English sentence structures in Descriptive Writing: A case study of Business Management students at Indonesian vocational higher education

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ABSTRACT

To meet the demand of current industries, the ability to write in English is highly essential in Indonesian vocational higher education. In today's business world, students of business departments require a set of advance skills in writing business documents such as business letters and product descriptions. This research investigated the types of English sentence structures and errors in the descriptive paragraphs written by business management students of Politeknik Negeri Sriwijaya. The method used was quantitative case study research. A total of 44 descriptive paragraphs were analyzed by using syntactical structure analysis and surface taxonomy-based errors. It revealed that all types of sentence structures were used in the descriptive paragraphs. There were 34.77% simple sentence structures, 22.96% compound sentence structures, 26.36% complex sentence structures, and 15.91% compound-complex sentence structures. Thus, the most widely used was simple sentence structures. Regarding the errors, it was found that only a few errors were made by them; omission (3 errors), addition (7 errors), misformation (19 errors), and misordering (1 error). Hence, misformation was the dominant error. In summary, the students wrote their descriptive paragraphs in simple sentences mostly and made errors in misformation the most.

1.   Introduction

The existence of English as a compulsory or elective course in Indonesian higher education should not be taken for granted. The rapid changes in industries worldwide require the best human resources equipped with sufficient both spoken and written communication skills to compete in the workplace. Vocational higher education has an immense role in this issue to meet the demands of

today's industries. It has to be a major concern of the English teachers at many Polytechnics to prepare the students with plentiful English knowledge, especially for their writing ability.

According to Siregar et al., (2022), the majority of vocational students in Indonesia still struggle with producing ideas in writing specifically in organizing their sentences into paragraphs. At the Polytechnic level, writing skills are very much needed in the business department, particularly for writing reports, memos, and letters compared to writing essays and stories (Unueshotse, 2017). Effective writing by using correct formats in such business circumstances is crucial (Ranaut, 2018). Written communication challenges affect professionals whose working language is a foreign language as writing is highly valued in the workplace (Lee & Schmidgall, 2020). Herlina (2022) found that most Indonesian employees working in the industry still had obstacles in writing business letters due to their lack of vocabulary and grammatical knowledge. They struggled to structure sentences and paragraphs correctly.

Huda (2021) indicated that there was a relationship between sentence structure knowledge and descriptive writing ability. The ability to write descriptions is the ability to express ideas in the form of objects, using a variety of good and correct written words to create scripts that clearly describe objects. Nair and Hui (2018) revealed that the most common errors in descriptive writing were in the areas of sentence structure and grammar. Yani (2021) confirmed that students mostly made errors in grammar. Ismayanti and Kholiq (2020) added that the generic structure was one of the hindrances for students in describing and organizing the ideas properly. Silawati (2019) argued that students' writing skills were positively influenced by sentence structure knowledge. To produce good English paragraphs, it is essential to organize ideas not only in simple and compound sentences but also in complex and compound-complex sentences. Apart from that structure, identifying the most common errors in paragraph writing in terms of omission, addition, misformation, and misordering is prominent. Some related studies contribute to the present research.

Regarding sentence structures, Anggoro et al., (2022) found that simple sentence structures were dominantly used in Joe Biden and Donald Trump election night speeches. Kaefiyah (2015) on the analysis of "Go Diego Go" Eps. The Artic Rescue also found that simple sentences were mostly used. Purnama (2016) supported that simple sentence structures were also mainly used in the descriptive writing of STIKOM Bali students. In addition, Rikat (2015) argued that students used various sentence structures not only simple and compound sentences but also complex and compound-complex sentences in their abstract writing. At last, Andriani and Bram (2021) found that complex sentence structures were the most frequent sentence type in BBC news articles.

Concerning the errors in writing, Rahman and Feriyadin (2022) found that Indonesian senior high school students made errors in interference, omission, addition, substitution, and ordering of writing narrative paragraphs. Octaberlina and Muslimin (2022) admitted that addition was the most dominant error in students' thesis proposal writing. Sundari et al., (2021) also found that students made errors in omission, addition, misformation, and misordering of writing recount paragraphs with omission as the most dominant error. Furthermore, Imaniar (2018) showed that omission was the type of error made mostly by Indonesian junior high students in writing descriptive paragraphs. On the other hand, by using a case study at an Indonesian junior high school Muhsin (2016) revealed that misformation was the dominant error made by the students in writing descriptive paragraphs.

By the above rationale, this research is focused on answering the following research problems:

1. What are the sentence structures used by Business Management students of Politeknik Negeri Sriwijaya in writing descriptive paragraphs?

2. What is the most frequent type of sentence structure used by Business Management students of Politeknik Negeri Sriwijaya in writing descriptive paragraphs?

3. What are the errors made by Business Management students of Politeknik Negeri Sriwijaya in writing descriptive paragraphs?

4. What is the most frequent error made by Business Management students of Politeknik Negeri Sriwijaya in writing descriptive paragraphs?

