

**Errors Made by the Second Semester Students
of the English Department at Widya Mandala Catholic University
Surabaya in Learning English Tenses as Reflected in Their Narrative
Writing.**

Ervina Hartono

Abstract. People realize that writing cannot be separated from their lives such as in the school and college, they have to make essays or journals for their subjects and in the office, they have to make business letters or reports for their job. Realizing that writing is very important, the writer did an error analysis on the students' tenses in their narrative writing. The reasons why the writer conducted this research are to find out to what extend the second semester students of the English Department at WMCUS acquire the English tenses as reflected in their narrative writing, to find out the possible sources of errors that the student make in constructing English tenses in their narrative composition, and to suggest the possible solutions of the problems.

The subjects are the second semester students of Widya Mandala Catholic University Surabaya. The writer took two classes: class B and C. The writer took the two class in the middle of the six classes. The writer collected the students' test papers which were the data before they are marked by the lecturers. Then, the writer analyzed the data by recognizing and identifying errors, counting the frequency of error occurrences, classifying the identified errors according to the source of errors, interpreting the findings, making conclusion and suggestions.

In analyzing the data, the writer did not use one of the Larry Selinker's sources of error—Transfer of Training is not included because the source can be seen in Speaking clearly. The writer did not use the Transfer of Training to analyze the sources of errors in the data analysis. The results of the analysis are as follows: The sources of errors that contribute are Language Transfer (7% errors), Strategies of Second Language Learning (54,3% errors), Strategies of Second Language Communication (1,6% errors), and Overgeneralization of Target Language Material (37,1% errors). The prominent errors are Strategies of Second Language Learning (54,3% errors) and Overgeneralization of Target Language Material (37,1% errors). From the analysis, the writer concludes that certain students have not mastered two tenses: Simple Present Tense (38% errors) and Simple Past Tense (52% errors). The occurrence of students' errors in the Simple Present Tense and the Simple Past Tense might be caused by the students' confusion because the two tenses are often used in the narrative writing and the regular use of the two tenses and there was a possibility of the students' carelessness. The possible solutions that the writer provided are categorized in two types of errors which are form and function. To overcome the form error, the writer

suggested drill and exercises and to overcome function error, the writer suggested the Communicative Approach.

Keywords: Errors, English Tenses, Narrative Writing

Introduction

Background of the Study

There are four skills in English, namely listening, reading, speaking and writing. As one of those skills, writing plays an important role in English but it is often forgotten or abandoned. That is why many people are not able to write well. Today, people do not only give more attention to writing but they consider it important and necessary to be seriously learnable. They realize that writing cannot be separated from their lives such as in the school and college they have to make essays or journals for their subjects and in the office they have to make business letters or reports for their jobs. Gere (1988) and Weigle (2002) also agree that more and more people learn English for occupational or academic purposes.

The word grammar is connected to the word rule according to Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1999). Grammar is important because it does not only construct tenses but also conjunctions, subordinations, coordinations, articles, prepositions, etc. Mastering the grammar can be obtained by learning and practicing structure. A lot of learning and practices can be useful to develop the use of grammar. Someone who masters grammar well will be able to write well too.

Writing and reading have the same way of how someone understands comprehension. The way someone understands a text in reading is the same as the way he or she understands in writing. It means the reading schema can be applied to make a composition or an essay in writing. According to Devine, et al. (1987), there are basically three areas of schema that play a part in the act of reading: linguistic schema, content schema, and formal schema. Devine, et al. say that linguistic schema is everything connected to linguistic areas. In writing, this means the students' ability to construct grammar and to use vocabulary. Students who do not understand much grammar and vocabulary will not produce various sentences which result in a dull composition. Content schema refers to a reader's knowledge about the topic being read or discussed. In writing, students who do not have enough knowledge of the topic which is used to make a composition or an essay will not be able to make it properly. For example, the students are given a task to make a composition about the gastritis intestinal. Absolutely they cannot make it because they do not have any prior knowledge about it. Perhaps there are some students who can write about it but they do not write much because the lack of knowledge of the topic given. Therefore, the need to have the knowledge is important to make a composition. The more they know about the topic which is given, the better composition or essay they will

produce. Finally, formal schema or the knowledge of the rhetorical patterns in which information is presented. Furthermore, Devine, et al (1987) expresses "Readers who are familiar with narrative structures in their culture may not be able to efficiently process different narrative structures in another culture or language". To understand more, the writer quotes another Devine's words "Familiarity with the way in which information is usually given affects the speed at the readers can process the passage." It means that the way of the composition is written give a big result of understanding. If a composition is orderly written such as there are an introduction, a body/bodies and a conclusion and neatly written are easier to understand than a composition which does not have those things and poorly seen are difficult to understand and it takes more time to read.

