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Grammatical errors in ESP students' presentation across proficiency levels

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the grammatical errors across proficiency levels. The samples were collected from the second semester of Agriculture students' oral presentation of ESP class at Faculty of Agriculture, Universitas Brawijaya. They were grouped into high and low proficient students by using TOEFL test. The errors in their speech were classified by using surface structure taxonomy namely misformation, disorder, addition, omission, blends, and miscellaneous. Findings indicate that misformation is the dominant error produced by both levels of proficiency. It is followed by omission, addition, miscellaneous, disorder and blends.

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1. Introduction

Being able and fluent in communicating in English is the main goal of learning a foreign language which emphasizes the development of the correct speech habit. According to Srivastava (2014) accuracy and fluency are the two factors which define the success of English language students in the future. Accuracy focuses on the ability of the learner to produce grammatically correct sentences and the learner should not only know correct grammatical rules of the language but also able to speak and write accurately (Srivastava, 2014). On the other hand, fluency emphasizes on communication skills, efficiency, and the context while speaking (Srivastava, 2014). Shen (2013) points out that accuracy is the basis of fluency while fluency is a further improvement of a person's linguistic competence and a better exposure of his/her communicative competence. Therefore, accuracy needs to be learnt to support the fluency of speaking. Without accuracy, the message of speaking can be misunderstood and it can make the students commit to language errors.

Errors in language are the imperfect side of the learner in their discourse or composition (Dulay et al., 1982). Brown (2000) defines errors as methodical deviations made by learners who have not comprehended the rules of the target language. However, the error is not always negative, as suggested by Brown (2000:217), error reflects students' basic competence in English because it is related to cognitive process.

Analyzing errors contributes to recognize the inaccuracy in the use of language produced by the speaker. Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) define error analysis as a set of procedures for identifying, describing, and explaining learner errors. According to Corder (1967, cited in Ellis & Barkhuizen 2005), learner errors are significant in three ways: (1) they serve a pedagogic purpose by showing teachers what learners have learned and what they have not mastered yet; (2) they serve a research purpose by providing evidence about how language is learned; and (3) they serve a learning purpose by acting as devices by which learners can discover the rules of the target language.

In analyzing the errors, Burt, Dulay, and Krashen (1982) proposed Surface Structure Taxonomy, namely misformation, disorder, addition, and omission. Misformation errors means the learners use of a wrong form or structure. There are three kinds of misformation error, namely regularization, archi-forms, and alternating forms. Disorder refers to the incorrect placement of a morpheme or group of morphemes in an

utterance. Addition happens when the presence of an item that must not appear in well-formed utterances. Errors of addition are divided into three, namely regularization, double marking, and simple addition. The last is omission. Omission is the absence of an item that must appear in a well-formed utterance. Furthermore, James (1998:111) added one type of error called Blends. Error of blends happens when “the learner has activated two structures that are semantically related, either of which could serve his present purpose, but they fail to make a clear choice, and instead combine a part of each to produce a structure which characteristics of both”. For example, the use of the word one and each in a phrase: “for each one thing”. The last type of error is called miscellaneous errors. This error does not belong to either the surface structure taxonomy or blends. According to Simbolon (2015), miscellaneous errors are various errors in conjunction with translation, wrong order and choice of English words in term of the meaning of the sentence in context as well as the omission or addition of certain language elements. In classifying the types of errors in students’ oral presentation, this research combined the types of error in the surface structure taxonomy by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982), with James (1998), and Simbolon (2015), namely omission, addition, misformation, misordering, blends, and miscellaneous.

The focus of this study is investigating the grammatical errors in students’ oral presentation. The term error in this study is limited to grammatical error. Most students find it challenging when they are required to present orally, especially in English. Oral presentation is a formal speech that needs a structure talks. Hence, the language accuracy in oral presentation needs to be considered. In oral presentation, even the students are taught the presentation phrases, the students still commit to many errors.

Following this view, there are very few studies that are directed to investigate the grammatical errors produced by the students in an oral presentation. It was conducted by Ting, Mahadhir, and Chang (2010), and Muhamad, Shah, Ibrahim, Sarudin, Malik, and Ghani (2013). In Indonesian context the studies about error analysis in spoken language were done by Soepriatmadji (2008), Adib (2012), Oktaviani (2013), and Simbolon (2015). However, none of those previous studies used oral presentation to analyze grammatical errors.

