GRAMMATICAL PROBLEMS IN INTRODUCTION SECTION OF THESIS WRITTEN BY ENGLISH LITERATURE STUDENTS

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Abstract

Introduction section is the first section of the thesis that has an important role which summarizes background information about the topic. The ability to write a clear and concise introduction section of a thesis is indispensable skill to writers; thus it is essential for students to be aware of linguistic aspects of writing. Past literature in writing studies have shown that although many studies have been written about the grammatical errors and mistakes in writing, there is very little research done on grammatical problems in writing introduction section of thesis. This research was a descriptive qualitative research which aimed to analyze grammatical problems found in the introduction section of thesis written by English literature students at STIBA Persada Bunda Pekanbaru. The source of data in this research was documents taken from students' thesis. The data were collected by using coding sheets. The findings of this research showed that the most common grammatical problems found in introduction section of thesis was incorrect verbs which were dominated by tenses confusion and lack of subject and verb agreement. The possible solutions to overcome students' grammatical problems were using indirect method in teaching grammar and prioritizing grammar structures to teach.

Keywords: *grammatical problems, introduction section, writing thesis*

Abstrak

Bagian pendahuluan adalah bagian pertama dari tesis yang memiliki peranan penting yang merangkum informasi mengenai latar belakang dari topik penelitian. Kemampuan untuk menulis bagian pendahuluan yang jelas dan ringkas sangat diperlukan bagi penulis oleh karena itu siswa harus mengetahui aspek-aspek kebahasaan dalam menulis. Beberapa penelitian sebelumnya menunjukkan bahwa meskipun banyak penelitian telah dilaksanakan mengenai kesalahan tatabahasa dan kesalahan dalam menulis, namun hanya sedikit penelitian yang dilakukan mengenai masalah tatabahasa dalam penulisan bagian pendahuluan tesis. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif deskriptif yang bertujuan untuk menganalisis masalah tatabahasa yang terdapat pada bagian pendahuluan skripsi yang ditulis oleh mahasiswa sastra Inggris di STIBA Persada Bunda Pekanbaru. Sumber data dalam penelitian ini adalah dokumen yang diambil dari skripsi mahasiswa. Data dikumpulkan dengan menggunakan lembar pengkodean. Temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa masalah tatabahasa yang paling umum ditemukan pada bagian pendahuluan skripsi adalah penggunaan verba yang salah yang didominasi oleh kesalahan penggunaan tenses dan ketidaksesuian subjek dan kata kerja. Solusi yang memungkinkan untuk mengatasi masalah tatabahasa adalah menggunakan metode tidak langsung dalam mengajarkan tatabahasa dan memprioritaskan struktur tatabahasa untuk diajarkan.

Keywords: *Permasalahan tatabahasa, bagian pendahuluanl, menulis skripsi*

INTRODUCTION

Writing a good introduction section of thesis is an inevitable challenges faced by students. The introduction plays an important role in understanding background information of the research. It provides a lot of information to the readers about the road map for the rest of research and captures the readers' interest. The ideas proposed in this section have to be clear and concise to help the readers understand why this topic is important to investigate. If it is not stated in an understandable way, the readers will have no interest to read the rest of the sections. Creswell (2014) noted that because this section is the initial passage in a study

or thesis, special care must be given to writing it since it needs to create readers interest in the topic.

However, writing introduction can be difficult and troublesome for students, especially for non-native speaker. The different structure between first language and target language is considered as a source of the students' difficulties (Fengjie, Jia & Hongyi, 2016) Every language has its own characteristics and grammar which distinguishes it from others. Understanding the target language structure incompletely can lead to grammatical errors (Krishnasamy, 2015; Nifriza, 2016) Hence, writing needs more attention to the structure and linguistic aspects that can be problematic for students in writing introduction.

Grammatical accuracy is needed in writing academic papers, especially a thesis. As stated by Paltridge and Starfield (2007), level of grammatical accuracy is required in writing a thesis. Then, Gay, Mills & Airasian (2012) note that the writer should use clear, simple, straightforward language with correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation are expected. Furthermore, Blaxter et al. (2006) mention that one of the easiest ways of making a good initial impression on the readers is to ensure, as far as possible, that the writing is error free in terms of grammar, punctuation and spelling. In other words, grammatical accuracy can influence the readers' impression on the thesis.