A person who tries to speak in a target language (TL) may often make a fossilized language of mother tongue interference. The speaker performs the linguistic items, rules, and subsystems incorrectly are identified as errors. Selinker (1972) claims that the errors which occur in interlanguage (IL) are a result of the native language (NL) then it is known as the process of language transfer; if the errors are a result of identifiable items in training procedures, it is known as transfer of training; if they are a result of an identifiable approach by the learner to the material to be learned, it is known as strategies of second language learning; if they are a result of an identifiable approach by the learner to communication with native speakers of the TL, it is known as strategies of second language communication; and the last, if they are a result of a clear overgeneralization of TL rules and semantic features, it is known as the overgeneralization of TL linguistic material.

Knowing that the students of Widya Mandala Catholic University Surabaya are trained to be teachers, as L2 learners they may often make mistake. In line with this study, the writer conducts an error analysis research to know the students' acquisition of English tenses. From the research, the writer will be able to make a conclusion whether the students' ability in English tenses have already well developed or not. Then she tries to find out what the possible cause of errors that the students make in constructing the English tenses in their narrative composition and gave the possible problem solutions.

The writer focuses the investigation on the English tenses used by the students in their narrative writing which the students use in their composition. The writer analyzes those things in the narrative composition which is taken from the writing paper final test of the second semester students' academic year 2006/2007 of Widya Mandala Catholic University Surabaya. She wants to analyze it because she is eager to know the errors that the students make in constructing the English tenses in the composition, to find the sources of errors and to solve the problem.

Statements of the Problem

- ❖ What are the kinds of errors that the second semester students of English Department at Widya Mandala Catholic University Surabaya English tenses as reflected in their writing?
- ❖ What are the possible sources of errors that the students make in constructing the English tenses?

Objective of the Study

Based on the problem mentioned before, the writer made the following objective: To find to what extent the student of Widya Mandala Catholic University Surabaya of the second year students acquire English tenses in constructing English sentences in their narrative composition. The writer analyzes the students' writing to find the possible sources of errors that the students make in constructing the English tenses.

Research Methods

In this seeth, the writer would like to present the research methodology used in this study. It consists of the research design, the subject, the instrument, the procedure of data collection and finally, and the procedure of data analysis.

Design

This research is a descriptive qualitative study. To make it clear, this research is called descriptive study because in this study the writer attempts to identify, analyze, describe, and classify the errors and rank the errors from the highest to the lowest errors occurrence in acquiring English tenses in the second semester students of the English Department of Widya Mandala Catholic University Surabaya writing test. It can also be categorized as a case study since this is related to a certain group of subjects—the second semester students found in a certain department—the English Department of Widya Mandala Catholic University Surabaya.

Subject

The second semester students of English Department of Widya Mandala Catholic University Surabaya, academic year 2006/2007 were divided into six classes A, AB, B, C, CD, and D. The writer then chose classes B and C based on the two in the middle of six classes as the subjects of this study. The subject of class B are 20 students and the subject of class C are 22 students who are listed on the attendance list. Total number of subjects of both classes is 42 students. The students who were absent from attending the final test of class B: 3 students and class C: 2 students. Finally, the subjects who attended the final test of class B: 17 students and class C: 20 students. After checking the original students' test paper, the writer found out that there was a mistake in the test minutes of the odd

semester 2006/2007 sheets which was for class C. The test watcher wrote there were 20 students' paper but actually there were 19 students which were based on the list. It seems that he forgot to move a student's paper to another class. In class B, there was a female student whose her name was not listed on the test attendance list but she wrote her class B. Another student whose name and signature were on the test attendance, has no paper submitted for the test. The writer counted carefully that actually there were 19 students in class B and 17 students in class C. Thus, the total subjects of both classes are 36 students. Below is the summary of the data which the writer collected in the form of table.

