

ERRORS IN WORD ORDER AND SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT IN THE UNDERGRADUATE THESIS ABSTRACTS

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Abstract: The objectives of the research were formulated to find out the errors of word order and the subject-verb agreement made by the English department students at universities in Indonesia in their undergraduate thesis abstracts. The method of the research was qualitative descriptive. The source of data was 35 undergraduate thesis abstracts from 2017 to 2019 year made by the English department students at universities in Indonesia. Technique of data analysis was through collecting data, identifying of errors, classifying of errors, explaining of errors and evaluating of errors. The classification of the errors is based on Surface Taxonomy category. The research findings reveal that the most common error of word order in the surface taxonomy was omission consisting of 76 or 38% errors. Meanwhile, the most error of subject- verb agreement was omission and misformation with 21 or 48,83%.

Key Words: abstract; word order; subject-verb agreement; surface taxonomy category

Introduction

Before completing a study, college students must write a thesis. It is an obligatory task for the college students because they are academicians who are able to contribute their scholarly knowledge to their scientific paper which is called as a thesis. The thesis is written based on the student's research result, so it is not a free writing but it is an academic writing. The academic writing is a formal writing that is planned and focused. It answers the questions and demonstrates an understanding of the subject. It is structured and written in a logical order. It shows knowledge of the subject area, supports opinions and arguments with evidence. It is also written in appropriate language and tenses, and it is clear.

As the thesis is a scientific paper and an academic writing, it hopefully gives beneficial to all people or students who want to learn the study. The thesis can be used as comparative study for them. They can come to the library and read the thesis. In digital era, people do not need to go to library for reading the thesis because nowadays many theses are available in Portable Document Format (PDF). They can be accessed through internet. In thesis, one of important components is abstract. It is presented at the beginning of the thesis. It displays a descriptive summary with no longer than 350 words. It consists of the statement of the study purpose, methods and findings of the thesis research. This abstract ties together the entire writing of thesis, summarizing all of the research and preparing readers on what to expect in the thesis. In another word, by reading the abstract the reader will identify quickly what the thesis is about.

Evans, et.al (2014, p.130) clearly said that an abstract is a gist of the thesis paper that explain about the reason of doing the research or study, how the research or the study is achieved. Further components are discussing the use of the methods in the research or the study and what results obtained. The abstract is ended with the conclusion. Therefore, the position of the abstract is at the beginning or at the head of a paper because it is usually the first thing that readers read and decide whether to continue reading or not.



The most common weakness in student's writing is the inability to generate sentences that are not only readable but also grammatically correct in conventional, formal sense. The students have always had difficulties handling the basic mechanics of sentences. However, the essential skill in writing abstract which is same as other academic writing is the ability to generate a correct sentence, followed by another correct sentence and so on. It means that a sentence follows the conventions of standard English in its punctuation, spelling and grammar. So, grammar is an important part in writing because grammar organizes the language, so that the meaning of a sentence can be clear and easy to understand. Grammar is an explanation of how the forms of word can be changeable and united into sentences in a language. Thus, to be able to use proper language, the student needs to study the grammar, so the language product can be grammatically acceptable.

The students sometimes make errors on the use of grammar when they produce an English writing. They cannot avoid the grammatical errors in their writing. Sometimes they do not pay attention to the errors they make and they do not know how to correct the errors. The errors commonly are caused by transferring patterns and features of the native language to the new language. The errors are usually happened because the students have had experiences with their mother tongue. Hence, the students who have been using Indonesian language since their early childhood already had experience with the language, and when they learn English as their new language, they would be faced with the problem of different sound, words and sentences. Thus, errors appear as the students attempt using or producing English Language as their target language.