The only study which investigates grammatical errors made in oral presentation was conducted by Muhamad et al (2103) and Saad and Sawalmeh (2014), but they did not classify their subject of research based on the level of proficiency. Furthermore, research in analyzing the grammatical errors in oral presentation in Indonesian context is still small in number, specifically to English for Specific Purposes students. It can be caused that analyzing the error in spoken language is a multifaceted task as it requires analyzing a multifarious corpus of spoken language. Hopefully, this recent study can fulfill the research gap and give different perspective from the previous studies.

The researcher conducts a research on analyzing the grammatical errors in oral presentation across ESP students’ level of proficiency by employing the surface structure taxonomy. TOEFL is utilized to test the students’ English level of proficiency. The reason for using TOEFL since it is a universal and standardized test which proven as a valid test. The researcher classifies the level of proficiency based on the TOEFL score. Based on the background explained above, the research questions of the study are formulated as follows:

- 1) What are the most grammatical errors produced by high and low proficient students’ in English oral presentation?
- 2) Which grammatical errors are dominant across students’ proficiency level?

2. Method

The population of this study consisted of students who register in the second semester in the academic year 2016/2017 from Faculty of Agriculture, University of Brawijaya Malang. There were ten classes in total, namely class A to J. The sample was drawn from purposive sampling technique. The researcher took two classes, H and J class as samples based on some reasons. In these two classes, the lecturer equipped the students with the presentation materials at the beginning of the semester. It covered the phrases used in giving a presentation and how to deliver oral presentation effectively. The lecturer also directed the students to practice the theory by performing oral presentation on the selected topic. Moreover, they were selected due to the accessibility and matched with researcher’s subject criteria. The number of students for H class was 31 students and for J class was 35 students.

To collect the information about the students’ grammatical errors in oral presentation, the instruments used in this study were the researcher herself as an observer, an audio recording of the students’ oral presentation, the students’ presentation transcript and worksheet to record the students’ errors. To

classify the students' level of proficiency, the researcher used the TOEFL paper test taken from Phillips (2004), and the students' TOEFL score. Table 1 shows the classification of the students' level of proficiency based on their TOEFL score.

Table 1 TOEFL Proficiency Level Classification

TOEFL Score	Level of Proficiency	N
501 – 550	High	12
351 – 425	Low	26

The criterion of high proficiency student is student who has TOEFL score in range 501 to 550. Meanwhile the low proficiency students are the students who have TOEFL score in range 351 to 425. It was found that there are 6 students from J class and there are 6 students from H class who considered as high proficiency students. Therefore, there were 12 students with high proficiency in total. For the students who had English low proficiency, there were 11 students from H class and 15 students from J class. While the other students would be eliminated from the study since their scores are in the medium range, 426-500. It was rather difficult to find the significance differences between the high and medium proficiency and the medium and low proficiency because the score range was so close between those two levels of proficiency. So that, the researcher cut the medium range score and only divided the level of proficiency into high and low.

The data of the grammatical errors were taken from students' presentation on the topic given by the lecturers, namely either *fruit hybrid* or *creative product*. In this activity the students had to present individually about their creative product in combining two kinds of fruit or vegetables or creating a new product from fruits or vegetables. Their product must not be real; it could come from their imagination and their creativity. A week before the presentation, the lecturer taught and gave the basic feature language to be used in presenting their product. In the students' presentation they had to include the name of the product, the uniqueness of the product, the taste, the looks or appearance, the consumer segment, and the reason why people had to buy their product. It was like a descriptive and persuasive presentation. At the end of each presentation section, the lecturer counted the number of people who will buy the product. The more audience raising their hands, the more attractive the product was. It meant that the presenters had successfully persuaded the audience to buy their creative product.

The initial step in error analysis was collecting the samples of learner language, followed by identify and categorizes the errors, describe the errors, and calculate the frequency of errors. The description of errors is a comparative process between the erroneous utterances and the reconstructed utterance. There are two steps to describe the errors. First, the researcher coded the identified errors into a set of descriptive categories. The surface structure taxonomy categories were employed in this study, namely addition, omission, misformation, disorder, blends, and miscellaneous error. Table 2 is the example of error description that used as worksheets in this study.