Writing a thesis is one of the requirements that have to be fulfilled by English students at STIBA Persada Bunda Pekanbaru. Before finishing their study, they are asked to write a thesis related to linguistics and literature. Their thesis will be examined by some lecturers as the examiners to decide whether it is met the standard of a good thesis or not. Based on the preliminary observation, many grammatical problems were found in the introduction sections of students' thesis. It was obtained that there were some tenses used inappropriately in students' thesis, such as "*Language **was** the ability to acquire and **used** complex systems of communication.* Moreover, the tenses in this sentence were incorrectly used to state general information about language. The students tend to change the tenses to past tense in the introduction section of the thesis since they assume that the research has already been done and they need to report it by using past tense. This problem can be found in some students' thesis.

Next, the result of observation showed that some sentences are lack of agreement between the subjects and the verbs; and this occurred many times. For instance, *"The author usually **use** figurative language in their poems."*. The students tend to omit ending –s in the verb of third person singular in present tense and also put ending –s for plural noun. As a result, the sentence is poorly structured and has low readability. It will distract the readers to get the meaning that wanted to convey by the writer in the introduction section of their thesis.

Clearly, these problems need to investigate since it gives big impact in the quality of introduction section of students' thesis. For this reason, this research analyzed more deeply about the grammatical problems in the introduction section of thesis written by English students at STIBA Persada Bunda Pekanbaru. This research was intended to investigate how problems occurred in the introduction section of their thesis and suggested some possible solution to overcome students' problem in using grammar.

The Language of Introduction Section of Thesis
When writing Introduction, language structure should be considered since it is one of the important aspects that will affect the meaning the writer wants to convey. Language is not only a matter of sentence structure. The writer's voice, word choices, contents and word orders are also important to be considered in writing an introduction section. As stated by Soles (2010), a good academic writing should be clear and concise. It should be written straightforward to make the points delivered in the writing conveyed in an interesting way. In line with this opinion, Cali (2015) asserts that good writers are concise and precise; they

try to avoid using unnecessary words and choose the exact words to convey the meaning. Hence, the writer should consider carefully about all language aspects in writing an introduction to make his introduction concise.

Bailey (2011) states some considerations in writing an academic text. The first is that writers should consider the vocabulary used in their writing. He suggests several guidelines for vocabulary used: (1) use vocabulary accurately, (2) avoid using idiomatic, instead use standard English, (3) be as precise as possible, (4) use tentative language for conclusions, (5) avoid adverbs that show personal attitude, (6) do not use contract verb forms, (7) passive voice may not be over-used, (8) avoid using the word *like* to introduce examples, the word *thing*, instead use *factor*, *aspect* or *issue*, the word *lots of* and *little* or *big*, instead use *a significant*, *small* or *large*, (9) do not use question forms, (10) avoid numbering sections, (11) avoid using *etc* or *and so on*, and (12) avoid using phrasal verbs.

In brief, the language used of a research needs to be considered in writing a good thesis. The writer should use the correct sentence structure, tenses and even appropriate style in writing a thesis. One of the important aspects is the grammatical aspect which deals with structure of language used in introduction section. The writers should pay attention to the choice of tenses they use in the research. If they cannot use the tenses appropriately, it will be difficult for the readers to understand their thesis.

Grammatical Problems in Introduction Section of Thesis

The issue of grammar errors is unavoidable for students' especially in writing. This problem occurs because the students' understanding in using correct grammar is limited. Swales and Feak (2012) state that the grammatical problem is a complicated one since many instructors do not appreciate how difficult it is to master some aspects of English such as articles (*a*, *an,* and *the*), verb tenses, subject-verb agreements and prepositions. They believe that if the flow of ideas is good, small errors may not be noticed; when the flow of ideas is not strong—i.e., does not follow the old-to-new principle—grammar errors may be more pronounced. Hollister (2014) adds that grammatical mistakes equate to poor writing, and it is one of the primary reasons for manuscript rejections when publishing an article. Thus, grammar cannot be neglected by the students since it is equally important as the flow of ideas and also can influence the quality of writing.