Error is different from mistake because a mistake occurs from the lack of students' knowledge about the system of target language and they fail to use it. Meanwhile, error refers to the competence of student in the target language. The students who learn English as their second or foreign language are usually not able to make any corrections of their errors by themselves because they do not have full understanding of English system. Mourtaga in Abushihab (2004, p.214) claimed that "errors occur repeatedly and cannot be recognized by the learner." Therefore, the role of teachers is important to help the students to correct the grammar in their writing and train the students to practice a lot to make their good writing. The teachers deal with these errors by making some strategies after the conduct error analysis. Moreover, these errors provide evidence of the students' level in English language. Further, these contain valuable information on the learning strategies of the students and they also supply means by which the teachers can assess learning and teaching and determine priorities for future effort.

This research will focus on syntactic errors, especially the word order and subject-verb agreement because the word order of English is different from Indonesian language. In Indonesian language, the primary word is placed in front of defining word, while in English the defining words precede the primary word. For example: handsome boy = anak laki-laki yang tampan. The word "boy" is called noun and the word "handsome" is called adjective. In English the adjective comes before the noun but in Indonesia the noun may come before the adjective. In the process of learning, Indonesian students definitely make errors. It is understandable since the rule of Indonesian and English language is different.

Many students have problem in subject-verb agreement rules in their writing even though they have been learning English for about some years in school because in an Indonesian sentence, the verbs do not change even it happens in the present, past or in the future. Hewings (2005, p. 80) stated that "The subject verb agreement means if a sentence has a singular subject it is followed by a singular verb, and if it has a plural subject it is followed by a plural verb; that is; the verb agrees with the subject." Therefore, the students tend to make errors in term of subject verb agreement. Moreover, some research analysis also support that more students contribute errors in term of subject-verb agreement in the writing.

As abstract is a kind of academic writing, the students should be able to arrange the words into a sentence, sentences into paragraph. Unfortunately most of the students are not able to construct sentence in proper tenses and arrange the sentences coherently. In line with this many students could not express their ideas smoothly in written form especially when they write their abstract of the thesis. Considering the importance of learning, understanding and mastering word order and agreement between a subject and a verb in a sentence and the fact that the students make errors in their writing, the writer is interested to study this case. So, the problems in this research need to be formulated as follow:

1. What errors in word order in undergraduate thesis abstracts of English department students of universities in Indonesia?

2. What errors in subject – verb agreement in undergraduate thesis abstracts of English department students of universities in Indonesia?

The researcher decided to collect data from undergraduate thesis abstracts of English department students taken from the official universities' repositories. Those theses are published for public. Furthermore, as the students of English department they learn about grammar and academic writing but there are grammar errors especially in the word order and subject-verb agreement found in the undergraduate thesis abstracts of English department students at universities in Indonesia. Therefore, the researcher analyzed the error of word order and subject verb agreement in the abstracts and the type of error based on surface strategy taxonomy. According to Dulay, Burt and Krashen, 1982, p. 156-162 that Surface Strategy Taxonomy highlights the way surface structures. Learners may omit necessary items or add unnecessary ones, they may misform or misorder them. There are types of this surface strategy taxonomy .A). Omission. "An omission is a type of error which is characterized by the absence of an item that must appear in a well-formed utterance" (Dulay, Burt and Krashen, 1982, p.154). B). Addition. "An addition is a type of error which is characterized by the presence of an item which must not appear in well-formed utterance" (Dulay, Burt and Krashen, 1982, p. 156). C). Misformation. Misformation errors are characterized by the use of the wrong form of structure or morpheme. (Dulay, Burt and Krashen 1982, p.158). D). Misordering. "These types of errors are characterized by the incorrect placement of morpheme or group of morphemes in an utterance, (Dulay, Burt, and Krashen 1982, p.162).

Method

The object of the study is the analysis of errors in word order and subject verb agreement in English department students' undergraduate thesis abstracts. Therefore, the source of data of the study is the students' undergraduate thesis abstracts at the universities in Indonesia. There were thirty five (35) undergraduate thesis abstracts that the researcher analyzed. The thesis abstracts were collected from three universities. They are the English department students' undergraduate thesis abstracts.

