sentence**
Total of sentences		110	57	28	15
Total of error		42	29	8	8
Type of error	**Fragment**	22	13	-	-
	Comma splice	9	5	2	1
	Run on	4	4	5	7
	Stringy	3	3	-	-
	Choppy sentence	4	4	1	-
Dominance of error		Fragment	Fragment	Run on	Run on

Based on the table of finding above, it showed the numeric of each type of sentence found and its types of error on the whole descriptive texts that had written by the students.

3.1 Types of Sentences

3.1.1 Simple Sentence

A simple sentence is an independent clause with no conjunction or dependent clause. A simple sentence has no dependent clauses. (An independent clause (unlike a dependent clause) can stand alone as a sentence). The data sample is *I really like to eat.* This evindence showed that the sentence is an independent clause which consists of one subject.

3.1.2 Compound Sentence

A compound sentence is two independent clauses joined by a conjunction (e.g., and, but, or, for, nor, yet, so). They're best for combining two or more self-sufficient and related sentences into a single, unified one. The data of compound sentences found on the whole students' descriptive text are 57 (fifhy seven) sentences. They are classified as a compound sentence because it connects two independent clauses, typically with a coordinating conjunction like; and, or, but. The data sample is as follow:

He likes study sometimes and he is a clever student in his class.

The excerpt showed that the sentence consist of two independent clauses and are connected with coordinating conjunction "and".

3.1.3 Complex Sentence

A complex sentence contains one independent clause and at least one dependent clause. The clauses in a complex sentence are combined with conjunctions and subordinators, terms that help the dependent clauses relate to the independent clause. The data of complex sentences found on the whole students' descriptive text are 28 (twenty eight) sentences. They are classified as a complex sentence because the sentence consist of one independent clause and at least one dependent clause. One sample is as follows:

Despite being the best player, he still taught his junior about his techniques.

This showed that the sentences consist of one independent clause and one dependent clause which are connected with coordinating conjunction "because" and "despite".

3.1.4 Compound-Complex Sentence

A compound-complex sentence contains multiple independent clauses and at least one dependent clause. The data of complex sentences found on the whole students' descriptive text are 15 (fifteen) sentences. They are classified as a complex sentence because they have at least two independent clauses and at least one dependent clause. One sample is as follow:
The beach is save enough for swimming because the beach is shallow and the wave is not so big.

3.2 Types of Error

3.2.1 Sentence Fragments

A sentence fragment is a structurally incomplete sentence or part of the sentence (Oshima and Hogue, 1998:169). An incomplete sentence will express incomplete thought and cannot stand alone as sentence. Remember that a complete sentence must contain at least one main or independent clause, in which one main or independent clause is made of one complete subject and one complete verb that expresses a complete thought.The data of the sentence fragment found on the whole students' descriptive text are 35 (thirty five) sentences. One of the results is as follows:

And sweet foods i really like ice cream

The data showed that the sentences indicate as the sentence fragment for its incomplete and missing part. Based on the data analysis, a sentence fragment is often found in the simple sentence with 22 data.

3.2.2 Run-on sentence and comma splice

Oshima and Hogue (1998) state that a run-on sentence is a sentence in which two or more independent clauses are written one after another with punctuation. While a comma splice sentence is similar to a run-on sentence in which the writer combines two independent clauses with only a comma without a conjunction. In other words, run-on sentences and comma splices are compound sentences that are wrongly connected. The data of the run-on and comma splice sentence found on the whole students' descriptive text are 17 (seventeen)

sentences of run-on, and 20 (twelve) sentences of comma splice. The samples of the result are as follows:

> *Every time i remember food, often my money runs out just to buy food.* **(Run-on)**
> *There are two big windows here so there's lots of light.* **(Comma splice)**

The findings showed that the sentences indicate as the run-on and comma splice sentences for its incomplete and missing part. Based on the data analysis, a run-on sentence is often found in the simple sentence with 9 data. Meanwhile, a comma splice sentence mostly found in the compound-complex sentence with 7 data.

3.2.3 Choppy sentence

Oshima and Hogue (1998:177) states "a choppy sentence are sentences that are too short. They are the result of using too many simple sentences". The data of the choppy sentences found on the whole students' descriptive text are 9 (nine) data. One sample is as follow:

> *The heavy food that i like is meatballs and the snack that i like is cassava chips.*

The data above showed that the sentences indicate as the choppy sentences for its consequence of using too many simple sentences. Based on the data analysis, a choppy sentences is often found in the simple and compound sentence with 4 data of each types of sentences.

