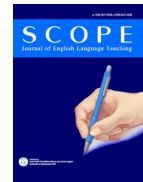




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An Empirical Research

Verb Errors in the Essays of Students Majoring in English Education: A Formal and Functional Perspective

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KEYWORDS

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A B S T R A C T

As the effort to provide a pedagogical input for the development of teacher education of English as a foreign language in Indonesia, this paper aims to reveal the verb nature of Indonesian students majoring in English education program. To obtain the purpose of study, a qualitative research approach and a text-analysis method were employed. As the participants, four second-year students and six third-year counterparts participated in this study. The participants were given five argumentative-essay questions to answer. Overall, more than 90% of verbs of each participant were already accurate while the rest were still incorrect. The verb errors of both groups were not only evaluated based on the formal grammar perspective but also were further discussed based on the functional perspective. The findings of this study reveals that there is a different tendency between both analyzed data sets. The second-year students tended to make errors in missing 'be' either in relational and material clauses. In comparison, the third-year counterparts had the tendency to make errors in subject-verb agreement in material clauses. Based on the findings, it is expected that there will be different emphases of teaching grammar especially verbs for different levels of Indonesian students majoring in English education.

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INTRODUCTION

To the present time, English verbs have become one of linguistic problems faced by Indonesian students. This phenomenon, for example, has been revealed by Fitrawati & Safitri (2021), Latupeirissa & Sayd (2019), Mohammad et al. (2015), Phettongkam (2017), and Prayuda et al. (2023). In line with Indonesian students' problems in mastering verbs, their linguistic irregularities in English verbs have been one of linguistic research issues. Through the comprehension about the nature of students' verbs in

English, some pedagogical treatment can be formulated and practiced to help the developing language learners use English accurately including in writing. This also applies in the case of students majoring in English language education. Since they are expected to be a linguistic model for their students later, their language especially verbs must be accurate.

Based on the Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (Richards & Schmidt, 2002), one of the definitions of verb is associated with a word that represents an action or a state. According to the functional perspective, a verb can be associated with a process though

there might be other linguists who are not line with this claim. What makes formal and functional perspectives distinct in seeing verb/process is that the later sets the social purpose of a text as the basis. Verbs among other parts of speech play a central role in creating meaning. They serve as representing all processes or experiences. By only knowing the verb, to some extents, the noun will be automatically known but not vice versa. The verb 'bark', for instance, refers to a dog. Due to the role of verb as the foundation of meaning making, this linguistic component is the first one that should be represented accurately.

Until now, students' nature in English verbs has been scrutinized especially in the tertiary levels (see Fitrawati & Safitri, 2021; Latupeirissa & Sayd, 2019; Mohammad et al., 2015; Phetongkam, 2017; Prayuda et al., 2023). One of the foci has been addressed to students majoring in English education. Again, as they are expected to be a teacher of English, their English competency including in using verbs needs to comply with the correct grammar. However, the verbs of students majoring in English education have been commonly known to be characterised by errors. The analysis of Fitrawati & Safitri (2021), to illustrate, has revealed that one of the most frequent grammatical errors in EFL students' writings is associated with their verbs.

In English education program, the verbs of Indonesian students have been characterised by various errors. The analysis of Surista & Setiawan (2023) on the descriptive writings of first-semester 21 students majoring in English education, to illustrate, has reported verb errors in missing be and redundant (double) verbs. This phenomenon was also previously found by the study of Hidayatullah et al. (2017). Based on the existing studies that have analysed Indonesian college students' verb errors in English, it can be inferred that missing be is one of common error types.

Among the myriad of scientific reports on the verbs of students majoring in English education program, there have been some analysing their verbs comparatively. A study that has comparatively analysed college students' grammatical errors in writing including verbs is the one conducted by Tandikombong & Atmowardoyo (2016), relying on the fourth and sixth semester students as the two distinct participants. Their study has found that the most frequent grammatical errors of both groups of students occur in verbs. Other previous linguistic studies that have discussed college students errors in English grammar including verbs are the ones conducted by Panjaitan et al. (2023) and Purba et al. (2023). However, like the analysis of Tandikombong & Atmowardoyo, (2016), their studies made use of students' translated sentences from Indonesian to English.

