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Students' Linguistic Competence in Essay Writing

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Abstract: Writing in a foreign language (English) has been a highly instrumental for EFL Undergraduate learners because they are required to write assignments, papers, and dissertations. Yet, the course offered and passed to fulfill the writing requirements was meager especially in the language content. Hence, this project aimed at finding out the sentence problem made by the students in essay writing. Using 5 data sources from students' writing, the study was focused on exploring students' mistakes in the use of cause-effect. The finding of this study showed that the most sentences problem made by the students in cause-effect essays were 24 sentences problem in run-on sentences and comma splice and the least were 2 sentences problem in choopy sentences.

Keywords: Essay writing, cause-effect essay, sentences problem

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INTRODUCTION

The study of graduate students' writing have been conducted to describe their problems in related to teachers' belief (Bagheri & Riasati, 2016), (Alter & Adkins, 2001), (Bartholomae, 2005), (Chandler, 2003), and put forward several aspects of error types including word choice, noun ending, spelling, punctuation, verb tense, and article (Lee, 2004).

The offering of writing course in the undergraduate college English is not only to complete one or more compulsory and general courses of English, but also to further their knowledge for academic purposes or for particular reasons related to their research project. In many colleges and universities, this subject is given in the second semester of their study program based on the assumption

that students should master the grammar until intermediate or advanced (Alter & Adkins, 2001).

Based on the observation as a lecturer in essay writing class, writing has been regarded as the most difficult skill to learn. Over the past three decades, growing numbers of students at all levels of education are perceived as not adequately proficient in writing (Cooper, 1999), (Altenberg & Granger, 2001). Therefore, it needs specialized skill that includes the ability to express the opinions or thoughts clearly and efficiently. In the case of EFL learners, the majority of students writing proficiency are determined by their linguistic competence, rather than the other aspects such as knowledge of topic and the writing rhetoric, (Ainley, Hidi, & Berndorff, 2002). However, very few studies were employed to investigate

the kinds of linguistic aspect such as those promoted in this study namely the cause effects.

Moreover, Oshima & Hogue (2006) states that essay is a short piece of writing that discusses or analyzes one topic and can be divided into some paragraph.

There are four kinds of essay learnt by student in essay writing subject. They are chronological order, cause-effect essay, comparison-contrast essay and argumentative essay. Cause-effect essay becomes the first kinds of essay learnt by student.

Oshima & Hogue (2006) state that cause effect discusses the cause (reason) for something, the effect (result). Moreover, (Boardman, 2009) states that cause-effect essays is essays that follow one of two basic organizational patterns. The first discusses all the causes and/or effects separately in "blocks". A block can be one or more paragraphs. The block style has two common variations. In the second basic pattern, have a series of one cause/one effect paragraphs where each cause is "linked" to one effect. In order to make a good writing, writer or students who learn writing must know some sentences problem that must be ignore during writing.

According to (Bram, 1995), sentence problem is one of the common problems might be a lack of ability to construct grammatical sentences. Based on (Boardman, 2009), there are five kinds of sentences focus as the problem in writing, they are : Choppy sentence, Stringy sentence, Run-on sentences and comma splice, Dangling modifiers, Avoiding fragments. Choppy Sentence is a sentence a very simple or a short sentences. Ideas in sentences can be connected by combining two sentences to make a compound Choppy sentence, A stringy sentence has too many independent clauses, perhaps through an overuse of coordinating conjunctions or subordinate. Run-on sentence occurs when two or more sentences are punctuated as one sentence. Two sentence

compounds by using comma is not good. Dangling modifiers is has different subject and can lead to misunderstandings. Fragment is a string of words does not have these two basic. Three common types of fragments are shown below. The verb with tense is missing, the subject is missing, a dependent clause is punctuated as if it were an independent clause.

The phenomenon above raised the question "What types of problems did the students have in writing essay?"

METHOD

This study was conducted to find out students' sentences problem in cause-effect essay. In similar study, (Alter & Adkins, 2001) assessed six criteria such as diction – word choices; sentences – variety of compound, complex, and simple, no fragments, and active voice; paragraphs – well organized and clear focus; general organization; mechanics – spelling and punctuations, capitalization; and usage – appropriate subject-verb agreement and pronoun reference.