Research instrument is a tool for collecting data or information needed in a research and it plays an important role in conducting a research. Since this research is qualitative research and the method used is document analysis, the researcher is the primary instrument to analyze the data. The researcher conducted this research, processed data collection until data analysis and interpreted by herself actively and accurately. As Bogdan and Biklen (2007, p.4) said that 'the key instrument in qualitative research is the researcher him/herself'. While Creswell (2012, p.223) stated that "Documents represent a good source for text (word) data for a qualitative study".

Collecting data is a process of obtaining the primary data needed for the accomplishment of the aim of the research. This research used written documents of students' undergraduate thesis abstracts taken from the official websites of the universities in Indonesia as the source of data. The data were obtained through reading the undergraduate thesis abstracts of students as the source of data, identifying the word order and subject verb agreement errors which were made by the students in the abstracts, describing and classifying the errors of the word order and subject verb agreement based on types of errors from Heidi Dulay, those are addition, omission, miss-formation, and miss-ordering, calculating those errors to find out which the most types of error occurred and the last is interpreting the data and concluding the result of research.

Technique of data analysis that is used in this research is descriptive analysis. According to Kemp, Hollowood, et.al (2018, p.17), "Descriptive analysis provides detailed, precise, reliable, and objective sensory information about products". In this research, the information of products was the errors of word order and subject-verb agreement in students' undergraduate thesis abstracts that were analyzed by the researcher to identify whether the error was found or not. The researcher explained the data in detailed.

Results and Discussion

Result

It is found that in the errors of word order, omission has the highest frequency of errors with 76 errors (38%), followed by misformation with 58 errors (29%), addition with 51 errors (25,5%), last, misordering with 15 errors (7,5%). Meanwhile, the highest frequency errors in subject verb agreement is misformation and omission with 21 (48,83%), followed by addition with 1 errors (2,3%) and misordering is lowest or null.

1. Word Order

As mentioned previously, there are 4 types of grammatical errors according to Dulay, Bun, and Krashen (1982), they are addition, omission, misformation, and misordering. After conducting the research, word order and subject verb agreement errors were found in the abstracts. From the findings, 200 errors were related to word order errors. The following subsections provide the discussion of the errors of word order found in the abstracts and some samples of the highest until the lowest amount of errors made by the students in their abstracts.

a. Omission

Based on the research findings, omission is a type of errors that occurred more frequently compared to the other types. There were 76 errors (38%) found in the abstracts. Omission is the most frequent error type that occurred in the E.I.ESP students' undergraduate abstracts of the year 2014-2017. From the total 76 errors, the most frequent error classification found in omission is the absence of verbs that occurred 30 times. While the least frequent error is the absence of suffix –s or –es (nouns) and suffix –s or –es (verbs) , and it is followed by the absence of suffix –d or –ed (verbs) that occurred 4 times. The following figure showed the classification of errors in omission.

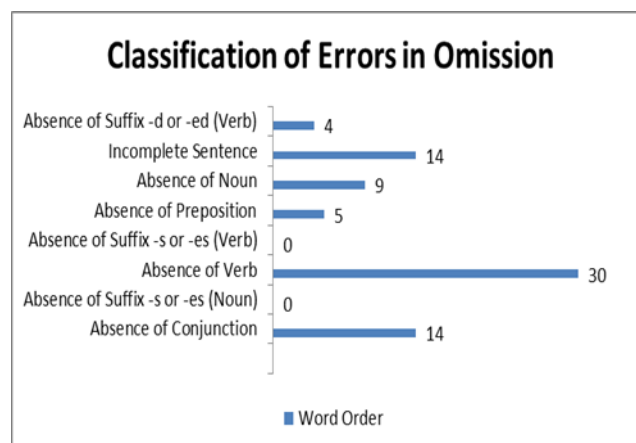


Figure 1. classification of error of omission in word order

b. Misformation

Based on the findings, 29% of the errors belonged to misformation. The errors occurred 58 times. From the total 58 errors, the highest frequent error occurred in misinformation is the word choice, 27 times. In contrast, the least frequent error in this category is the requiring of gerunds that is occurred only eight.

