Lexical Formation Error in the Descriptive Writing of Indonesian Tertiary EFL Learners

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study was aimed at identifying the kinds and frequency of formal errors on Indonesian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' descripting writing. Therefore, descriptive analysis research design was implemented to achieve the objective. The data were collected from the descriptive writing of university students in Indonesia (N = 40). Then, the data were computerized and tabulated by using descriptive statistic (frequency and percentage) in SPSS version 21. The result of this study presents that from 223 errors, suffix was the most frequent formal errors (32.29%) in Formal Misselection, followed by calque (22.87%) in Formal Misformations and omission (12.56%) in Distorsion. In conclusion, most of the students have considerable difficulty in forming the correct form of the words. Therefore, to produce an excellent descriptive writing, the students are suggested to learn and practice more on words formations (grammar).

1- INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

It is undeniable that writing is a very challenging skill (Hayes, 1996; Kellog, 1996) because it does not merely put words in to a paper but it has many requirements to be called a proper writing (Alsamadani, 2010). Furthermore, Ridha and aL-Riyahi (2011) mentioned that grammar is used to be the main concern on leaning English as a foreign language especially in productive skills (writing and speaking). Therefore, tertiary students need to master grammar in order for them to produce a good writing.

On the other hand, many scholars agree that vocabulary is more important than grammar in writing composition. McCarthy (1990) claimed that even though EFL learners have mastered the grammatical and sounds system of English, without the acts of words, the communication would not happen in meaningful way. Moreover, it is true that the basic element in acquiring the language is the words (Cameron, 1994).

As vocabularies (lexis) and grammar (rules) are very important in productive skills, it is very useful to do a research on how the learners form the lexis in their language product (in this case is writing). Actually, the lexical formation falls under morphology in linguistics. It is a study combination between vocabulary and grammar. Prasad (2012: 6) says that "morphology describes the patterns of formation of words by the combination of sounds into minimal

distinctive of meaning called morphemes". It deals with the rules of combination of morphemes such as how prefixes and suffixes are attached to them to form words. It also studies the changes that take place in the structure of words.

Related to the rules of word formation in language learning, many EFL learners including in Indonesia produced numerous kinds of errors in their written products and the highest number of errors were lexical formation (Llach, 2005; Ander & Yildirim, 2010). Besides interfering the language form errors also affect the quality of EFL learners writing. Therefore, analyzing the errors especially the lexical formation on EFL learners' writing composition is a must because the right solution would be suggested based on the core problem.

One of the genres in writing that is needed to be mastered by Indonesian EFL learners is descriptive writing. This genre is well known among teachers and students in teaching and learning English process in any level of education institutions in Indonesia. Therefore, investigating the lexical formation errors in Indonesian EFL learners' descriptive writing would be interesting and beneficial to both teachers and learners.

2- OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study was to analyze the lexical formation errors made by Indonesian EFL learners in their descriptive writing. In accordance

with the background of study, the objectives of this study were formulated as following:

1) To identify the lexical formation errors in EFL learners' descriptive writing.
2) To analyze the lexical formation errors in EFL learners' descriptive writing.

3- LITERATURE REVIEW

Descriptive Writing

Pardiyono (2007) defined descriptive writing as a kind of written composition that has specific function on portraying particular living and non-living objects to reader. Moreover, there are five kinds of descriptive writing. They are describing process, event, object, place and person (Jolly, 1984). Furthermore, there are three parts of descriptive writing. They are 1) communicative purpose, that is to describe an object 2) rhetorical structure, which is divided into two parts, a) identification, a statement that consists of one topic to be described; b) description, that is consisting of the detailed description about object that is identified in identification, and 3) grammatical patterns. In descriptive paragraph, declarative sentence and present forms are used properly (Pardiyono, 2007).

Literally, according to the definition and parts of the descriptive writing composition, particular lexical formation is a very important linguistic element in order to deliver the meaning of the descriptive writing clearly. Therefore, finding out the errors in the EFL learners descriptive writing is very essential as finding the errors is the step to find the right solution to the said problems.

Morphology

Morphology is the branch of linguistics that studies patterns of word formation within and across languages. It is the identification, analysis and description of the structure of words (words as unit of the lexicon are the subject matter of lexicology) (Prasad, 2012). Therefore, morphology is actually overlaps three other linguistic fields, syntax, sematic and phonology. In this case, the study is focused on lexical formation. It means how the words are formed in the EFL learners' descriptive writing composition.