From the functional perspective, the comparative analysis of Manar & Dewanti (2023) has disclosed that the verbs in

the undergraduate thesis introductions of Indonesian students majoring in English are still less functional compared to those in the data set of reputable journal. Their thesis introduction sections tend to be characterised by neutral processes while the journal counterparts set as the parameter contain more investigative processes. Based on the functional perspective, theses or research articles ideally have the social purpose of developing knowledge. This implies that the types of processes should comply with the genre of knowledge building, namely starting from questioning, addressing the problem, investigating, and reporting.

Among the plethora of studies examining the verbs of Indonesian English-department students, none has combined the formal grammar framework and the functional one. As claimed by Manar (2022), there has been a new trend of hybrid linguistic theory in evaluating the language phenomenon for a better holistic understanding and solution. The present study also offers the functional perspective in extending the comprehension about college students' verb errors, by employing Hallidayan transitivity system. Transitivity system is a functional linguistic tool under experiential meaning making. This Hallidayan tool of experiential meaning making consists of six process types, namely material, mental, verbal, behavioural, relational and existential (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004, 2014).

The first process type, material process, refers to the process of doing/happening involving a one-side participant only (actor), two-side participants (actor and goal/range/beneficiary), or even three-side participants (actor, goal/range, and beneficiary). The second process type, mental process, is associated with the process of sensing/thinking/feeling that involves a first participant (senser) and a second participant (phenomenon). The third type of process, behavioural process, is a mental-based domain but its effect is noticeable from outside. This process commonly involves one-side participant called behavior. The fourth type of process, verbal process, is the process of saying that involves one-side participant only (sayer), two-side participants (sayer and verbiage), even three-side participants (sayer, verbiage, and target).

Different from the four mentioned process types that represent 'activities' or 'reactions', the two other processes, namely existential and relational represent abstract experiences. The former represents the existence of entity while the latter represents the relation between an entity and its quality. The process of representing an entity known as existential process involves one-side participant, namely existent. The second abstract process type, relational process, is employed to establish the relation between an entity and its qualities. When the quality is a part of the entity and both are not reversible, the process is

called attributive relational process involving two-side participants (carrier as the first participant and attribute as the second one). Further, when the entity and quality are reversible and equal, the process is called identifying relational process involving two-side participants (identified as the first participant and identifier as the second one).

A process can be also accompanied by another constituent known as circumstance. Different from participants that to some extents are embedded in the process, a circumstance is optional. Circumstances represent where, when, why, how, with whom, and to what extent a process happens or is done.

Until this point, there has been the lack of analysis on the verb nature of students majoring in English education based on the formal and functional grammar perspectives. On account of this status, this study aims to investigate the English verbs of students majoring in English education by answering the following questions: to what extent do the verbs of the second-year and third-year Indonesian students contain errors based on the formal and functional grammar?

METHOD

The method adopted by this paper was case study that relied on text analysis to reveal the verb errors made by Indonesian students majoring in English education. The data were collected directly from two distinct offline classrooms with the same time allocation. In completing their writings, both participants of study did not use any supporting materials such as course books, internet sources, dictionary, etc. Both participants only relied on their own language competence in finishing their essays. The data selected for this study were the writings of the fifth meeting. Prior to this, the participants had participated in writing their essays for four times in different four meetings. The type of writings produced by the participants of study is argumentative essay.

On the second phase, five essays of five second-year undergraduate students and seven essays of seven third-year counterparts were analysed for their verbs. However, one writing of the former and one of the latter contained too many errors and their meaning is not easily understood. One of them even contained Indonesians due to the limited English mastery of the writer. As the effect, only four essays of the second-year undergraduate students and only six of their third-year counterparts were further analysed for their verbs.