2.   Method

The present research was done under the quantitative case study research design. This design was used to find the number of sentence structures used and errors made by the students in their descriptive paragraphs. The participants were 44 third-semester students of the Business Management Study Program, Politeknik Negeri Sriwijaya, who were taking an English for Business class. In this class, they learned all the English skills including writing skill that covers writing letters, messages, memos, product descriptions, etc. To collect the data, they were asked to write descriptive paragraphs about the given business products. The paragraphs were eventually analyzed to answer the research problems.

To analyze the sentence structures, the data were classified into some categories for each sentence whether it was a simple, compound, complex, or compound-complex sentence. A simple sentence refers to a sentence that consists of one clause or an independent clause (a subject and a predicate). A compound sentence refers to a sentence that connects two independent clauses by using a coordinating conjunction. A complex sentence refers to a sentence that consists of one independent clause and one or more dependent clauses. At last, a compound-complex sentence refers to a sentence that consists of at least two independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses. The same as analyzing the errors, the data were first identified to know where the errors were made. Referring to the errors of the selected sentences, each was classified as whether it refers to addition, omission, misordering, and misformation. Addition errors refer to the presence of an additional item in utterances that causes redundancy. Omission errors refer to the omitted item in utterances. Misordering errors refer to the wrong placement of morphemes in utterances. Lastly, misformation errors refer to the use of incorrect forms of morphemes in utterances. The most frequent type of sentence structure and error was finally analyzed by using the following formula to determine the percentage of each.

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$$

P   = The percentage

F   = The frequency of sentence structures/ errors

N   = The total number of sentence structures/ errors

3.   Results and discussion

3.1.   Result of Sentence Structure Analysis

Based on the data analysis, all types of sentence structures were found in the students' descriptive paragraphs with a total of 440 sentences comprising 153 simple sentences (34.77%), 101 compound sentences (22.96%), 116 complex sentences (26.36%), and 70 compound-complex sentences (15.91%). It can be concluded that simple sentence is the most frequent type of sentence structure used by Business Management students of Politeknik Negeri Sriwijaya in writing descriptive paragraphs. The percentage of each sentence structure is illustrated in the following chart.
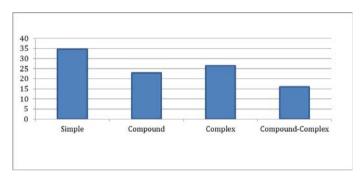

Figure 1 – Types of sentence structure

3.2.   Result of Error Analysis

For the errors, only a few were found. Only 20 students were making errors in their sentences. The other 24 students had the correct sentences. After analyzing the sentences from the 20 students, there were only 30 errors comprising 7 addition errors (23.33%), 3 omission errors (10%), 1 misordering error (3.34%), and 19 misformation errors (63.33%). The percentage of each type of error is illustrated in the following chart.

Figure 2 – Types of error

In conclusion, misformation is the most frequent type of error made by Business Management students of Politeknik Negeri Sriwijaya in writing descriptive paragraphs. The errors are described in the following table.

Table 1 – Error Details

No	Error	Sentences
1	Addition	- I **am** recommend that lip cream for Indonesian women
		- If you want to consume**d** it, you can buy the large one
		- This product **is** has many varieties
		- It **is** makes my lips more colorful
		- This sunscreen **is** has many advantages for our skin
		- Indomie was officially **is** marketed in 1970s.
		- If it is opened, it **will** can be drunk.
2	Omission	- If **it available,** you can use the sunscreen
		- The barcode **can scanned**
		- Bear **brand introduced** by Nestle in 1996
3	Misordering	- It is available **various at** minimarkets
4	Misformation	- Good Day Coffee **have** released new variant
		- You can buy Yakult **on** supermarket
		- We can **compared** it with the other brands
		- The songs in this book **is** different from the others.
		- The product **have** special colors.
		- One of the **product** is Beng-Beng
		- One of the famous **plane** is Boeing 787 series
		- Bluetooth **use** specific connection
		- I **see** a lot of cars yesterday
		- Eating these foods **are** unequalled
		- Oreo **have** a new branch
		- Many consumers **complains** about the product
		- We **trying** to find the solution after reviewing it last week
		- This sunscreen is **make** of natural elements
		- Several **product** are promoted to the customers each week
		- Everyone **use** a mouse to operate the computer
		- To buy it, people **needs** to order it earlier
		- This product can be **buy** anytime and anywhere
		- Customer **have** to wait for it

3.3. Discussion

The findings show that all types of sentence structures were found in the students' descriptive paragraphs with the simple sentence as the most used type of sentence structure. Rikat (2015) supported that various sentence structures (simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex) were used in the students' abstract writing. They were even found as a whole in the speeches (Anggoro et al., 2022). The adequate structure knowledge to vary their sentences has a great contribution to the students' paragraph writing (Amri, 2016). With the dominant use of the simple sentence, Purnama

(2016) confirmed that it was also mainly used in the descriptive writing of STIKOM Bali students. It is even mostly used in speeches (Anggoro et al., 2022; Kaefiyah, 2015). Nevertheless, it was not frequently used in news articles compared to the complex sentence structure (Andriani & Bram, 2021). The tendency may occur due to the student's English proficiency to vary the sentences. It becomes a major problem for polytechnic students in academic writing to use each sentence structure (Handayani, 2019).