Table 2 Example of Error Descriptions

Error	Reconstruction	Linguistic description	Surface structure description
I will presentate..	I will present...	Verb phrase – Modals Not an English words	Misformation – regularization
I will to present...	I will present...	Verb phrase – Modals	Addition – simple addition

(Adapted from Ellis and Barkhuizen, 2005:63)

In the end, the data were interpreted. The interpretation of errors involved determining their error sources in order to justify why they were made. To explain errors, we need to know what process the students used when they do not know the target- language form. Traditionally, two major processes are identified as interlingual and intralingual errors.

3. Results and discussion

Types of Grammatical Errors of High Proficient Students

The findings of the study showed that the high proficient students have the most frequent errors in misformation, followed by the omission, misselection, addition, miscellaneous errors, and blends as presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The Frequencies of Error Categories Produced by High Proficient Students

Error categories	Students' Level of Proficiency	
	High	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Misformation	67	56.3
Omission	27	22.7
Misselection	12	10.1
Addition	8	6.7
Miscellaneous	4	3.4
Blends	1	0.8
Total	119	100

The errors mostly dealt with misformation of constructing sentences, followed by the omission and misselection of preposition, words, linking and auxiliary verbs, and articles. The result of the present study is in line with the study conducted by Hojati (2013) in investigating errors in the oral performance by Advanced-level of Iranian students. The result showed that the advanced Iranian students have persistent problems in articles, clauses, preposition, and misselection of words. It can be concluded that many foreign language learners often deal with the problems in preposition, misselection of words, the use of linking and auxiliary verbs, and articles. Therefore, those frequent errors will be discussed thoroughly.

The problem of preposition is quite complex for Indonesian speakers since Indonesian does not have preposition-paired like in English. One reason accounting for this point is that prepositions have many different meanings and uses in different contexts. This case is consistent with Gass and Selinker (1983) who confirmed that the difference in the structure of language makes it problematic when it transformed into the foreign language.

One of the examples of misformation error in preposition, found in the present study, is the preposition paired *interested in*. In Indonesian context, the word *interested* is usually combined with the word *with* instead of preposition *in*. The next example is the preposition-paired *combination of A and B*. Most of the Indonesian speakers say *it is the combination between A and B*. Those kinds of preposition errors were also found in low proficient students' utterances. Therefore, the writer will not discuss any further about the preposition in section of the low proficient students. The low and high proficient students shared the same problems in pairing the correct preposition. Furthermore, the students sometimes omit the preposition *for* in the phrase "That's all my presentation". The common error of Addition in preposition, which Indonesian speakers often say, is the phrase "*in here*". They over-included preposition *in* for the word *here*. Those errors might be caused by the negative transfer of L1 translation.

The finding of this study is consistent with the study by Tahaineh (2010). He revealed that freshmen, sophomores and juniors of Arabian students have numerous problems of preposition. The most difficult preposition used for the Arabian learners in his study are *by, in, on, to, with, of, from, for* and *at* respectively. The similarity between Indonesian and Arabian is that both of them use their L1 rule in forming the preposition paired since they do not have particular rules for preposition paired.

The second frequent common error made by high proficient students is the omission of linking verb and auxiliary verbs. There were 13 errors in using either linking verb or auxiliary verbs. Based on data that have been identified, the students often omit the linking verb "be" to make sentence in simple present tense. However, the omission errors of linking verb are derived from the negative transfer of the L1 rule. The Indonesian speaker made simple generalization about the meaning of copula *be* is "*adalah*", literally means "to be". The example of omission error was found in the sentence "*It safe to eat*". Indonesian speaker might translate that sentence into "*Itu adalah aman dimakan*". In Indonesian context, they would like to say "*Itu*

aman dimakan” and they will translate it into “*It safe to eat*”. As a result, the students exploited redundancy to copula *be* as the result of their L1 transfer. According to James (1998) exploiting redundancy means omitting grammatical features that do not contribute to the meaning of an utterance.