Further, only finite verbs were analysed to answer the research problem. Non-finite verbs (to infinitive and present participle) were excluded from the analysis since they did not signal any tense or time. After all finite verb

errors were found, their numbers were calculated in reference to the total correct verbs. Then they were analysed and categorized in terms of their types of errors. Finally, the types of verb errors made by the second-year and third-year students were further analysed based on the functional-linguistic perspective. All verbs were analyzed by breaking the essays into clauses and then by highlighting the verb errors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The aim of this comparative analysis is to disclose the verb errors made by two different groups of Indonesian students majoring in English education. The theory employed as the basis for verb-error classification is error analysis. Error analysis can be viewed as the study of language errors made by second language learners (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). Based on the analyses of both data sets, most of verbs produced by all participants of study were already accurate. Despite this fact, either the writings of the second or third year students still contain errors. The rate of errors of both data sets is portrayed on chart 1.

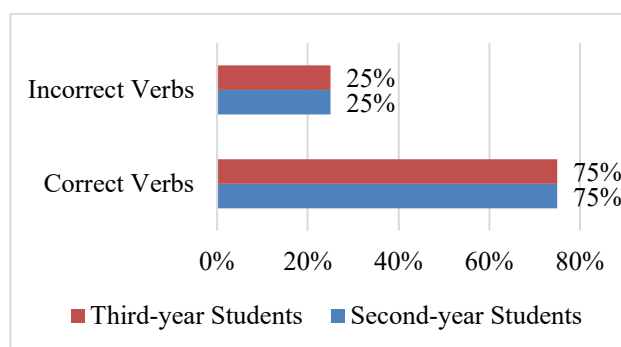


Chart 1. The Extent of Verb Errors

Chart 1 portrays the percentage of verbs accuracy used by second- and third-year students in their essays. The essays of both second-year and third-year ELT students still contain English verb errors. The extent of the error rate in comparison to that of accurate verbs is twenty five per cent either in the second-year students' essays or in the third-year ones. This means that only a fourth of verbs in both data sets are inaccurate. The incorrect verbs of both groups cover errors in subject-verb agreement, missing be, modality, passive voice, and the use of double or redundant verbs, as revealed in the following extracts.