3.2.4 Stringy sentences

Oshima and Hogue (1998) state that a stringy sentence is a sentence with too many independent clauses, usually connected with and, but, so, because, etc. A stringy sentence makes the reader forgets the beginning of the sentence before reaching the end. To correct the first sentence, remove the coordinate conjunction „so‟, and then recombine the sentences. The data of the stringy sentences found on the whole students' descriptive text are 6 (six) data. The samples of the result as follow:

> *He is naughty sometimes, but he is a friendly and kind person, so that he has many friends in his class.*

The data above showed that the sentences indicate as the stringy sentences for its consequence of using too many independent clauses. Based on the data analysis, a stringy sentence is often found in the simple and compound sentence with 3 data of each types of sentences.

Based on the first problem statement, the researcher found four types of sentences on the student's writing descriptive text, there are simple sentence, compound sentence, complex sentence and compound complex sentence. Each types of sentence found has a different amount. The types of sentence found in this research is simple sentence was 110 sentences, compound sentence was 57 sentences, complex sentence was 28 sentences and compound complex sentence was 15 sentences.

As explained in Oshima and Hogue (1998) show the major errors in the sentence structure, they cover sentence fragments, run-on sentences or comma splice, choppy

sentences, and stringy sentences. A sentence fragment is a structurally incomplete sentence or part of a sentence. A run-on sentence occurs when two or more independent clauses are written one after another with no punctuation. A comma splice occurs when two independent clauses are incorrectly joined by a comma without a coordinating junction. Choppy sentences are sentences that are too short. The result indicates students could be categorized as low-level writers as the dominant use of simple sentences (Hosseinpur & Kazemi, 2022). A stringy sentence is a sentence with too many independent clauses, usually connected with and, but, so, because, etc. Depend on the finding of the study there are total 87 errors occured in the writing descriptive text of the students, they are; 35 data of sentence fragment, 17 data of comma splice sentence, 20 data of run-on sentence, 6 data of stringy sentence, and the last 9 data of choppy sentence. For further classification, there are total 42 errors in the simple sentence, 57 errors in the compund sentence, 28 errors in the complex sentence, and 15 errors in the compound-complex sentence.

The second statements of the problem is to find the dominant grammatical error in each types of sentences. Based on the finding, it suggested that the most grammatical error found in the type of sentence of simple sentence with the total 110 data of error. The dominant error occured in the simple sentence is a sentence fragment with total 22 data found. The other following data are; compound sentence with 57 data and 13 sentence fragment as the dominant error, complex sentence with 28 data and 5 run-on sentence as the dominant error, and the last one compound-complex sentence with 15 data and 7 run-on sentence as the dominant error. The minimum number of complex- and compound-sentences indicate students are struggling with higher-level writing by avoiding word complexity and greater syntactical features in creating sentences (Kim, 2021; S. Kim & Kessler, 2022).

This research revealed that many students made sentence fragments in their descriptive writing. According to Oshima and Hogue (1998), a sentence fragment is a structurally incomplete sentence or part of a sentence. Based on the finding, sentence fragments occur 22 times or 42 % of the total error. It was the first highest frequency of error appeared in students" writing. It means that sentence fragment was the most dominant error made by students. Actually, a sentence fragment is a group of words that is attempting to function as a sentence but missing one or more of the parts required in a complete sentence. As we have known, subject and verb are the important components of a complete sentence. It is appropriate with Hogue (1998) that a sentence is a group of words that contains at least a subject and a verb and expresses a complete thought. If a group of words lacks a subject, a verb, or both, of course, it cannot express a complete thought and cause a fragment. Consequently, the writing is difficult to understand by the reader, and even the intended meaning of the text gets lost.

Some sentence fragments found in students' writing occur because the use of a dependent clause that is not attached to an independent clause. It is related to Bram (1995) that a sentence fragment is also similar to a phrase or a dependent clause. It expresses an incomplete thought and cannot function nor stand alone as a simple sentence. However, the dependent clause has a subject and a verb, so they look like complete sentences, but they don"t express a complete thought. They are called "dependent" because they depend on other statements to complete the thought. In other words, a dependent clause must be attached to a statement that makes sense standing alone.

Here the researcher tries to present the distribution and examples of sentence fragments found in students' writing. Based on finding, the sentence fragments are frequently made by the students for example is "heavy or light food ". This phrase belongs to a sentence fragment because there is no subject and verb.