Information of the data	Class B	Class C	Total
Number of students who were on the attendance list	20 students	22 students	42 students
Number of students who were absent	3 students	2 students	5 students
Number of papers which were assigned	17 papers	20 papers	37 papers
Number of students who their name were not on the attendance list but they assigned the paper	—	1 student	1 student
The exact number of the data	17 papers	19 papers	36 papers

Total number of the papers which were analyzed: 36 papers

The reason why the writer chose those students as the subjects of this study was based on the consideration that they have already learned grammar in Structure 1 and the writer wants to know how well the students acquire the tenses.

Instrument

To carry out this study, the first instrument to be used is the lecturers made test which is given to the second semester students of academic year 2006/2007 of the English Department of Widya Mandala Catholic University Surabaya. The second instrument is the writer herself as a person who analyzes and interprets the data.

The reason for choosing the writing papers of the second semester students is that in their writing papers reflect what they have already learned in the Structure I.

paper which was administered by the teachers, before she copied the data she asked permission first to the teacher and then asked permission to the coordinator of the Writing I subject. She copied the students' test paper before the teachers giving mark on it.

Frequency of Occurrence Errors

a. Finding Type of Errors

Error Tense	Number of Error	Percentage
Simple Present Tense	120	38 %
Present Continuous Tense	9	3 %
Present Perfect Tense	4	1,3 %
Simple Past Tense	163	52 %
Past Continuous Tense	11	3,5 %
Past Perfect Tense	3	1 %
Modal 'will'	1	0,3 %
Modal 'would'	1	0,3 %
Modal 'can'	-	-
Modal 'could'	2	0,6 %
TOTAL ERROR	314	100 %

After analyzing the 36 students' papers, the writer found a fact that the biggest errors which were made by the student is Simple Past Tense and the second biggest errors which were made by the student is Simple Present Tense. The writer draws a conclusion that the students had difficulty in Simple Past Tense and Simple Present Tense. The writer observed the data that there were so many errors in those two tenses, in the contrary, the student seemed did not have meaningful difficulties in the tenses that the writer thought would be the biggest problem for them. The writer thought that the student would face difficulty in Past Continuous Tense, Present Continuous Tense, and Present Perfect Tense. The fewer errors are in Modal 'could', 'will', and 'would'. The writer misjudged the students' ability in mastering in Past Continuous Tense, Present Continuous Tense, and Present Perfect Tense. Surprisingly, the writer found fewer errors in those tenses than what the writer expected. Then, the fact that was shocking is the writer found plenty of errors in Simple Past Tense and Simple Present Tense which in the writer's mind those two tenses are easy. The writer made predictions that the errors happened a lot in the Simple Past Tense and Simple Present Tense are because the two tenses are often used in the narrative writing (recount and fiction), the regular use of the tenses caused the students confused so that the students used to mix up the tenses and the students' carelessness.

b. Sources of Errors

Sources of Errors	Number of Error	Percentage
Language Transfer	17	7 %
Strategies of Second Language Learning	133	54,3 %
Strategies of Second Language Communication	4	1,6 %
Overgeneralization of target Language Material	91	37,1 %
TOTAL	245	100 %

The writer got the numbers from the Data Analysis in the Appendix. The prominent sources of errors are Strategies of Second Language Learning and Overgeneralization of Target Language Material.

Interpretation of Findings

After analyzing all of the 36 papers, the writer found some facts are surprising. These are the facts that the writer found: the larger errors in tenses are Simple Past Tense was 52% and Simple Present Tense was 38%. The fewer errors are Past Continuous Tense was 3,5%, Present Continuous Tense was 3%, Present Perfect Tense 1,3%, Past Perfect Tense was 1%, Modal 'could' was 0,6%, Modal 'will' was 0,3%, and Modal 'would' was 0,3%. There were no errors in Modal 'can'. The second facts, the writer found which the sources of errors that occurred the most are Strategy of Second Language Learning (54,3% errors) and Overgeneralization of Target Language Material (37,1% errors), the sources of errors that occurred the least are Language Transfer (7% errors), and Strategy of Second Language Communication (1,6% errors).