Also, the findings indicate that all types of errors were found in small numbers in the students' descriptive paragraphs with misformation as the most made type of error. It is supported by Sarfo-Adu (2015) that the paragraph writing skills of polytechnic students are above average (neither very good nor bad). Many have found that students' sentences were ungrammatically structured. The errors made are mostly in grammar specifically in the use of verbs. When they have grammatical problems, it is hard for them to use proper English strings to put the ideas together (Shalawati & Hadijah, 2020). Utami (2021) shows that ungrammatical sentences occur due to the issues of noun agreement, to-infinitive, prepositions, and articles. Ismayanti and Kholiq (2020) explained that the difficulties faced by students in descriptive writing are generic structure, grammar, and spelling. The causes were the students' lack of text production skills, knowledge of objects to write, and interest. Saputra et al., (2022) added that the highest error found in the students' descriptive writing was in verb tense with the intralingual transfer as the primary source of error. Furthermore, Burhanuddin et al., (2018) indicated that the greatest error found in the students' writing was the misuse of verbs. Aprianto (2022) revealed that syntactical errors were mostly found in higher education students' writing including regular and irregular verbs, reported speech, modals, and tenses.

All types were also found in the different kinds of paragraphs. Rahman and Feriyadin (2022) found that Indonesian senior high school students made errors in interference, omission, addition, substitution, and ordering of writing narrative paragraphs. Esmianti (2021) also found that students made errors in omission, addition, misformation, and misordering of writing recount paragraphs with omission as the most dominant error. Since misformation is the most frequent type of error found in this research, it is supported by Muhsin (2016) who also found it as the most dominant error in the students' descriptive paragraphs. This result contradicts the research finding of Imaniar (2018) that omission is the type of error made mostly by students in descriptive writing. Misformation happens due to the student's inability to use appropriate subject-verb agreement. From a total of 19 errors, the students could not use the right verb(s) for the subject(s) written in simple sentences. They need to learn in-depth about the use of verbs in simple present tense both in active and passive forms to describe an object. For the addition errors, most of the students made double-marking problems. They added an item that may be considered a habit in their utterances. The frequent use of be verb added to the real predicate becomes the identifier of how they are accustomed to using it in their simple sentences or describing an object. On the other hand, omission errors were indicated by the missing verb for adjectives and past participles. The students skipped it and only focused on the use of the adjective and the past participle to express the ideas. The last is misordering errors. The students only had a problem with the incorrect placement of prepositions.

4.   Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that in writing descriptive paragraphs, the students of Indonesian vocational higher education in the Business Management Study Program of Politeknik Negeri Sriwijaya used all types of sentence structures. They vary the sentences to describe the business products. Simple sentence structure is the most frequent type of structure used by students followed by complex sentence structure, compound sentence structure, and compound-complex sentence structure as the last. A simple sentence is always easy for students to describe things directly. It does not demand any other ideas to go straight to the point of what they want to write. Even though it looks easy and simple, the element in each sentence should be taken into account, especially the use of verbs (predicates). The students only made a few errors. However, they made the most in grammar, especially on verb tenses. All types of errors were also found. Misformation errors are the most frequent type made by students followed by addition errors, omission errors, and misordering errors. The misformation occurred due to the subject-verb agreement matter. The errors of addition were indicated by the verb being overused in their sentences. The omission errors happened because of the missing be verb when they used adjectives and past participles in describing things. Finally, the misordering error was indicated by the inappropriate preposition placement.

It is suggested that English lecturers do not take the existence of sentence structures to develop and organize students' ideas and writing errors for granted although only a few errors were found. Having various sentence structures, students can enrich their writing and fluency in articulating their ideas. If simple sentences are overused, the paragraph will become monotonous. Related to writing business documents, vocational higher education or polytechnic English lecturers have to consider teaching verbs properly in both active and passive forms to avoid errors in English classes. The required documents are tremendously important in industries today. They have to be well-written and concise. Lack of grammatical structure will influence the proficiency image in the workplace. It is hoped that it can be anticipated through English courses of vocational education to prepare the best graduates for professional careers in industries. They can make the classroom activities more enjoyable by having a peer-feedback activity to learn the errors together. This pedagogical implication does not only refer to the teachers but also refers to the students studying and improving themselves independently by writing and learning more from mistakes or errors. They have to pay attention to their grammar in general and the use of verbs in particular. Lastly, future researchers are expected to analyze the other kinds of writing related to business to better equip vocational students in their working field to be more fluent in written communication skills.

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