An Error Analysis on the Use of Simple Past Tense

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Abstract

The objectives of this study are (1) to identify and classify the errors of the second semester students of Informatic Study Program Cokroaminoto Palopo University in using simple past tense, (2) to describe the frequency occurrence of the errors. The instrument used was a test on English simple past tense. The population of the study was the second semester students of Informatic Study Program Cokroaminoto Palopo University. The sample consisted of 50 students. Students errors identified in this study were categories into three types, namely, errors of omission, errors of addition and errors of misformation. The result of the analysis shows that there were in all, 1234 errors among 50 students. The types of errors among the students in constructing and using English simple past tense consisted of 68 (5%) errors of omission, 95 (8%) errors of addition and 1071 (87%) errors of misformation. From the highest to the lowest, the errors were: misformation, addition, and omission. The result of further analysis shows that the students seemingly have problems in each category omission, addition and misformation. The average number of errors made of all the students was 46%. From the percentage, it can be concluded that the students' mastery in using English simple past tense was poor. It is hoped that the finding of the present study will be useful for the teaching of English, especially the teaching of English simple past tense.

Key words: *An error analysis, simple past tense*

Introduction

English as an international language has an important role to develop science and technologies many countries in the world use English as a medium of communication among people in different countries, and also of writing many kinds of books in which those are spread in different countries. For many years, English has been the most important foreign language in Indonesia. The learners must be able to master the four skills, they are: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, also English components such as: grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, etc. Among the four skills, writing is the most difficult one because it requires demonstrating the control of a number of variables simultaneously; they are control of content, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, punctuation spelling, etc. Alam (2016) points out, "It has been argued that learning to write fluently and expressively is the most difficult of the macro skills for all language users regardless of whether the language in question is first, second, or foreign language." The writing skills are complex and sometimes difficult to teach, requiring mastery not only of grammatical and rhetorical devices but also of conceptual and judgment elements. It means that ability to write needs a special skill and process in organizing language material by using learners' own words and ideas and to be a good composition.

The learners often make mistakes and even errors in learning English, especially when they try to arrange sentences or use tenses in their writing. As a result, they will write sentences ungrammatically. Actually, ungrammatical sentences have great

influence when the learners are writing sentences. That can be influenced by the first language which is different from the second language in written form.

It can be seen that errors in learning a second language are caused by the interference of the learners' mother tongue. In other words, errors made by the learners sometimes are caused by use of the first language. Making Errors is a natural and unavoidable part of the process of learning English. Many kinds of errors arise when the learners write because they do not master the English structure well. Also, errors are the inability of the students in using rules of the components and elements of the second language. So almost all learners must make errors when they are learning English because it is difficult to separate error in the process of learning English.

Students' errors are very useful ways of showing what they have and have not learnt. Errors are important to study in order to understand the process of learning. A study of learners' errors describes what problems the learners are having now and help the teacher plan remedial work. In addition, the teacher should not see negatively as a sign of failure but see them positively as an indication of what the teacher or lecturer still needs to teach. So, if the teacher or lecturer tries to prevent students; errors, he/she never finds out what they do not know.

To categorize error into classification based on the types or the sources of errors is not easy work. Many times error cannot be traced back into one source. Moreover, the boundaries between different sources of error many sometimes be unclear that the arbitrary classification decision unavoidable. According to the process editing written by Sue Loarch (1984: 181) the writer concludes that there are two categories of errors, global and local errors. Global errors are those which affect the over all sentence organization significantly, while local errors are those affect single element (constituent) in a sentences.

Amin (2017) made a classification of errors in comparative taxonomy based on comparisons between the structure of L2 errors and certain other types of constructions there comparisons result in four types of errors; developmental, inter-lingual, ambiguous and other errors. Furthermore, based on surface strategy taxonomy, Amin (2017) give emphasis on the ways surface structure is altered. Learners may omit necessary items or add unnecessary ones, they may misfire item or miss order them. Thus, the errors may be in the form of omission, addition, miss formation, and miss ordering errors types.

Omission errors are characterized by the absence of an item that must appear in a well-formed utterance. Although any morpheme or word in a sentence is a potential candidate for omission, some types of morpheme are omitted than others. Additional errors are the opposite of omission. They are characterized by the presence of an item, which must not appear in a well-formed utterance. Additional errors include double marking, regularization and simple addition that is an addition that is not double marking or regularization. Misformation errors are characterized by the use of the wrong from of morpheme or structure, while in omission errors the items is not supplied at all, in miss-formation errors the learners. Supplies something although it is in correct. Misordering errors are characterized by the incorrect placement of a morpheme or group morphemes in a utterance.