Errors in subject-verb agreement

*ELT need research because...*Data-SB-2Y

Correct form

*ELT needs research because...*Data-SB-2Y

...men is not a guardian of the ethic in society. Data-JA-3Y

Correct form

...men **are not** a guardian of the ethic in society.
Data-JA-3Y

Errors in missing be

...previous findings and theory that **against** ours.
Data-AA-2Y

Correct form

...previous findings and theory that **are** against
ours. Data-AA-2Y

In contrast, a father **barely** at home due to the work.
Data-ND-3Y

Correct form

In contrast, a father **IS** barely at home due to the
work. Data-ND-3Y

Errors in passive voice

...If the theory...**write** by experts in that field. Data-
AA-2Y

Correct form

...If the theory...**is written** by experts in that field.
Data-AA-2Y

He can choose another word that **known** by
everyone. Data-TD-3Y

Correct form

He can choose another word **that is known** by
everyone. Data-TD-3Y

Errors in redundant verbs

Concept...**is find** a new element... Data-SB-2Y

Correct form

Concept... **finds** a new element... Data-SB-2Y

This **is includes** with the gender and the use of
language. Data-JA-3Y

Correct form

This **includes** the gender and the use of language.
Data-JA-3Y

Errors in Modality

...we need **find** the gap... Data-SB-2Y

Correct form

...we **need to find** the gap... Data-SB-2Y

...we **must to change** our dialect... Data-MA-3Y

Correct form

...we **must change** our dialect... Data-MA-3Y

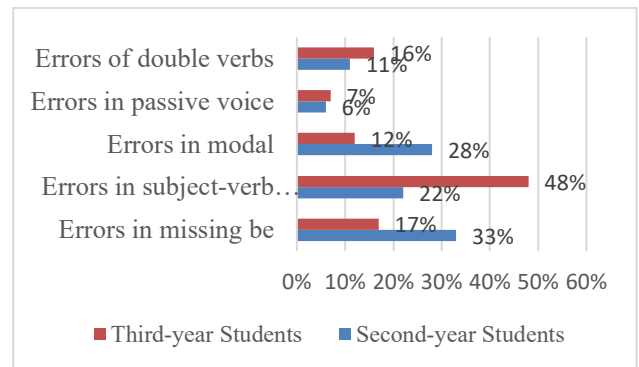


Chart 2. The Tendency of Verb Errors

Chart 2 displays the percentage of types of verb errors written by second- and third-year students in their essays. In reference to chart 2, there lie differences in terms of tendency of verb errors made by second-year and third-year students of English education. The first highest gaps of verb errors between both groups occur in subject-verb agreement and missing be. Whereas the second-year students tended to make verb errors in missing be, the third-year counterparts tended to make errors in subject-verb agreement. This different tendency of between groups is exemplified in the following extracts.

Error in missing be

We need previous journal articles to find a gap for
the topic we interested to. Data-AA-2Y

Correct form

We need previous journal articles to find a gap for
the topic we **are** interested to. Data-AA-2Y

Error in subject-verb agreement

However, I think it also **depend** on the
context...DATA-TD-3Y

Correct form

However, I think it also **depends** on the
context...DATA-TD-3Y

The second highest gap of verb errors between second-year and third-year students of English education as shown by chart 1 is errors in modals. In comparison to the latter, the former tended to make errors in modals. Some of these errors are displayed in the following extracts.

Error in modal: modal + present participle

...from the literature we can **understanding** what...
Data-AA-2Y

Correct form

*...from the literature we **can understand** what...*
Data-AA-2Y

Table 1. Errors in Relational Clauses

Types of Errors	Second-year Students	Third-year Students
Subject-verb agreement	40 %	50%
Missing be	60 %	50%

As displayed in table 1, there is the different tendency of verb errors between the relational clauses of second-year group and those of the third-year counterparts. The relational clauses of the former tend to have errors in missing be in comparison to subject-verb agreement errors. Different from the relational clauses of the first group, those of the third-year counterparts have equal error distribution between missing be and subject-verb agreement. To summarize, whereas the verb errors in second-year students' relational clauses tend to be characterized by missing be (60%), those in the third-year ones are more proportionate (50%). The phenomenon of missing be in the relational clauses of second-year participants can be seen from the following extracts.

Error in missing be in relational clause

*...previous findings and theory that **against** ours.*
Data-AA-2Y

Correct form

*...previous findings and theory that **are** against ours.* Data-AA-2Y

Table 2. Errors in Material Clauses

Types of Errors	Second-year Students	Third-year Students
Subject-verb agreement	33.34%	82.35%
Missing be	66.66%	17.65%

In reference to table 2, there is the discrepancy of verb errors between the material clauses of second-year group and those of the third-year counterpart. The material clauses of the former tend to have errors in missing be in comparison to subject verb agreement errors. The errors in missing be are even twice of the subject verb agreement ones. Different from the material clauses of the first group, those of the third-year counterpart tend to have errors in subject verb agreement. The errors in subject-verb agreement are even four times of the missing-be ones. To summarize, whereas the verb errors in second-year students' material clauses tend to be characterized by

missing 'be' (66.66%), those in the third-year ones are inclined to be characterized by subject-verb agreement errors (82.35%). This linguistic gap is shown in the following extracts.

Error in missing be in material clause

... because current studies teaching us how to get closer to the truth . Data-CH-2Y

Correct form

*... because current studies **are teaching** us how to get closer to the truth .*

Data-CH-2Y

Error of subject-verb agreement in material clause

*...when the teacher **teach** the students.* Data-JA-3Y

Correct form

*...when the teacher **teaches** the students.* Data-JA-3Y

The analyses of the present comparative study have disclosed that both groups of second-year and third-year students majoring in English education still make verbs errors in English despite the fact that more than seventy percent of their verbs have been accurate. What more important is that the current paper has successfully revealed the gap of verb errors between both groups of students. Although both groups have made many errors including in missing be and in subject-verb agreement, there is the distinct tendency between both. The second-year group tend to make errors in missing be while the third-year counterpart shows the tendency to make verbs errors in subject-verb agreement.