Regarding this research, the researcher limits the grammatical problems usually faced by the students in writing introduction section of thesis into seven problems with verbs, adverbs, pronouns, conjunctions, word order, plurals, and spelling. These problems are commonly found in students' writing as explained in Hollister (2014) and Lane and Lange (1999). The problems are:
1. Verbs
    a. Tense confusion (when writers unwittingly or unnecessarily shift tenses in a sentence or passage or from paragraph to paragraph)
    b. Dangling modifier (when any of the modifiers above lack the necessary syntactical connection to the nearest subject in a given sentence)
    c. Lack of subject-verb agreement (when writers incorrectly use a singular verb in a plural subject or vice versa)
    d. Modal verb (writers use the wrong form of any part of a modal verb phrase)
2. Adverbs (writers unnecessarily use adverbs in a sentence)
3. Pronouns (mismatching of relative pronoun in a sentence)
4. Conjunctions (beginning sentences with conjunctions that is considered informal in the context of academic writing and overusing conjunctions by repeating the same conjunction in the same sentence)
5. Word order (ordering the words in a sentence incorrectly)

6. Plurals (using regular and irregular noun incorrectly)
7. Spelling (lack of conformity and incorrectness when writing the words)
Thus, these seven categories were used to analyze students' grammatical problem found in the introduction section of thesis.

METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

The type of this study was a descriptive since it sought deep discussion about the grammatical problems in the introduction section of students' thesis. In this research, the researcher analyzed and interpreted the data in order to find out some issues related to grammatical problems in the introduction section of students' thesis. The source of the data for this research was students' thesis. There were 10 thesis taken as the source of data in this research. The data were grammatical problems of background of the problem in the introduction section of thesis written by STIBA Persada Bunda students who were graduated in academic year 2016/2017. Coding sheet was used to find out the grammatical problems, frequency and percentage of problems occurrences.

The data were collected through several steps: 1) asking officially to the administration staff at the library of Persada Bunda Pekanbaru the necessary documents, which were students' thesis; 2) collecting the thesis and it were coded as D followed by number (For example, D1, D2, and so on); 3) attaching the coding sheets to the documents; 4) reading, identifying and coding the data to find out grammatical problems. To make data identification more easily, the researcher marked every type of grammatical problem by circling the words and giving code; 5) tabulating the identified data. Having coded the identified words, the data from each document was tabulated into the coding sheet.

The data were analyzed based on the following steps: first, *quantitative data* were used to reveal the grammatical problems by classifying the problems into its classification and counted the total number of all types and percentage. Second, *qualitative data* were used to propose the possible solutions to overcome students' grammatical problems of the introduction section of thesis based on the theories and previous research findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that some students had problems in using grammar accurately. The problems can be occurred due to the carelessness of the students when writing a thesis. It is also caused by limited knowledge of students in using correct grammar. Based on the data, some students tend to write using spoken language that is not recommended for academic writing. The grammatical problems in students' introduction section of thesis were described in the figure:

Figure 1. The Percentage of grammatical problems found in the introduction section of thesis
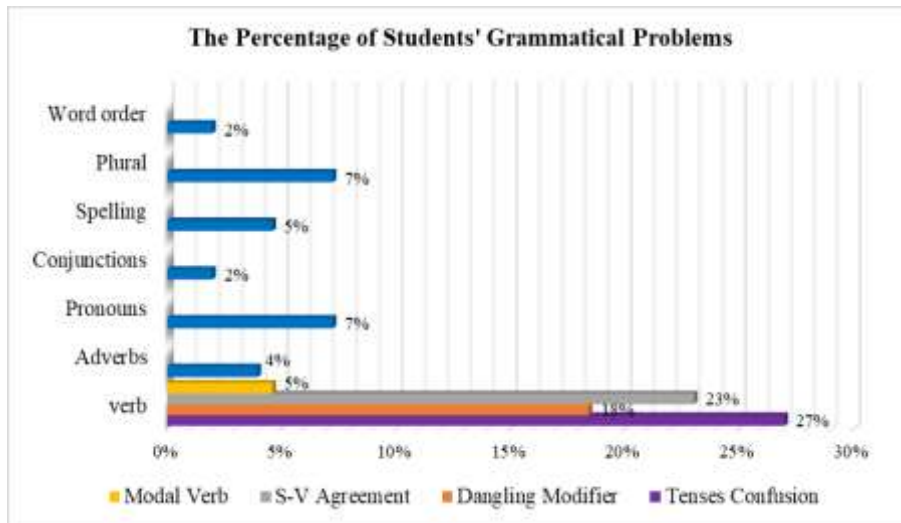

Figure 1 shows that verbs are the grammatical problems mostly found in the introduction section of the students' thesis. Most students are likely to shift the tense unnecessarily that can lead the readers to confusion and also lack the necessary syntactical connection between the verb to the nearest subject. Then, the fewest grammatical problems found in students' thesis is word order and conjunction which mean that almost no mistakes are found in students' thesis related to word order and conjunction. The total number of grammatical found in students' introduction section of the thesis is 152 mistakes. These mistakes are dominated by verbs problem with 111 mistakes of the total number of mistakes. Then the fewest mistakes found in students' thesis is conjunction and word order with 3 mistakes of the total number of mistakes