The error classification is intended as an aid to present data rather than to create a basic for extensive speculating concerning the source of errors. To make a good composition, the students must be able to master and apply the structure correctly, especially about tense used. In this case, the tense used is simple past tense. If they cannot do that, of course, errors will arise. Automatically their writing will cause

misunderstanding for the readers, because the readers cannot receive the massage or expression of their idea well. Most of the students still find problems in using it, because of their limited mastery, especially the differences between regular and irregular verb. Therefore the writer wants to analyze the errors made by the students and tries to give solutions to overcome their problems. The research question in this research was what errors are made by the second semester students of Informatic Study Program Cokroaminoto Palopo University in using simple past tense?

Method

The use of method in a research is very necessary, because it will be able to help a researcher get data easily. This research used survey method. It is used to describe phenomena of a case by taking its data that will be analyzed and generalized to the population of the research through Descriptive to qualitative samples.

The case that was surveyed in this research was about phenomena of English simple past tense errors committed by the second semester students of Informatic Study Program Cokroaminoto Palopo University. The subject of the research was 50 students, they were 25 from class 2B and 25 students were from class 2G.

Instrument used to get data in this research was in the form of topics list used in the writing composition. The researcher used the form of topics list as instrument for asking the students to produce their language in the form of written language through writing composition spontaneously in the class.

The technique used to collect data in this research was by giving a test of writing composition to the students. The purpose of giving the test was to ask the students to produce her/his language through writing an English composition spontaneously. It means that it does not give the opportunity to the students to look up his/her note. The result of the students' work was needed to analyze their language, which has many kinds of errors. So in this case test did not measure the students' ability in the writing skill, but it analyzed the student's errors in producing their language in the written form in the aspect of English simple past tense.

According to the Carden's Model (1987:173) the first step in process if analysis is the identification of errors. After identifying the errors the total number of errors, made by the learners was counted, and the value each errors was 1 (one). After the identification of the errors, the researcher formed a reconstruction of the correction of the sentences in the target language, or on the other word, the researcher compared the original sentences and finally describe the differences.

Results
1. Errors of Omission

They are indicated by the absence of one or more items that must appear in a well-formed sentence. From the data analysis, errors of omission, which could be identified in these studies, are:

a. Omission of "not" in negative simple past tense.
b. Omission of the simple past tense, and
c. Blanks or unanswered items.
    1) Omission of "not" (n't) in negative simple past tense

Such errors, in this study were found when the students did not understand the form of the statement whether it was negative or positive, which would determine the form of the simple past tense needed. Most of the time the students were probably still

confused or lack of attention with the form or the statement, which were asked for confirmation, so they answered with the wrong form of simple past tense.

The examples found in students answer sheets:

1. He <u>did help</u> his father in the yard.
2. She <u>did studied</u> English and Indonesia.
3. He <u>did cleaned</u> the house yesterday.
4. Tuti <u>did washed</u> her shirts last week.
5. Ali <u>did carried</u> the radio to his brother's house.

The underline simple past tense, which errors in the answer sheets are wrong as they do not correspond to the right answer/simple past tense needed for statements given. "not" as an indication of negative forms, is left out in these sentences.

Reconstruction of the sentences"

1. He <u>did not</u> help his father in the yard.
2. He <u>did not</u> help his father in the yard.
3. He <u>did not</u> clean the house yesterday.
4. Tuti <u>did not</u> wash her shirts last week.
5. Ali <u>did not</u> carry the radio to his brother's house.

2) Omission of "Ed" of Simple Past Tense

The omission of "ed" of the simple past tense, is indicated by the sentence of predicated in the simple past tense. The examples are:

i. She <u>want</u> to see her brother there.
ii. Ana <u>carry</u> the basket for her mother.
iii. On Monday I <u>wash</u> my shirts.
iv. On Friday I <u>study</u> match and history.
v. Yesterday I <u>clean</u> the house.