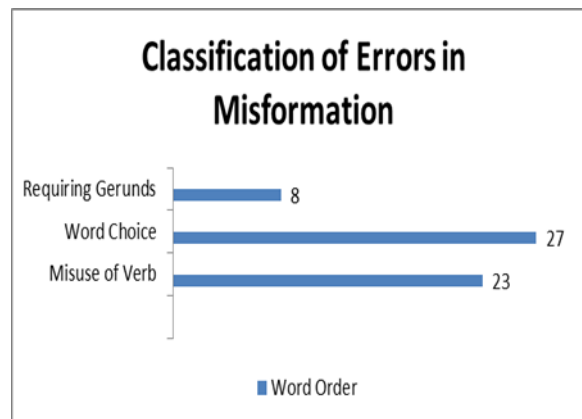


Figure 2. Classification of errors of misformation in word order.

c. Addition

Error of addition in the students’ abstracts placed the third position in the error of word order. It has 51 of 200 errors. The most frequent error in this category from the students' abstracts is the unneeded verbs and the redundancy, which occurred 9 times of 51 errors. It is followed by the unneeded preposition which is found 8 times, and the unneeded conjunction and the unneeded suffix –ing which occurred 7 times. While the least frequent error is occurred one and two times that have categories of the unneeded articles, the unneeded noun or pronoun, the unneeded adjectives, the unneeded suffix-s or –es nouns, the unneeded suffix –s or –es verbs, the unneeded suffix –d or –ed and the repetitions. The classification of errors in addition is shown below.

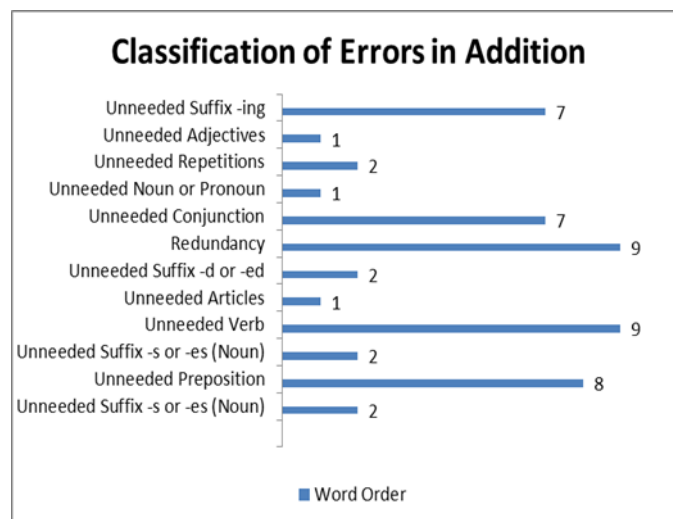


Figure 3. Classification of errors of addition in word order.

d. Misordering

The errors belonged to misordering were classified into word order category because the researcher found the wrong sentence structure in some sentences in the students’ abstracts. Here are 3 samples of the errors found in misordering.

2. Subject Verb Agreement

There are 43 times of error occurred in the subject verb agreement. The highest frequency percentage errors in subject verb agreement are misformation and omission. The classifications of each category will be described below.

a. Omission

Based on the research findings, omission and misformation are types of errors that occurred 21 times (48,83%) and their errors frequency showed the highest compared to the other types in the category of subject verb agreement.