In terms of subject-verb agreement errors, there have been previous studies on this issue (Dinh, 2023; Mohammad et al., 2015). The investigation of Dinh (2023) on the writings composed by Vietnamese EFL college students has disclosed that verb agreement is one of the three most common grammatical errors. The similar phenomenon was also reported on the case of Bangladesh college students (Mohammad et al., 2015). Students' errors in subject-verb agreement have also been pointed out by Latupeirissa & Sayd (2019) relying on Indonesian EFL university students as the study participants. This type of error in the context of Indonesian study participants has also been reported by the study of Burhanuddin (2020) analysing the English writings of second-year university students of English education. In terms of missing verbs, this case has been shown by the study of Mohammad et al. (2015) relying on Bangladesh students as the study participants and by that of Yusuf et al. (2021) involving Indonesian students as the research participants.

To the present time, as found by the present investigation, existing studies on the English verbs constructed by Indonesian students have revealed that missing *be* and subject-verb agreement are two of their common errors. The report of Surista & Setiawan (2023), to illustrate, has shown that the writings of 25 Indonesian college students also still contain English verb errors in missing *be* like “...*my dad happy there*” and subject-verb agreement as in “*mother prepare for food*”. In terms of the verb, the correct form of the former is “...*my dad is happy there*” and that of the latter is “*mother prepares for food*”.

College students’ errors in missing *be* and in subject-verb agreement have been also reported by Wirawati et al. (2017). Their qualitative study has pointed out that misinformation error is the most common type of error including subject-verb agreement while omission is the second most frequent error including the omission of *be*. What makes the current study distinct from their study, however, is the type of data. The data of the present study are taken from students’ essays during the classroom hour while those of Wirawati et al. (2017) were taken from students’ research proposals. In other words, the participants of the present study wrote their writings without the help of dictionary and without the time for revision.

Further, the tendency of lower-level Indonesian college students to make English verb errors in missing *be* is possibly due to the interference from Indonesian language. Indonesian does not have verbs in the form of *be*. This is one of main differences between English and Indonesian based on the prescriptive linguistic. To some extent, Indonesian has ‘*adalah*’ that can be associated with *be* in English but this does not apply to all contexts. In giving definition, for example, the word ‘*adalah*’ is commonly used like in “Guru **adalah** contoh bagi peserta didik” (“Teacher is a role model for students”). But in giving attributes, the use of ‘*adalah*’ is not common like in “Guruku lapar” (“My teacher is hungry”).

The case of missing *be* in the writings of Indonesian tertiary students will disappear as their English keeps developing. This is related to the decreased errors of missing *be* on the case of higher-level Indonesian college students majoring in English, as the result of their higher exposure to English. This explains why in comparison to their lower-level counterparts their writings are less likely to make errors in missing *be*.

In terms of errors in subject-verb agreement, most errors occur in simple present verbs whose subjects are third person singulars (*she/he/it*). Both the writings of lower-level and higher-level students are in fact contain this type of errors. However, since the simple present clauses of the lower-level students contain more linking verbs (in the form of *be*) than ‘action’ verbs, their occurrences of

subject-verb agreement errors are surpassed by errors in missing *be*. The subject-verb agreement errors in simple present verbs produced by English-major students has been also previously reported by Burhanuddin (2020). Subject-verb agreement errors was even claimed by his study as the main errors. Further, the frequent errors of subject-verb agreement in simple present clauses with the subject *she/he/it* implies that this type of grammar seems more challenging to master than the grammar of *be*. Thus, this type of error might be caused by the intra-lingual factor, namely the complexity of English verb structure especially in simple present verbs.