According to (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2011), participant is a person who provides data for a research study. Participants in this research selected from students in STKIP Abdi Pendidikan Payakumbuh. They are the third year students of STKIP Abdi Pendidikan Payakumbuh from class A consisted of 34 students. But, only 5 students whose cause-effect essay taken by researcher since data saturation occurs.

According to (Gay et al., 2011) observation, interviewing, questionnaire, phone calls, personal and official documents, photographs, recordings, drawings, journals, email messages and responses, and informal conversations are all sources of qualitative data. So, the researcher used source of data from official document.

The data were collected from the lecturer who still kept the students' writing when they had examination. In analyzing the

data, the researcher used some steps from (Gay et al., 2011) as follows:

1. Data managing

To organize the data and to check for completeness, the researcher analyzed the students' cause-effect essay by describing the sentence problem found from the data.

2. Reading/memorizing

The researcher read the description from the sentence problem and get understanding of the data collected.

3. Classifying

The researcher classified the sentence problem found in students' cause-effect essay into five categories. They were: choppy sentence, stringy sentence, run-on sentences and comma splice, dangling modifiers, and avoiding fragments.

4. Interpreting

According to (Gay et al., 2011), data description is based heavily in the connection, common aspects and linkages among the data, especially the identify categories. At this point, the researcher had interpreted the data based on the categories.

5. Writing report

According to (Gay et al., 2011), the writing report to describe the reserach and finding is the final process in qualitative reserach. So, researcher wrote the report based on the data got from the student.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research revealed the following things: first in data description, the researcher described the students' sentence problem in general, and the second was data analyses, the reseacher described the

students' sentence problem in detail based on each categories.

1. Data description

Based on (Bram, 1995), there were five categories in students' problem in essay. They are choppy sentence, stringy sentence, run-on sentence and comma splice, dangling modifiers and avoiding fragments. After analyzing the data from the students' cause-effect essay, the researcher got the result of students' sentences problem of cause-effect essay in essay writing class at STKIP Abdi Pendidikan Payakumbuh. The result was described in general as follow.

Table 1. Students' Sentence Problem Based on Each Categories

No	Sentences problem	Number of sentences
1	Choppy sentence	2 sentences
2	Stringy sentence	3 sentences
3	Run-on sentence and comma splice	24 sentences
4	Dangling modifiers	3 sentences
5	Avoiding fragments	8 sentences

Based on the table above, the most sentence problems made by students was run-on sentence and comma splice and the least was choppy sentence

The research also described each categories in detail by analyzing sentence problem founded in students' cause effect essay. It could be seen in data analysis as follow.

2. Data Analysis

a. Choopy sentence made by students

As stated before, choopy sentence is a sentence a very simple or a short sentences. The result of the reserach could be seen in table 2:

Table 2. Students' Sentence Problem in Choopy Sentence

No	Students code	Students' sentence	Choopy sentence	Correct sentence
1	02	the effect negative of internet is, people can easy. With see blue film, and browsing sites...., but internet in this now very needed and importantt for people	Add a conjunction	The negative effect for people are easy to see the blue film and browsing situs but it is needed and important for them
2	04	in other hand internet have good effect for us. In knowledge we can get speed information about something. The information about anything that we needs. Then we can know the situation in the universe with internet. With internet we can use social media. Such as: face book, twitter, Google, and another. With them we can make interaction with another people in the word.	Add a comma and conjunction	In other hand, internet has good effect for us. Such as to get information fastly about anything we need, to know the global situation, to use the social media for example facebook, twitter, google and another, the last to make interaction with another people in the world.