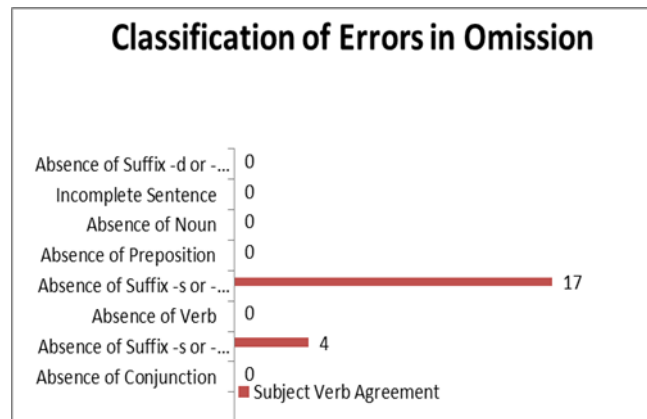


Figure 4. Classification of error of omission in subject-verb agreement.

b. Misformation

This category has the same number of errors with omission's that occurred in error of subject-verb agreement. The research found 21 times or 48,83%. Misuse of verb gave the biggest contribution in the error of misformation.

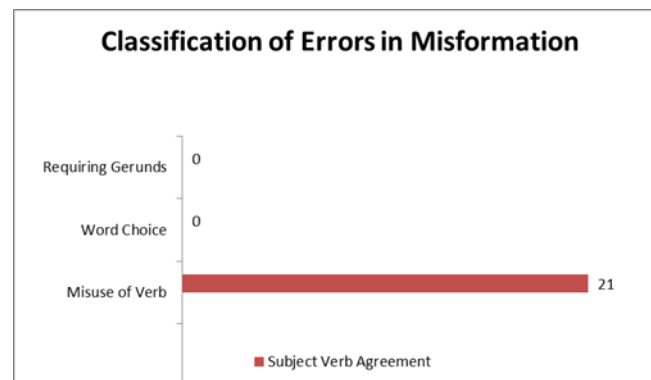


Figure 5. Classification of errors of misformation in subject-verb agreement.

Discussion

Based on the result of analysis, the errors in word order are more often than subject verb agreement. The errors in word order showed 200 errors or 82,30% and subject verb agreement had 43 or 17,69% errors. Furthermore it showed that types of error occurred in word order and subject verb agreement are misformation, omission, addition and misordering that only appeared in word order. The highest percentage of errors made by students in their abstracts is omission for word order that occurred 76 times or 38% .The second is misformation that the researcher found 58 times or 29% of errors in the abstracts. The third is addition which has 51 times or 25,5% of errors. The last is misordering that showed 15 times or 7,5% of errors. Meanwhile, in subject verb agreement misformation and omission are the highest frequency percentage of errors found in the research finding. They had 21 times or 48,83% of errors. The second is addition that only appeared 1 time or 2,3%. It can be shown in the figure below:

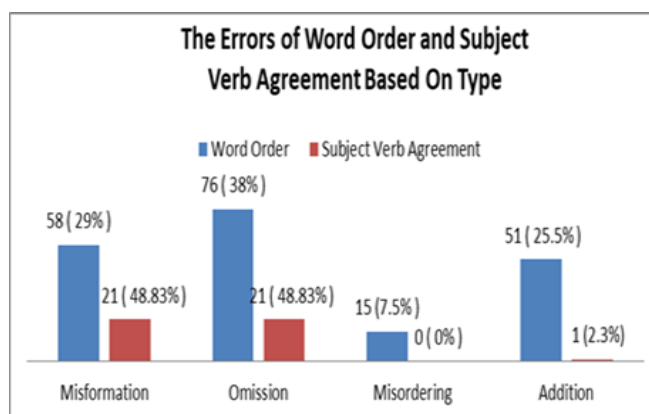


Figure 6. The number of Errors of Word Order and Subject- Verb Agreement.

The result finding is relevant with the research that was held in 2012 by Blanka Frydrychova Klimova from University of Hradec Kralove, Czech Republic which entitled *Common Mistakes in Writing Abstracts in English*. Her result indicated that word order errors in English are considered serious. Almost 35% of abstracts had the wrong word order.