Another type of verb errors revealed in the finding section refers to the redundant or double verb. As displayed in the finding section, both second-year and third-year students wrote redundant verbs especially in simple present tense. However, if both analysed data are compared, the error percentage is found more on the data of the third-year participants. This phenomenon was also previously found by the analysis of Hidayatullah et al. (2017) on the English verbs of sixth-semester Indonesian students majoring in English education. Though the focus of their study was more on subject-verb-agreement errors, their displayed data has shown errors in redundant verbs like in “are happen” and “is contained” that must be written “happens” and “contains”.

Based on the findings of the present study and the study of Hidayatullah et al. (2017), it can be claimed that errors in redundant or double verb tend to appear on the further phase of English verb mastery. It can be interpreted that this type of error is possibly related to the developmental errors in learning English verbs. In particular, the error is not associated with intra-lingual and inter-lingual errors. As it has been known, in English grammar system, there is no pattern of double verbs with “*be + verb-1*”. In the same way, under the grammatical system of Indonesian language, there is no verb pattern of “*adalah + verba*” (*be + verb-1*).

In relation to the functional perspective, the tendency of second-year college students to make verb errors in relational clauses can be associated with the function and nature of relational clauses. Relational clauses compared to other types of processes are more abstract due to their function for relating meaning. The verbs of relational clauses in general are as not concrete as other types of processes. Unlike relational processes, other processes can be seen, sense, heard, or imagined. As formulated by Halliday & Matthiessen (2004), relational process is defined as the process of being or having. It represents experiences on the ‘relationship’ or connections between things. According to Knapp & Watkins (2005), making meaning of abstract things especially in creative writing is associated with the advanced level of literacy skill. Due to

the abstract nature of relational clauses, there is a need to provide intensive practices bound in context to Indonesian college students majoring in English education especially in mastering the use of *be*.

To date, there has been absent linguistic studies evaluating the verb errors of second and their-year university students based on both formal and functional linguistic perspectives. Based on the formal perspective alone, there has been myriad of studies. In terms of the functional perspective, there has been few evaluating college students' verbs. The comparative linguistic study of Manar et al. (2020), for instance, has revealed that students' verbs are not as functional as those of the advanced writers.

The current study has attempted to combine formal and functional perspectives in evaluating the inaccuracy of verbs constructed by English-major students of different levels. In terms of the causes of errors in grammar especially verbs, different studies have claimed distinct positions. The source of errors can be associated with the interference or mother tongue of students (Atashian & Al-Bahri, 2018; Fitrawati & Safitri, 2021; Mohammad et al., 2015) or it can be linked to intra-lingual errors, namely the difficulties of the target language (Prayuda et al., 2023; Yusuf et al., 2021).

Regardless of the exact source of errors, what more matters is that the necessity for EFL teachers to increase students' awareness of the differences between their mother tongues and their foreign languages. Besides, the pedagogical treatment also needs to involve the functional perspective, namely teaching and learning English verbs based on the context of situation and context of culture. In a simple way, the teaching and learning of grammar need to be adapted to the social purpose of a text. Last but not least, there is a need to consider the factor of different levels of learners.

CONCLUSION

To the present time, based on the perspective of formal grammar, the mastery of verbs has been one of linguistic challenges faced by Indonesian students majoring in English education. This comparative study has revealed the different tendency of English verb errors of second-year and third-year university students majoring in English education based on not only formal grammar but also functional grammar. Whereas the first group tended to make errors in missing *be* both in relational and material clauses, the latter had the tendency to make errors in subject-verb agreement in material clauses. Based on the findings of the present study, it can be concluded that grammatical competence of making meaning with *be* is still challenging. Hence the teaching of nominal verbs for Indonesian students should be emphasized especially for the lower-level students. Further, the pedagogical intervention for higher-level students should focus on the

use of subject-verb agreement especially in simple present tense sentences.

Despite its findings, the current analysis has only focused on the inaccuracy of verbs between second-year and third-year university students majoring in English education, based on the perspectives of formal and functional grammar. To confirm the findings of the present study, further studies can make use of more students as the participants. In addition, to extend the scope of this study, further analyses can relate students' verb errors to their first languages. As it is known, to many Indonesian people, Indonesian is not their first language, but rather their second language.

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