To sum up, sentence fragments give a big contribution in causing sentence structure errors in writing. However, the use of complete sentences is needed to support the explanation in a text. As one type of text, descriptive text requires a clear and vivid explanation of the object being described in order for the reader can visualize the object in his or her mind. It is related to Oshima and Hogue (2007) a good description is a word picture; the reader can imagine the object, place, or person in his or her mind. The students might know the elements of a complete sentence, but they lack knowledge of the elements of a complete sentence in the target language, especially English.

The second highest frequency of error that appeared in students" writing was a run-on sentence and a comma splice. This error occurs 16 times or 32 % of the total error. Run-on sentences and comma splices appear due to the wrong in combining two independent clauses. According to Bram (1995), run-on sentences and comma splices are compound sentences that are wrongly connected. Here the researcher tries to present the distribution and examples of run-on sentences and comma splices found in students" writing. Based on the finding, run-on sentences and comma splices were frequently made by students. Run-on and comma splice appeared in students writing as in the sentence "She makes me fall in love with her since first I saw her on TV". This sentence indicates a run-on sentence due to the absence of punctuation before the word "since". As the result, the sentence could be hard to understand. Whereas, comma splices appeared in students' writing as in "Even though his nose is pug but this kitty has a keen sense of smell". This sentence is comma splice because there is no punctuation before "but".

However, both run-on sentences and comma splices will make the sentence difficult to comprehend. The readers are forced to reread and reread before they succeed in marking where a sentence begins and ends. Further the reader will probably spend too much time trying to find out the intended message in the writing. Based on the finding in this research, the students were not fully aware of using punctuation or connecting words in a sentence.

The third highest frequency of error that appeared in students' writing was Choppy sentences. This error occurs 10 times or 20 % of the total error. Choppy sentences appear due to the use of too many short sentences, sometimes often repeating the same word. According to Oshima and Hogue (1998), choppy sentences are sentences that are too short. They are the result of using too many simple sentences. Choppy sentences are found in students' writing as in "He is 14 years old now. He is 4 years old younger than me". These sentences too short and often repeat the same subject "He". The use of too many sentences in a row that begin with the same subject can cause sentences errors, especially choppy sentences. Therefore, they should be combined by using appropriate connecting words to make longer sentences in order to the idea can connect each other. The revised sentence will be "He is 14 years old now and 4 years old younger than me".Choppy sentences make the sentences do not have a good style. Reading these kinds of sentences can be boring for the reader. Based on the finding in this research, there were some students that use too often repeating the same word. However, informal academic writing choppy sentence tends to avoid because many short sentences in succession make it appear that a writer is incapable of sustaining a complex

thought. The students should combine these short sentences to form longer ones so it makes the idea can connect to each other.

The last fewest frequency of error that appeared in students' writing was stringy sentences. This error occurs 3 times or 6 % of the total error. Stringy sentences appear due to the use of too many clauses usually connected with and, but, so, and because. These clauses strung together forming one very long sentence. Oshima and Hogue (1998), state that a stringy sentence is a sentence with too many independent clauses, usually connected with and, but, so, because, etc. Actually, there is no limiting the use of independent clauses in one sentence, but two is a good maximum. Errors of stringy sentences are found in students' writing as in "He is kind and humorous and his eyes are really beautiful". This sentence is a stringy sentence because the student uses too many connecting words to combine clauses. These connecting words can be decreased in order to sentence flow smoothly. The revised sentence will be "he is kind, humorous, and his eyes are really beautiful".

In conclusion based on the finding in this research, the students are still confused in constructing well-formed sentences. They use too many connecting words and, because, so" to combine clauses. Actually, the use of connecting words to combine several clauses to be one sentence is good, but overuse it can cause the reader to forget the beginning before reaching the end.

4. Conclusion

The research shows that the second year students made various kinds of errors in constructing sentences. It indicates that the students still have problems constructing well-formed sentences in writing. An error that was found in students' writing can be categorized into four distribution: sentence fragments, run-on sentence and comma splice, choppy sentence, and stringy sentences.

From this study, the dominant error occured in the simple sentence is a sentence fragment with total 22 data found. The other following data are; compound sentence with 57 data and 13 sentence fragment as the dominant error, complex sentence with 28 data and 5 run-on sentence as the dominant error, and the last one compound-complex sentence with 15 data and 7 run-on sentence as the dominant error. The other researcher is suggested to use a better method to collect data of their research. He/she should present the findings better and more systematically, so that they can be understood well, and have more benefit to the reader. Furthermore, the other researcher is also suggested to not the only concerned with sentence structure, but also he/she should add other aspects of writing that can be analyzed.

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