Based on the table above, it could be seen that only 2 sentences problem in choopy sentences found from 5 cause-effect essays. This result showed that it was the least sentence problem made by students. It happened because most students can arrange their sentences in writing without creating many simple sentence in one paragraph. Actually, the students had

already learnt about it at previous semester in writing I.

b. Stringy sentence

As stated before, stringy sentences is a sentence with too many clauses, usully connected with and, but, so, and sometimes because. The result of this sentences problem that made by students could be described in table 3:

Table 3. Students' Sentence Problem in Stringy Sentence

No	Students code	Students' sentence	Stringy sentence	Correct sentence
1	02	Internet very advantages for people, because with internet they can add knowledge, add to friend.	Add conjunction	Internet has many advantages for people because it can add knowledge and friend
2	02	the effect of internet star from children, until parent, all people can be use internet.	Add conjunction	The effect of internet started from children until parent since all people can use internet
3	03	then they can do something is their watch in internet not only bad effect from the internet, internet has good effect such as, give information about politics, economics, knowledge, and of all information we need.	Add conjunction	Then, they can do anything by watching internet and it is not only has bad effect but also good effect. For example, it give information about politics, economics, knowledges and anything we need.

Based on the table, researcher found there were 3 sentences problem in stringy sentence made by the students in their essays. It may be because most students have understood the way how to put the correct conjunction in creating many

clauses like the exercises that they did in writing I.

c. Run- on sentence and comma splice

As stated before, run-on sentence occurs when two or more sentences are punctuated as one sentence. Actually, two sentences

compound by using comma is not good. The description could be seen in

the following table 4:

Table 4. Students' Sentence Problem in Run-On Sentence and Comma Splice

No	Students code	Students' sentence	Run-on sentence and comma splice	Correct sentence
1.	01	Internet can give many information, knowledge, and in internet can use for communication.	Add a coordinate	Internet can give many information and knowledge. It also can be used for communication
2.	01	because hand phone is easy to bring anywhere then many people can use internet anywhere and anytime	Add a comma	Because handphone is easy to bring anywhere, many people can use internet anywhere and anytime
3.	01	besides that, cause often use internet, it also give negative effect for many people	Incorrect punctuation	Besides, the cause of using internet also gives negative effect for many people
4.	01	They often look videos, and play game. Then if often use internet also effect health eyes	Incorrect punctuation	They often lood videos and play games: therefore, it also gives effect on the health of eyes
5.	01	So, internet not only gives many people advantage but also give effect negative. Because internet does not lu provide much knowledge.	Add a comma	So,for people, internet is not only give advantages but also negative effect because it provide many knowledges
6.	02	Internet have effect negative and positive in people, because internet easy given wherever.	Add a subordinate	Internet has negative and positive effect to people because it is easy to bring anywhere
7.	02	The effect of internet start from children until parent and all people that use internet.	Add a subordinate	The effect of internet started from children until parent and all people who use internet
8.	03	in Indonesia internet was used in many gender, began from kid, child, teenagers and adult.	Add a period	In Indonesia, internet is used in many genders. It begins from kid, teenager and adult
9.	03	If the person every house use gadget. They will less communication between family members.	Add a comma	If the person of every house uses gadget, they will less communication between family member
10.	03	They can search many information is damaged for their morals and habit.	Add a coordinate	They can search many information which damage for their morals and habbit
11.	03	Then they can do something is their watch in internet not only bad effect from the internet, internet has good effect.	Incorrect punctuation and give conjunction	Then, they can do something bad after watching in internet. Yet, not only bad effect that can get from internet but also good effect
12.	03	but if we use internet to seek some information is damaged our morals, internet can make us stupid	Incorrect punctuation and give conjunction	But, if we use internet to seek some information which damage our morals, internet can make us stupid
13.	04	As a younger we must now what's the function of internet because internet have a bad and good effect for us.	Add a comma	As a younger, we must kno what's the function of internet because internet have a bad and good effect for us
14.	04	The first is the children, we must control them when used internet cause internet can give anything information for them.	Add a subordinate	The first is the children. We must control them when they use internet because it can give any information for them
15.	04	internet have a bad effect for our children, they can to search anything from internet.	Add a subordinate	Internet has a bad effect for our children because they can serach anything from it.
16.	04	Just for example the children can to	Add a comma	Just for example, the children can