Furthermore, the data of this research were analyzed by taking the samples of the students' introduction section of the thesis. The researcher focused on the seven problems related to the use of grammar in the academic writing. The examples of grammatical problems can be seen as follow:

Table 1. The Examples of Grammatical problems in the introduction section of thesis

No.	Indicators	Sub Indicators	Sentences	Correction
1.	Verbs	Tense confusion	Language **was** the ability to acquire and **used** complex systems of communication.	Language **is** the ability to acquire and **uses** complex systems of communication.
		Dangling modifiers	Variety of techniques **used to got** our attention…	Variety of techniques **are used to get** our attention…
		Subject-verb Agreement	**Messages** used in advertising **needs** to be short and unique to be remembered.	**Messages** used in advertising **need** to be short and unique to be remembered.
		Modal verb	Slogan **must used** a brief word and make a simple sentence.	Slogan **must use** a brief word and make a simple sentence.
2.	Adverbs		Pragmatics **can be also** literal meaning and implicature meaning.	Pragmatics **can also be** literal meaning and implicature meaning.
3.	Pronouns		**People** have to communicate in order to help **us** fulfill **our** needs,…	**People** have to communicate in order to help **them** fulfill **their** needs,…
4.	Conjunctions		We not only can share our photo **but also we can share** short video.	We not only can share our photo **but also** short video.
5.	Word order		The researcher **focused only** on bilingual, the code mixing in two languages…	The researcher **only focused** on bilingual, the code mixing in two languages…
6.	plural		Many people use deixis on letter or text message to share **informations.**	Many people use deixis on letter or text message to share **information.**
7.	Spelling		Newspaper is **devided** by some articles.	Newspaper is **divided** by some articles.

Based on the data showed in figure 1, misuse verb tenses are the most frequent mistakes made by the students. Past tense is the most problematic for the students. They tend to use past tense to express general truth or fact instead of using present tense. For instance, in this sentence, "*Language **was** the ability to acquire and **used** complex systems of communication (datum 37)",* past tense is used to state the general truth about language. The verb **used** and **was** should be changed into simple form of the verb that is **use** and **is**. The key to selecting appropriate tense for past actions or conditions is whether the action or condition occurred or existed at a specific time. For specific times in the past, the students should use past tense. For expressing general truth, habit or fact the students should use present tense.

Furthermore, the second most common problems found in students' thesis is lack of agreement between a subject and a verb in the sentence. As a general rule, a singular subject requires a singular verb, and a plural subject requires a plural verb. Elements of this rule can be confusing to the students. Consequently, they made many mistakes in determining the correct agreement between the subject and the verb in the sentence. For instance, in the sentence, "*Every slogan has the different meaning, like **slogan** cigarettes of Class Mild **have***

different slogan such… (datum 5)", the verb does not agree with the subject. The word **slogan** is a countable noun that should be added *–s* to make plural form. However, the verb **have** should be preceded by plural noun. The correct verb of this sentence is **has** since the subject is singular. The key to proper usage is to identify whether the subject is singular or plural, regardless of any intervening language, and then to choose the verb accordingly.

The problems in using appropriate verb tenses and subject-verb agreement are also found in several studies. Krishnasamy (2015) obtained that 38.2% of all the errors committed by the students fall under the category of tenses, and 22.3% of all the errors are categorized into subject-verb agreement errors. These errors occurred when students are asked to write a narrative essay. In their essay, they produced many errors by using inappropriate tenses, such as present tense and present perfect tense. They also had difficulties in matching the subject and the verb in the sentence. It happened because the language aspects (tenses and subject-verb agreement) differ from those they have in their L1 (Malay). In addition, Fengjie, Jia & Hongyi (2016) found that using correct tenses is one of the most common problems encountered by the college students in writing. The students are careless when writing in English. The attributive after subject may be too long and it confuses the students to use the wrong verbs. Therefore, the previous studies show that tenses and subject-verb agreement still the most common problems found in students writing.