The writer observes that the student tends to omit the auxiliary verbs when it is needed or add the auxiliary verbs when it is not needed. Both of it happens in Strategies of Second Language Learning and Overgeneralization of Target Language Material. It seems that the student have not mastered the Simple Past Tense and Simple Present Tense rather than the complicated tenses such as Present Continuous Tense, Past Continuous Tense, Present Perfect Tense, Past Perfect Tense, and Present Perfect Continuous Tense according to the writer. The writer thinks that those tenses are complicated because the form is not simple rather than Simple Present Tense and Simple Past Tense. The two tenses are simple because it is easy to understand and learn. The writer concluded that the students have not had a solid base of Simple Present Tense and Simple Past Tense. In Simple Present Tense, the writer finds the students omit the auxiliary (to be) and -es / -s ending for showing the first singular pronoun and in Simple Past Tense, the students often overgeneralized the rule and the irregular verb and sometimes omitted the auxiliary verb (to be). The students also did a combination of omitting the auxiliary verb (to be) and -es / -s ending in a sentence in Simple Present Tense. In Simple Past Tense, the student also did combination of overgeneralizing the rule and the irregular verb in a sentence.

Solutions of the Problem

The students have made two types of errors: form and function. In the form errors, the student made errors such as writing 'hug' into 'hugged', 'taught' into 'teached', 'hung' into 'hungs', etc. The solutions are through drill and exercises. The teacher needs to give drill and exercises to train the students. Sometimes the students often forget the forms so they need to be trained the forms continuously until they memorize it permanently. Drill can make the students memorize the verbs

permanently in their minds. To overcome the problem, drill can be the best solution. Drill is given for teaching the irregular form, teaching the regular *-ed* form with its two pronunciation variants, teaching the doubling rule for verbs that end in *-d* (for example, wed-wedded, hug-hugged). The teacher can give handouts a list of irregular verbs that student must memorize. In the exercises, the teacher can train the form by teaching pattern practice drills for *-ed*, and doing substitution drills for irregular verbs. For a notice, drilling can be bored for the students because they have to repeat the same thing continuously. This can make their interest of learning is down and the learning becomes less effective. The teachers should be careful to use drill. The teacher can give exercises such as fill in the blanks, use games as exercise and learning (matching the vocabulary, crossword puzzle, TPR (throwing a ball to a student and then mentioned the Simple Present verb and the student who received the ball gave the correct answer), etc.

In the function errors, the students made text based errors such as “Amel *was very help* me and gave a new spirit to start my day.” “*Today, I was wake up* earlier than usually and felt hatred in my heart.” “Teddy *was to bet* with his twin that who would get Lisa as his girlfriend he would get anything for his requests.” “Now, Louis *can’t lying* again about his feeling.” “They *are spend* their time together.” “They *helps* and *shares* each other.” The students used to mix up the tenses so the result is error. Because of the base of the error is text based, the problem can be solved by using communicative approach. In the communicative approach, the students are given narratives stories, explanation about the *-ed* form and the doubling rules that occur in the texts. The teacher uses two short narratives (Story A and B) about recent experiences or events; Story A to a half of the class and Story B to another half of the class. After that, the teacher teaches the regular *-ed* form using verbs that occur in the texts as examples, teaches the pronunciation and doubling rules if those forms occur in the texts, teaches the irregular verbs that occur in the texts. Then, the teacher asks the students to read the narratives. The teacher also asks question if they do not understand, asks the students to work in pairs in which one member has read Story A and the other the Story B, and asks the student to interview one another; using the information from the interview, then they write up the information and orally repeat the story that they have not read. In addition to the approach, the discussion about the text and pair interview can attract the students’ attention to learn. Giving the text as a media of learning is to make students recognizing the correct grammar. Indirectly, this helps students to learn the tenses. Because of learning various things, the students will not trap to the repetition. They will not feel bored. However, this approach has a weakness. The weakness occurs in the discussion because the teacher only teaches the regular *-ed*, the doubling rules, and irregular verbs which occur in the texts. It means that the verbs in the texts are limited in variety and number. It would be better if the teacher gives handout of a list of

irregular verbs and asks the students the meaning (if there are no meanings of the verbs). The teacher should not only teach verbs that occur in the texts but also the verbs in the handout. Then, the teacher asks the students to make sentences using the verb in the handout without the repetition. Each student who is chosen to make a sentence have to make different sentence of one another. The teacher can ask the irregular verbs to the students randomly, the meaning of the verbs, and asks the student to make sentences in every meeting at anytime. The meaning of these ways of learning is to avoid the misinterpretation meaning of the verbs by the students and to check the students' ability in mastering the material which is emphasized. In this case, the material which is emphasized are the Simple Past Tense and the Simple Present Tense. This solution can be used for Simple Present Tense with a few adjustments which fit for teaching Simple Present Tense.