No	Students code	Students' sentence	Run-on sentence and comma splice	Correct sentence
17.	04	search the application that can to bring a bad effect for their life. and then we are often saw the criminal case that make the children as a victim it's one of the bad effect of internet	Add a period	serach the application that can bring a bad effect for their life Then, we often see the criminal case that make the children as a victim. So, it's one of the bad effects of internet
18.	04	In other hand internet have good effect for us.	Add a comma	On other hand, internet has good effect for us
19.	04	In knowledge we can get speed information about something.	Add a comma	In knowledge, we can get speed information about something
20.	04	With them we can make interaction with another people in the word.	Add a comma	By using those media, we can make interaction with other people in the world
21.	05	than internet has many facility, such as browsing, chatting, searching etc"	Add a comma	Then, internet has many facility, such as browsing, chatting, searching and etc
22.	05	Because not only from the teacher, but from internet they can get many information about the material of study.	Add a comma	Because not only from the teacher but also from internet, they can get many information about the material of study
23.	05	If we use internet not only carefully we can get negative effect.	Add a comma	If we use internet carelessly, we can get negative effect
24.	05	For example, children can access negative sites, like to see the bad picture, videos, etc. To stop negative effect we must use internet only for the positive things	Add period and comma	For example, children can acces negative situs, like to see the bad picture, videos, etc. To stop the negative effect, we must use internet only for the positive things

Based on the analysis, there were 24 sentences problem made by student in run-on and comma splice. It showed that run-on and comma splice is the most sentences problem made by the students. It happened because most of students do not put comma and period in their writing. It makes their sentences is not understanable

d. Dangling modifiers

Dangling modifiers is has different subject and can lead to misunderstanding. The description could be seen in the following table 5:

Table 5. Students' Sentence Problem in Dangling Modifiers

No	Student's Code	Students' sentence	Dangling sentence	Correct sentence
1.	01	because hand phone is easy to bring anywhere then many people can use internet anywhere and anytime	Has different subject and give the full stop	Because handphone is easy to bring anywhere. Then, many people can use internet anywhere and anytime
2.	02	The effect of internet star from children, until parent, all people can be use internet".	Has different subject and give full stop	The effect of internet started from children until paren. All people can use internet
3.	05	By using internet can add our knowledge, because we can search information that we want.	Has different subject and give coordinate	By using internet, we can add our knowledge and search information that we want

In this analysis, the researcher found that there were only 3 sentences problem made by student in dangling modifiers. This result showed that students have already known to substitute key noun or they can keep maintain the consistency of pronoun in their writing.

e. Avoiding Fragments

Avoiding fragments is a string of words that does not have subject, verb, dependent clause and independent clause.

Table 6. Students' Sentence Problem in Avoiding Fragments

No	Student's Code	Students' sentence	Avoiding fragments	Correct sentence
1.	01	Because internet not only provide many knowledge	Does not have independent clause	Internet not only provide many knowledge
2.	01	Because, sometime that only open facebook account	Does not subject	They only open facebook account
3.	01	Because handphone is easy to bring anywhere	Does not have independent clause	Because handphone is easy to bring anywhere, there are many students bring to school
4.	02	Internet very advantages for people, because with internet we can add knowledge, add to friend.	Does not have a verb	Internet gives many advantages for people because with internet, we can add knowlege and friend
5.	02	Internet very important for people to give to information.	Does not have a verb	Internet is very important for people to give the information
6.	02	The effect of positive in internet is, can add knowledge, add to friend, give information, and to easy communication with the world.	Does not have a subject	The positive effect of internet is, it can add knowledge, make a friend, give information, and easily communicate with the people around the world
7.	03	The effect from the internet firstly, in one family.	Does not have a verb	the first effect of the internet is for family
8.	05	By using internet can add our knowledge, because we can search information that we want.	Does not have subject	By using internet, we can add our knowledge and search information that we want

Based on the table, there were 8 sentences problem made by the students in avoiding fragments, this result showed that students still have problem in creating a sentence since it can be called as one sentence if there is one subject and one predicate. The fact got from the data, some of students' essay are missing subject or verb.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the result described in finding and discussion above, it could be concluded that the most sentences problem

made by the students in cause-effect essay were 24 sentences problem in run-on sentences and comma splice and the least were 2 sentences problem in choopy sentences.

The finding was beneficial for students in order to avoid the use of sentences problem in their cause-effect essay. For lecturers, they can teach kinds of sentences problem in order to improve the ability of their students in essay especially for cause-effect essay.

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