The result of this study is compatible with previous researches outcomes. Novita (2018) conducted a study to investigate the undergraduate thesis abstracts of English language education students of Sanata Dharma University. She also found that omission is the most frequent one and the following category is misformation, the third is addition and the last is misordering. Other previous researchers of errors in word order conducted by Abdillah, et.al (2017), Limengka and Kuntjara (2012), Said and Syam (2015) showed that the omission, misformation, addition and misordering are found in the students writing. Although they have different category of the highest frequent errors, but omission and misformation are still the most errors in the word order. According to Ellis (1997), the students frequently disappear grammatical morpheme than content morpheme. It can be proven by this research that the students frequently omitted grammatical morpheme than content morpheme.

Meanwhile, Gunawan, et.al (2018) made a research of error analysis of subject-verb agreement made by students in Meurandeh Langsa and they also found three types of errors experienced by the students namely misinformation, omission and addition. In the other previous researchers related to subject verb agreement, Arinacky (2007), Ginanjar (2015) stated that their research findings also showed misinformation, omission and addition as the three types of errors in subject verb agreement in students' writing. Misformation is one of the highest frequent error in subject verb agreement, because students were still confused to use proper form of the morpheme or structure. Dulay, et.al (1982, p. 158) stated that misformation was marked by using a wrong form of the morpheme or structure.

In summary, dominantly most of students were made error because they have studied about grammar but failed in applying their knowledge in complex sentences that makes them confused the right pattern. It could be stated that the students get the problem in applying the word order and subject verb agreement in sentence based on the appropriate rules. It could be proven that they committed the error on their writing. In a language learning process, however, the term 'error' is not the same as 'mistake.' About this, Corder (1967 in Ellis, 1994) explains that "An error takes place when the deviation arises as a result of lack of knowledge. It represents a lack of competence. In addition, Richard and Schmidt (2002) state, "A distinction is made between errors, as a result from incomplete knowledge, and a mistake is made when the learner is writing or speaking and it is caused by lack of attention, carelessness, fatigue, or other aspects of performance." Error occurs because a learner is lack of competency or incompetence, while mistake does when a learner, though he has all the competency of the language, fails to perform what he knows.

Conclusions

1. Errors in word Order in the Undergraduate Thesis Abstracts of English Department Students in Indonesia.

Based on the result of analysis, the researcher found that the most frequent error in the undergraduate thesis abstracts is the error in word order especially in error of omission of verb. It was found 200 total errors consisting of 78 or 38% errors of omission, 58 or 29% errors of misformation, 51 or 25,5% errors of addition and 15 or 7,5% errors of misordering. Many sentences were written in improper structure especially the structure of passive sentence. The students might have lack of knowledge about the passive sentence and how to use it in the sentence. Moreover, they still cannot determine the main subject in the sentence well that made them confused to use the proper verb be to form the passive sentence. Furthermore, the use of that clause and its function in the sentence needs to be learned by the students because many clauses found in the abstracts are in improper structure.

2. Errors in Subject-Verb Agreement in the Undergraduate Thesis Abstracts of English Department Students in Indonesia.

From the analysis result in chapter IV, the researcher found that the total error in subject verb agreement is 43 errors with 21 or 48,83% errors of misformation and omission as the highest frequent error, and 1 or 2,3% error of addition. The students often used the wrong main verb for the main subject. It can be happened if the students cannot identify the main subject to determine the suitable verb, or otherwise, they cannot identify the main verb to determine the use of main subject. The writer might also be confused to determine if subject is plural or singular. The role of dictionary can solve the problem for this matter. The zero result in the error of subject verb agreement is error of misordering. The researcher cannot find the error of misordering in the analysis of subject verb agreement error.

These errors, however, are still understandable because they can serve beneficial improvement for teachers and for students. For students, making errors in their writing is as the process of learning to make some improvements and for teachers, they also should facilitate students in improving English mastery, so that the target language learning can be achieved.

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