Regarding to the present study, it is revealed that the grammatical problems in using tenses and subject-verb agreement occurred due to the differences between language components of students' L1 and target language. In Indonesian language,, the writer describes the time at which an action happened by using adverb of time at the beginning and end of the sentence. Meanwhile, English uses several types of tenses to express the time when an action happened. This differences can lead students to make an error in using appropriate tenses. Student's L1 also does not need to agree on number between the subject and the verb which differ from English that has a rule that plural subject should be followed by plural verb or vice versa. Otherwise, plural form of the verb and irregular form of the noun are not used in Indonesian language. As asserted by Yong (in Swan & Smith, 2001), nouns are not inflected for number in Indonesian language. They can be made plural by reduplication (e.g. buku-buku = books), though this does not happen after numerals. He also adds that Indonesian writers have problems both with English plural endings and with third-person singular verb agreement; plural endings are particularly likely to be dropped after number or plural quantifiers (e.g. *a few doctor*).

Moreover, the fewest common grammatical problems found in students' introduction section of thesis is conjunction and word order. Both of these language components had the same number of mistakes (i.e. 3 mistakes). The findings show that the students tend to overuse conjunctions in a sentence. For instance, in this sentence, "*The words revenue **and** event **and** fee…*", conjunction **and** is overuse in the sentence in which it joins three words. Conjunction **and** is used to join related statements together or in addition to. In connecting three words, conjunction **and** should be placed before the last word and preceded by comma. Thus, the correct sentence is "*The words revenue, event, **and** fee…*". Next, other grammatical problems is misplaced the word in a sentence which causes the meaning is unclear. For instance, in this sentence, "*To know the meaning of slogan that was learned one of linguistic subfields was **Semantic**",* the subject is delayed at the end of the sentence. To avoid unclear meaning, it suggested for the students to put the subject in the beginning of the sentence. The correct sentence is "***Semantic** is one of linguistic subfields that can be used to identify the meaning of slogan discussed in this research*." Hence, the students still have problems in using conjunction and ordering the word in order to help the readers grasp the meaning.

Some previous studies recognized that constructing a sentence in correct structure is one of the problems encountered by the students in writing. Lasaten (2014) found that word

order is the fewest common error made by students in their writing in which 1.01% occurrences. He deduced that this error is the result of negative transfer from mother language, limited knowledge of target language, the carelessness in writing. Then, Hamzah (2012) reported that four errors were identified on the ordering of the words in sentences in students' essay. Misordering of the words may produce distraction on communication and it can be identified as global error. Related to problems in using conjunction, Novita (2014) found that the students tend to omit coordinating conjunction or use the incorrect form in a sentence. She said that this problem occurred due to incomplete rule application that means that the students already know some components of a specific grammar rule, but the application is incomplete.

In this research findings, the problems in using correct conjunction and word order rarely occur in students' writing. The data show that only some students had difficulties in using appropriate conjunction and word order. Word order mistakes emerge because the different pattern between students' L1 and target language. In Bahasa, when an adjective is used to modify a noun, it should be placed after the noun (e.g. baju merah). In contrast, English places an adjective before a noun when its function as a modifier or it is also called as noun phrase (e.g. red book). This problem is found in students' thesis, for instance, "*The researcher **focused only** on bilingual, the code mixing in two languages… (datum 141)"*. In this sentence, the students put the adverb **only** after the verb **focused** where it must be placed before verb. The correct sentence is "*The researcher **only focused** on bilingual, the code mixing in two languages…"*. This problem can be caused by students' negative transfer from their mother tongue. Then, omitting conjunction in the sentence is one of grammatical problems in students' thesis. It happens due to the carelessness of the students when writing. They sometimes do not proofread what they wrote. As a result, the students left the conjunction that should be used in the sentence.

It is clear from the analysis presented that many grammatical problems can be found in students' introduction section of thesis. It can happen because the influence of students' L1 (negative transfer), limited knowledge of target language grammar, and the carelessness of students when writing the thesis. To minimize the occurrences of grammatical mistake in students' writing, the possible solutions need to be identified in order to help students improving their writing ability and writing quality.

Some possible solutions have been proposed by many researchers and experts which can be followed by the lecturer and students to improve the quality of writing. Firstly, the students and lecturer should keep in mind that grammar is a complex system that cannot be mastered in short period of time. As Hudson (in Berns, 2010: 127) stated that the grammar of any language is itself a complex system rather than a disconnected list of categories or facts, so even if the final aim is to improve writing, the immediate aim has to be an understanding of the grammar system itself. Merely teaching the names and definitions of the word classes by rote is unlikely to have any benefit for writing. The students need to use their background knowledge of grammar as they write. In other words, for better quality of writing, the students not only know about the use of grammar but also can implement their knowledge when writing. Thus, using grammar in real situation or in context will help students improve their writing since they directly implement what they have learned.