Those simple past tenses shown above are considered wrong because the predicate of the simple past tense (Predicate on type II) are left out:

Reconstruction of the sentences:

1. She <u>wanted</u> to see her brother there
2. Ana <u>carried</u> the basket for her mother
3. On Monday I <u>washed</u> my shirts
4. On Friday I <u>studied</u> math and history
5. Yesterday I <u>cleaned </u>the house

Blanks or unanswered items

Besides the two kinds of omission described above, at the time, it was found that there were many items left unanswered. In the students answer sheets, they were seen as blank answer for related number of items.

2. Errors of Addition

The second type of errors in this study is errors of addition. As it has been mentioned in advance, errors of addition are characterized by the presence of one or more items that must appear in well-formed sentences. Identified in this study include:

1) Addition of "was/were" on nominal sentences

Errors in the form of addition of "was/were' to simple past tense on nominal sentence is characterized by the appearance of 'was/were' to simple past tense.

The examples are:

1. Tari <u>did </u>in the living room
2. They <u>are</u> in the classroom
3. She <u>did</u> reading a newspaper
4. Mr. Smith <u>did</u> a teacher in SMP
5. She <u>does</u> very happy with the apples, the oranges and the flowers

Reconstruction of the sentences:
1. Tari <u>was</u> in the living room.
2. They <u>were</u> in the classroom
3. she <u>was</u> reading a news paper
4. Mr. Smith <u>was</u> a teacher in SMP
5. She <u>was</u> very happy with the apples, the oranges and the flower.

3. Errors of Misformation

These kinds of Errors are characterized by the use of incorrect form morpheme or structure. While in errors of omission, the items is not supplied of all, in errors of misformation the learners supply something although it is in an incorrect form. The errors of miss formation identified in this study are:

a. Misformation of "V1 to be VII".
b. Misformation of auxiliaries "did, was, were.
c. Misformation of "to be "(was/were)
d. Misformation of change to negative (-) and interrogative, (?) sentence.
e. Misformation of "did" and "was/were" in the interrogative (?)

1) Misformation of "V1 to become VII"

Usually, the errors occurred since the students still don't understand with the rule or the usage of pattern.

The examples are:
1. Yeni <u>go</u> to the market yesterday.
2. Mary <u>help</u> the teacher to clean the blackboard.
3. They <u>play</u> football in the yard.
4. He <u>study</u> English in his school.
5. His father <u>works</u> in the post office.

Reconstruction of the sentences:
1. Yeni <u>went</u> to the market yesterday.
2. Mary <u>helped</u> the teacher to clean the blackboard.
3. They <u>played</u> football in the yard.
4. He <u>studied</u> English in his school.
5. His father <u>worked</u> in the post office.

2) Misformation of auxiliaries "did, was, were".

The errors occurred as the students at that find still did not understand yet or they were likely confused with the use of auxiliaries (did, was, were).

The examples are:
1. He <u>does </u>play football last Sunday.
2. Rini <u>were</u> in living room.
3. They <u>was</u> reading a newspaper.
4. Jony <u>does not</u> writing A letter yesterday.
5. Father <u>were</u> talking with mother.

Reconstruction of the sentences:
1. He <u>did not</u> play football last Sunday.
2. Rini <u>was</u> in living room.
3. They <u>were</u> reading a newspaper.
4. Jony <u>did not</u> write a letter yesterday.
5. Father <u>was t</u>alking with mother.

3) Misformation of "to be "(was/were)

These errors appeared When the students used incorrect forms or to be which are not in agreement with the subject of the simple past tense

The example is:
- They <u>was</u> in the garden looking for flowers.

Reconstruction of the sentence
- They <u>were</u> in the garden looking for flowers.

4) Misformation of "change to negative (-) and interrogative (?)."

The errors are characterized by the use of incorrect simple past tense as the influence of change to negative and interrogative.

The examples are:
1. We did not <u>washed</u> the desk (-)
2. <u>Listened Tono</u> to the song (?)
3. Maria <u>carried not</u> her bag (-)
4. <u>Do </u>they <u>talked</u> to Mr. Brown (?)
5. Ani did not <u>written </u>a letter (-)

Reconstruction of the sentences:
1. We <u>did not</u> wash the desk (-)
2. <u>Did</u> Tono <u>listen</u> to the song (?)
3. Maria did not carry her bag (-)
4. <u>Did</u> they <u>talk</u> to Mr. Brown (?)
5. Ani <u>did not</u> write a letter (-)

5) Misformation of "did" and "was/were" in the interrogative (?)

The errors are characterized by the use of incorrect simple past tense for the statements beginning with "did" and "was/were". These errors are characterized by the incorrect use of both the auxiliaries in the simple past tense.