Conclusion And Suggestions

This chapter consists of two parts. In first part, the writer gives conclusion of the previous chapters. The second part deals with suggestions that may be useful for the English lecturers as well as the students.

Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis is to find out to what extend the second semester student of the English Department at Widya Mandala Catholic University Surabaya acquire the English tenses as reflected in their narrative writing, the possible sources of errors that the student make in constructing English tenses in their narrative composition, and the possible solutions of the problem. In getting the information that the writer needed, the writer analyzed the students' work, specifically the tenses.

From the analysis, the writer found some errors in using tenses in the students' writing. The percentage of errors in Simple Past Tense was 52%, Simple Present Tense was 38%, Past Continuous Tense was 3,5%, Present Continuous Tense was 3%, Present Perfect Tense 1,3%, Past Perfect Tense was 1%, Modal 'could' was 0,6%, Modal 'will' was 0,3%, and Modal 'would' was 0,3%. There were no errors in Modal 'can'. It was obvious that a few students had weaknesses in using the Simple Past Tense and the Simple Present Tense because they made many errors in both tenses repeatedly. It meant that the students had not mastered the Simple Past Tense well and the Simple Present Tense. The writer drew a conclusion that a certain students had not mastered the Simple Past Tense and the Simple Present Tense because there were so many overgeneralizations of the rules while most of others had already mastered it because they did fewer errors. The writer concludes that: First, the errors happened a lot in the Simple Past Tense and Simple Present Tense are because the two tenses are often used in the narrative writing (recount and fiction). Second, the regular use of the tenses caused the students

confused so that the students used to mix up the tenses. Third, another cause is the students' carelessness in making the tenses.

In the Selinker's theory (1974), he states that there are five sources of errors namely Language Transfer, Transfer of Training, Strategies of Second Language Learning, Strategies of Second Language Communication, and Overgeneralization of Target Language Material. But, the writer only found four sources of errors in contributing the students' errors in their writing such as Language Transfer, Strategies of Second Language Learning, Strategies of Second Language Communication, and Overgeneralization of Target Language Material. The writer did not use one of the sources of errors namely Transfer of Training because the writer could not find out whether the errors that the students had made were as the result of the wrong training. The error which is caused by Transfer of Training could be found out in Speaking obviously but not in the data analysis. The sources of errors which were found by the writer were the biggest errors in the first place was Strategies of Second Language Learning (54,3% errors) and the second place was Overgeneralization of Target Language Material (37,1% errors), fewer errors were Language Transfer (7% errors) and Strategies of Second Language Communication (1,6% errors).

After the writer analyzed the data, the writer provided two interpretations of the findings. The two interpretations are the students did two types of errors in general: form and function. In the form, the students had not mastered irregular verb and doubling rule that end in *-d*. In the function, the students mixed up the tenses pattern such as combining Simple Present Tense time signals for Simple Past Tense and vice versa. To overcome the problems in the form of errors, drill and exercises could be the answer. Communicative approach could be the answer to overcome errors that was based on function which was text based.

The possible solutions to overcome the form errors were drill and exercises and to overcome the function errors which were text based could be used communicative approach.

Suggestions

For the students of the English Department who have weaknesses in tenses should learn more. Do not stop learning English and improving their ability in mastering English especially tenses because it is the basic of the English four skills and the components. Read a lot text in English and practice making sentences will help students who have weaknesses in tenses. Maybe it sounds boring to read English texts and making English sentences continuously but from the students' sentences, the teacher will know the students errors. So that, the teacher can show to them their errors and ask them to correct the errors by themselves. From that point, the students also learn how to check and correct the sentences they have made. By learning tenses more, it is expected that the students master the tenses well so that no errors are found. No errors are a signal that the students have a strength basic so for the rest will be easy to make them

expert in English. It is important to have a strength basic because later on when the students are graduate some of them will be a teacher. A teacher is a role model for the student. If a teacher does not have strength basic in her major which is English, the result is his or her students' ability in English is unqualified.

For the teachers who teach English especially writing, if there are some students who have not mastered what they teach, does not give up. It does not mean that they are fail. This thesis can considered as an evaluation to know the students' weaknesses. From the weaknesses can be find out a method or ways which will be taken next to overcome the problem and improve the students ability. This is the purpose of an error analysis.

Future research related to the error analysis of students' writing should be focused on different areas of grammar. Wider and larger subjects might help to confirm the findings of this research.

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