The problem in misselection of words took the third highest common errors by high proficient students, as in the following examples: *combinate, fried meal's friends, the fruit content, and normal Durian*. These sources of errors are direct translation from their L1 since English does not have that kind of collocation. Brown (2000) clarified that it was the students' communication strategies in order to make the interlocutor understand their message, but at times these techniques can become a source of error. The students used word coinage, false cognate, and fabricated pattern as their communication strategies which became their sources of errors.

Types of Grammatical Errors of Low Proficiency Students

The findings in Table 4 showed that low proficient students made the most errors in misformation, followed by omission, addition, miscellaneous, misorder, and blends.

Table 4. The Frequencies of Error Categories Produced by Low Proficient Students

Error categories	Students' Level of Proficiency	
	Low	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Misformation	117	41.5
Omission	88	31.2
Addition	43	15.2
Miscellaneous	16	5.7
Misorder	15	5.3
Blends	3	1.1
Total	282	100

The result of this present study is consistent with the previous research conducted by Ting et al (2010) who examined the grammatical errors in spoken English of Malaysian university students who are less proficient in English and by Saad and Sawalmeh (2014) who conducted Error Analysis in role-play presentations among less proficient L2 Malaysian Learners. They showed that the students changed the target language structure by doing misformation and omission, and seldom did they add or misorder the elements of language.

Less proficient students did many errors in opening the presentation. This result is different from high level proficient students. The problem mostly deals with modals. There were various errors in saying “I will present a topic”. They modify the verb *present* into various forms, such as *I will presentation, I will presentate, I will to present*. These kinds of errors were hardly found in high proficient students. However, it is a simple and common phrase, but the low proficient students failed to form it.

The phrase *I will presentation* showed that the speaker might do generalization the meaning of presentation and used that words in all forms without considering whether it is a noun, or a verb. The error in phrase *I will presentate* might be the result of misanalysis. The speaker might think that the word *present* must be added with suffix *-ate* to form a verb. In fact, the word *present* itself is already a verb. The phrase *I will to present* might derive from ignorance of rule restriction. It occurs as a result of failure to observe the restrictions or existing structures that modal is followed by base form verb.

The next error was mostly caused by the interlanguage transfer. The low proficient students frequently did word to word translation from their L1 into the target language as their sources of errors. It was found in the finding that there were 16 miscellaneous errors which are four times higher than in high proficient students. Simbolon (2015) defines miscellaneous errors as various errors in conjunction with translation, wrong order and choice of English words in term of the meaning of sentence in context as well as the omission or addition of certain language elements. Even though the meaning is sometimes understandable, it is structurally unacceptable.

The example of miscellaneous errors found in this study is when the students want to describe the outer and inner appearance of their product. One of the examples is “*the shape of Nanas Pinacolada is*

coconut inside of pineapple". Another example is in the phrase "*why I use Stone Cold for my product?*". Those two phrases are obviously derived from direct L1 translation. In this case, the students translated the sentence by selecting English words which have the same literal meaning with their native language. Simbolon (2015) also asserted that simply translating sentence by using their native language rule is a recurrent problem of Indonesian students when learning English. It is the result of students' ignorance to the structure of the language. They think fluency is more important than accuracy. Otherwise, accuracy shows the fluency of someone and it cannot be simply ignored.

The Dominant Grammatical Errors across Students' Proficiency Level

The high and low proficient ESP students made mostly errors in misformation, followed by omission, addition, miscellaneous, disorder and blends. The combined result of the error analysis show that there are 401 errors found from 38 students. They include 184 misformation errors, 115 omission errors, 55 addition errors, 23 disorder errors, 20 miscellaneous errors, and 4 blends errors. Blend is the least error that both high and low students made. It only shares 0.8% and 1.1% respectively which is not too significant to be discussed further.

The results of this study are also consistent with the result of previous studies by Ting, Mahadhir, and Chang (2013), Muhamad et al (2013), Silitonga (2014), and Beltran (2014), which showed that misformation and omission is the most type of errors which students made. It is followed by addition and misordering. Since both levels of proficiency shared the same ranked of surface structure, the result was not qualitatively different but quantitatively. In term of across students' proficiency level, the result is in line with the study conducted by Nezami and Najafi (2012) which showed less proficient students produced more errors than the high proficient students.