The possible solutions to overcome students' grammatical problem and improve their ability in writing are:

1. *Using indirect method in teaching grammar*

One of possible ways to teach grammar to students is using indirect method. It is really helpful to the students on noticing how the grammar used in the text. Kachru (in Berns, 2010:172) recommends that to teach grammar is by first presenting a text; noting the use of grammatical items to signal meanings; generalizing on the basis of observed regularities; and

systematizing the information thus gathered. The claim is that this indirect method of teaching grammar prepares learners to see the grammatical regularities and also note the correspondences or lack of correlations between grammar and textual use. In addition, other methods can be adopted, such as deduction, induction, and comparison, in order to putting grammar knowledge in the context of teaching appropriately and to make students participate in the analysis of grammatical phenomena, to raise students' ability of summarizing and using English. (Feng Jie, Jia & Hongyi, 2016.)

Moreover, Chin (2015) suggests the teachers or lecturers to integrate grammar instruction with writing instruction by using the grammar terms that make sense to the students. Strategies, such as writing conferences, collaborative writing, grammar mini-lessons, and peer revising and editing groups, are all valuable methods for integrating grammar into writing instruction. Every student has different ability in writing. Lecturers can assign different proofreading tasks to specific individuals in each group to help them become better proofreaders. The students are drilled to find out the errors, such as spelling errors, agreement errors, fragments and punctuation errors, in their peer's or group's writing. Collaborating with classmates in peer editing groups will help the students improve their own grammar skills besides understand the importance of grammar as a tool for effective communication. By integrating grammar terms naturally into the processes of revising, editing, and proofreading, the students easily understand and apply grammar purposefully to their own writing.

2. *Prioritizing grammar structures to teach*

English grammar should be taught for English students in every colleges or universities. The common problems in teaching grammar is the fact that all class time is limited. Hence, lecturers have to identify the grammar constructions that must be taught and those that can be simply skipped in the interests of time and teaching effectiveness. Teaching unnecessary topic is useless for students since their needs are to use English for speaking and writing. It is challenging for lecturers to decide the appropriate grammar should be taught to meet students' needs.

Grammar teaching even at the intermediate levels of student proficiency can begin with an examination and analysis of structures in formal academic writing. Early on, the objective of instruction is to develop students' awareness and noticing of common grammatical features, and then building on this foundation, the regularities in grammar structures can be explicitly addressed and practiced in the production of academic writing (Celce-Murcia, 2002; Ur, 2011). Then, Hinkel (2013) suggests some constructions have a low priority, particularly when the teacher and learners have a limited amount of time to make maximum gains in improving the quality of students' writing skills. They are:

a. Verb tenses and passives that are of low instructional importance (Future perfect and future perfect progressive; past perfect and past perfect progressive)
b. Modal Verbs (modals of obligation *must*—used only in positions of authority and modals of permission—*may* and *might*)
a. Grammar constructions used almost exclusively in conversational discourse (indefinite and universal pronouns (e.g., something, anyone, nobody, everything), contractions (e.g., don't, isn't), emphatics (e.g., always, totally, for sure), exaggerative and intensifiers (e.g., awful, fantastic, huge), and casual hedges (e.g., anyway, sort of, kind of)

Therefore, by prioritizing the grammar structure to teach, it is expected that the students can meet their needs in using grammar to produce good writing. Grammar teaching that has the goal of preparing students for academic studies and professional activities needs to be designed to develop students' practical and useful skills, directly relevant to producing written and academic text (Hinkel, 2013). Then, Chin (2015) emphasizes that rather than

strive to teach all grammatical concepts to all students, lecturers should prioritize and provide instruction on the grammatical elements that most affect their students' ability to write effectively. In other words, teaching grammar is not only to focus more on structure but also to implement the knowledge into writing.

CONCLUSION

The data analysis and findings show that grammatical is the major problem encountered by the students in writing a thesis project. Based on this research findings, it can be concluded that the most common grammatical problems found in the introduction section of thesis is using incorrect verbs especially tenses and subject-verb agreement. Then, the fewest common grammatical problems found in students' thesis is word order and conjunction. In order to deal with this problem, the researcher suggests two possible solutions that can help lecturer to overcome the grammatical problems that are by using indirect method in teaching grammar and prioritizing grammar structures to teach. This research is expected to shed some light for the lecturer on the problem faced by the students in writing thesis project.

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