The examples are:
1. <u>Does</u> Tini cooking when her mother <u>come</u>?
2. <u>Does</u> Mr. Brown a teacher?
3. <u>Do</u> Lestari <u>went </u>to school yesterday?
4. <u>Does</u> Mary <u>left</u> the house at eight?
5. <u>Do</u> they <u>answered</u> the question?

Reconstruction of the sentences:
1. <u>Was</u> Tini cooking when her mother com?
2. <u>Was</u> Brown a teacher?
3. <u>Did</u> Lestari went to school yesterday?
4. <u>Did</u> Mary leave the house at eight?
5. <u>Did</u> they answer the question?

Quantitative analysis was done as the coming process of identifying and classifying the errors, in the attempt to answer research question, especially concerning with the students errors and problems in using English simple past tense. Students on the test did this analysis on the basic of competition on the percentage of errors mode. Then, from the errors percentage, it can also be inferred which aspects/items of English simple past tense. Therefore, in this study a certain item is identified as a difficult item is 45 % or more if the students make errors.

Table 1: Students Mastery Level in Terms of Errors

Errors	Level of Mastery
8 % - 15 %	Very Good
16 % - 30 %	Good
31 % - 45 %	Fair
46 % - 50 %	Poor
51 % - 100 %	Very Poor

It is found that in this study the students had difficulty in using English simple past tense since they still made many errors.

There are 23 items out of 50 items having error percentage 45%.It means that the students' level of mastery is still poor since they still faced difficulties in certain items of simple past tense. It terms of errors types, the frequency occurrence of each error type is provided in table 4.2.

Table 2: Frequency of Occurrence of Each Error Type

Type of Errors	Number of Errors	Percentage of errors
Omission	68	5 %
Addition	95	8 %
Misformation	1071	87 %
Misordering	-	-
TOTAL	1234	100 %

The percentage of each type or errors above was calculated by using the formula:

$$\frac{\text{Number of errors types}}{\text{Terms of each error types}}\ \text{X 100 \%}$$
Total number of errors

Table 2 shows that out of 1234 errors, there are 68 (5%) errors omission, 95 (8%) errors of addition, and 1071 (87%) errors miss formation, there is no error of missordering.

Discussion

The second semester students of Informatic Study Program Cokroaminoto Palopo University in using English simple past tense was analyzed as an attempting to find out the errors mode. It is included identifying the errors and classifying the errors. Identifying the Errors was done identifying and counting the numbers of errors which appeared in the students answer sheets. As in had done, the test in English simple past tense, which consists of 50 items, was conducted to 54 subjects. Most of the items in the test were answered (which were included in the errors of omission). Besides, the researcher also described the number of errors (wrong answer) for each sentence on

the test as an integrated part of the description of the frequency of occurrence of the errors.

Then, the classification the error into error type was done based on the surface strategy taxonomy. In which errors can be described into four types, they are:

1. Errors of omission: the absence of an item test must appear in a well-farmed utterance.
2. Errors of addition: the presence of an item, which must not appear in a well-farmed utterance.
3. Errors of miss formation: the use of the wrong form of the morpheme or structure.
4. Errors of misordering the incorrect placement of a morpheme or a group of morpheme in an utterance.

However, it was found from the data. There was no error of miss ordering. So that in the analysis errors only consisted of errors of omission, addition, and misformation. This was done to compare the right sentences with the students' wrong sentences and also to indicate to which types the errors belong.

The data analysis of the test on simple past tense shows that errors of misformation reached the highest frequency, followed by errors of addition, and errors or omission. It is found that there is no error of misordering in this study. Further analysis concerning the use of simple past tense in terms of each always of the items shows that misformation errors were always of the highest frequency. The researcher concludes that it happened because most of the students still have problems especially with the use of tense, auxiliaries, and special patterns on the simple past tense.

Conclusion

The result of the analysis shows that there were 1234 errors among 50 students. The types of errors among the students in constructing and using English simple past tense consisted of 68 (5%) errors of omission, 95 (8%) errors of addition and 1071 (87%) errors of misformation. From the highest to the lowest, the errors were: misformation, addition, and omission. The result of further analysis shows that the students seemingly have problems in each category omission, addition and misformation. The average number of errors made of all the students was 46%. From the percentage, it can be concluded that the students' mastery in using English simple past tense was poor.

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