To explain errors, we have to know what caused the error to happen. Source of errors are distinguished into interlingual errors and intralingual errors. Interlingual errors are the result of mother tongue influences. The students often transfer the grammatical elements of their mother tongue to the target language as their speaking strategy. Meanwhile, Selinker and Gass (2008) define intralingual errors as those that are due to the language being learned. There are 7 strategies in intralingual errors as summarized by James (1998), namely false analogy, misanalysis, incomplete rule application, exploiting redundancy, overlooking co-occurrence restriction, hypercorrection, and overgeneralization or system simplification. The minimum knowledge about the pattern, such as structure in language also caused the students' error. Due to the lack of knowledge about the structure, the students may use the structure without paying attention to the correct rule. The first dominant error from both high and low proficient students is misformation. Misformation errors happen when the learner cannot produce the correct structure or morpheme in a sentence. The immense of misformation errors can be caused by the variations in English grammatical structures. Brown (2000) asserted that once learners have begun to acquire parts of the new system, more and more generalization within the target language is manifested.

In this study, the students have to do a descriptive presentation, and the students are required to use present tense in their speech. However, the findings inform that the high and low proficient students still have great problems in distinguishing the use of auxiliary verbs *has/ have/ do/ does* and copula *be*. The students often used the linking verb *be* and auxiliary *has/have* at the same time where it is not necessary. Sometimes, they misuse one of them in wrong context, as in the phrase "*It is has red color*". To be (*is, am, are*) is not used in simple present tense of verbal. This error caused by overgeneralization of copula *be* in a sentence to describe adjectives or nouns. Overgeneralization happens once the learner understands a general rule but does not recognize all the exceptions to that rule (Ziahosseiny, 1999 in Shekhzadeh, &Gheichi, 2011). The finding of this present study is in line with the study about simple present errors in speech event conducted by Simbolon (2015). The result shows that Indonesian students mostly did overgeneralization to produce simple present tense utterances, for example in forming interrogative form "*What do you reading now?*". It showed that Indonesian student have troubles in differentiate the use of auxiliary verb in interrogative sentence for different type of tenses.

The second highest frequencies of grammatical errors made by both high and low proficient students in oral presentation are omission which reaches 29% from the total of errors. In this study, the students often missed the verb inflection *-s/-es* when they talk about singular verb in present tense and in plural nouns, and omit linking verb in present tense. According to Danurwinda (2014) the omission errors can be caused by the minimum knowledge about the right structure in English. The low proficient students are more dominant in doing omission of linking verb errors. The result of this study is consistent with James (1998:107), who

affirmed that more advanced learners tends to be aware of their ignorance of content words rather than omit one.

The third highest frequency of grammatical is the errors of addition which reach 14% from the total of errors. According to data, the students often add another verb when it is not required in a well-formed utterance. Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) acknowledged that this manifestation of error is the result of “too-faithful” use of certain rules.

The least grammatical error made by the high and low proficient is the error of misordering which reaches 6% from the total of errors. The most frequent error in misordering is the sequence of adjective in which describe the noun, for example “there are *two color variant*”. Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982, cited in James, 1998:110) explained that misordering is often the result of learners relying on carrying out word-to-word translations of native language surface structure when producing spoken utterances in the target language.

To conclude, relating to the source of grammatical errors and students’ English proficiency, the finding of this study showed that high proficient students tend to produce dominant errors from intralingual transfer, while the low proficient student mostly made dominant errors which influenced by interlingual transfer.

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

Both high and low proficient students have the most frequent errors in misformation, which have 184 frequencies (46%) in total. The dominant of misformation errors include preposition-paired, misselection of words, subject and verb agreement, and modals. The second type of errors is omission. 115 omission errors (29% in total) were found in this study, by which it is dominated by the low proficient students. The dominant linguistics errors in omission cover omission of linking verbs, omission of prepositions, and omission of noun phrases. The third dominant error is Addition, which referred to double marking. The students often have double verbs in one sentence. The fourth dominant error is Misorder. The students often made errors on where to put the adjective and adverb in a sentence and made the correct sequence in forming a question. The last dominant error is the miscellaneous errors. The most frequent miscellaneous error was word to word literal translation from the students’ L1. Finally, as both levels of proficiencies shared the same rank of errors categories, the result was not qualitatively different but quantitatively.

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