Basically, the smallest meaningful unit of word is morpheme. For example, the word *"independently"*, has a single free morpheme like *depend* and bound morpheme *"in-, -ent- and –ly"*. The morpheme *in-, -ent- and –ly* are called bound morpheme because they are meaningful only when they are added to the free morpheme *depend.* Thus, morpheme may be classified in to *root (free morpheme)* and *affix (bound morpheme)*. Again, *affix* is classified into *prefix* and *suffix.* It can be seen in Figure 1.
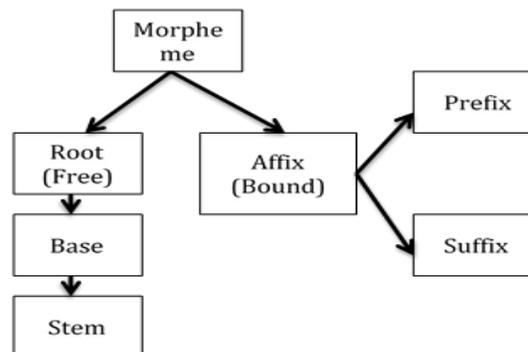

Figure 1. Classification of Morphemes

A Morpheme may further be classified into *class maintaining* and *class changing* morphemes. When by the addition of a prefix and a suffix the grammatical class (parts of speech) is not changed, it is categorize as class maintaining morpheme. When the grammatical class is changed by the addition of the morpheme, it is under class changing morpheme. For example, *speak, speaks, spoken,* and *speaking* are different form of the same grammatical category, *verb.* These are examples of *class maintaining* morpheme. If the *suffix –er* is added to *speak,* it becomes *speaker* (noun), and its grammatical category changes. This is an example of class changing morpheme.

Lexical Formation Errors

Practically, lexica errors have been classified differently by many previous researchers but some of the errors' classification only conveyed limited number of classes. For example, Ridha (2012) classified the lexical errors only in one class, which is semantic error. In contrast, Hemchua andSchmitt (2006) mentioned that the use of limited classification in students' language errors is irrelevant due to the complexity of lexis. Therefore, this study adopted lexical error taxonomy suggested by James (1998), which serves two main classifications of lexical errors. They are lexical formation errors and semantic errors. However, this current study focused on lexical formation errors only. Therefore, the description of lexical formation error from James (1998) is described as following:

There are three classes of lexical formation classifications namely formal *misselection*, formal *misformation* and *distorsion (*James, 1998). In addition, each sub-class is presented as below:

A. Formal *Misselection*

A.1 Suffix (for instant: *her achieves is very good [achievement])*

A.2 Prefix (for instant: *the rule is unappropriate [inappropriate]*)

A.3 Vowel Based: (for instants: *the will have coffee brake time for 20 minutes [break]*)

A.4 Consonant Based: (for instant: *the manager doesn't need any advises [advices]*)

B. Formal *Misformation*

According to James (1998) formal *misformations* are the errors that can be created by the learner from the resources of the target language or in the mother tongue. There are three classifications of formal *misformations*, which are discussed below:

B.1 Borrowing (for instance, *after the* Shubuh *[dawn], the farmers are usually go to the paddy field*).

B.2 Coinage (for instance, *drugging can be very nocive [dangerous] to our health*).

B.3 Calque (for instance, *I go to [am going to] school by motorcycle*).

C. Distortions

The results of distortions generally are non-existent forms in the target language. James (1998) classifies distortions into four sub-classes as follow:

C.1. Omission (for instance, *this can be happend [happened] because of your mistake*).

C.2 Overinclusion (for instance, *Jane is the most dilligent [diligent] student in her class*).

C.3 Misselection (for instance, *Jack's behavior really made me anger [angry]*).

C.4 Misordering (for instance, *Sally will continue her study aboard [abroad]*).

Previous Study in Lexical Formation Errors

There were so many studies, which had been done by many scholars in lexical formation errors. Different methodology produced different results in research. To mention some, the research done by Hemchua and Schmitt (2006), Ridha (2012)and Sanjaya (2015) is presented as follows.

Stood at Hemchua and Schmitt (2006) conducted a research on Thai students who studied English on the third year. The number of students was 20. The students were asked to write an argumentative essay, which were about 300 – 350 words. From the papers, they investigated the lexical errors made by the students. They found that students still made errors

on lexical formations even though the highest error was on semantic.

Ridha (2012) did a research on the interference of Arabic in the English written composition of Iraqi undergraduate students. The result of the study indicated that the negative transfer of Arabic linguistics effect the English written composition of Iraqi students on grammatical including lexical formation.

Sanjaya (2015) did a syntactical investigation on extrovert and introvert tertiary EFL learners written composition in Indonesia. He found that both introvert and extrovert students made errors on lexical formations but extrovert students tended to make more errors than introvert learners.

However, there was a similarity of those studies. All of them investigated the lexical formation errors made by English learners. Therefore, this study was focused on the lexical formation errors made by Indonesian EFL learners in University level. To get variety of result, this study was to investigate the kind of errors in lexical formation and calculate the frequency of errors in each type of error classes made by tertiary EFL learners in Indonesia.

4- METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study was designed based on descriptive analysis research design in which the quantitative data were collected (frequency) through documentation technique. Furthermore, the data were tabulated and analyzed to find out the rank order of the data and discuss the data based on related theories.

Participants

The participants of this study were 40 university students who took English education program at Universitas Negeri Medan – Indonesia and they were selected randomly from 160 students. They were on semester one and learning Writing 1 course in which descriptive writing is one of the genres in writing that they need to master. Furthermore, their first language is local language namely Batak language and Indonesian language is their national language. Then, English is normally used for international communication only. In addition, the average of their ages is 20-year old.

Procedure of Collecting Data

The data were collected from students' descriptive writing compositions. The 40 students were asked to write a descriptive writing with the minimum length of the words is 150 words. During writing, the

students were not allowed to look at dictionary and the time to complete the writing was only one hour. The topic was *my best friend.* After the students wrote the descriptive writings, the descriptive writings were collected to be studied.

Technique of Analyzing Data

The lexical formation errors made by students from the descriptive writing compositions were computerized and tabulated by using SPSS version 21 to find out the frequency based on classification suggested by James (1998). Then, the classes of the errors were ordered based on the rank (from the highest percentage to the lowest percentage). After that, the errors were described and discussed based on the related theories.

5- FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the data, the total number of the errors is 223 from the 3 classes of lexical formation errors. They are 95 errors of formal misselection, 67 errors of formal misformation and 61 distorsions. The average error of each student's descriptive writing is 5.575. This number is quite big because the students should have no mistakes as they are in university level and taking English Education Program some more. Furthermore, the following table presents the number for each error type and its frequency.

Table 1: *Frequency of Lexical Formation Errors*

Lexical Formation Error Type	Number of Errors (Total=223)	(%)	Number of Papers Containing the Errors (N=40)	(%)
A. Formal Misselection				
A.1 Suffix	72	32.29	28	70
A.2 Prefix	2	0.89	2	5
A.3 Vowel-Based	16	7.17	6	15
A.4 Consonant-Based	5	2.24	3	7.5
B. Formal Misformation				
B.1 Borrowing	9	4.04	4	10
B.2 Coinage	7	3.14	5	12.5
B.3 Calque	51	22.87	25	62.5
C. Distorsion				
C.1 Omission	28	12.56	16	40
C.2 Overinclusion	9	4.04	3	7.5
C.3 Misselection	18	8.07	9	22.5
C.4 Misordering	6	2.69	4	10

Table 1 shows the lexical formation errors made by Indonesian tertiary EFL learners. From the data, there are three main error classes namely Formal Misselection which contains four sub-classes, Formal Misformation which contains three sub-classes and Ditorsion which contains four sub-classes.

Interestingly, none of the sub-classes get zero number of errors.

Stood at Formal Misselection, suffix got 72 (32.29%) of overall errors made by the tertiary EFL learners and this number is the highest among all the classes. Then, these errors were found on 28 papers. It means that more than half (70%) of students made errors on suffix. Furthermore, Vowel – Based was the second highest in Formal Misselection which got 16 errors (7.17%) from 6 papers (15%). Then followed by Consonant – Based and Prefix, which got 5 (2.24%) from only 3 papers (7.5%) and 2 (0.89%) from only 2 papers (5%) respectively.

Beside that, on the Formal Misformation the highest numbers of errors felt under Calque which got 51 errors (22.87%) from al most half of the papers (40%). Then followed by Borrowing and Coinage, which got only 9 errors (4.04%) from 4 papers (10%) and 7 errors (3.14%) from 5 papers (2.5%) respectively.

Lastly on Distorsion, there were four sub-classes, which got errors on students' papers. The highest number of errors was Omission, which got 28 errors (12.56%) from 16 papers (40%). Then, the second highest number of errors was under Misselection, which got 18 errors (8.07%) from 9 papers (22.5%). The third and the fourth were Overinclusion, which got 9 errors (4.04%) from only 3 papers (7.5%) and Misordering, which got 6 errors (2.69%) from 4 papers (10%).

From all errors, the suffix from Formal Misselection got the highest number of errors, followed by Calque from Formal Misformation as the second highest and Omission from Distorsion as number three.

Conclusion and recommendation

Teaching and learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in tertiary level is very challenging for both teachers and learners because there must be interference of first language to the target language. Therefore, carrying out an investigation on students' writings is a good way to find out the type and frequency of errors made by tertiary learners. From this current study, it is clear that students still had difficulty in forming the correct lexical in their compositions.

Shalaby, Yahya and El-Komi (2009) suggested that teachers should clearly provide the information about morphological structure of words to English learners so that they know exactly how to form the words correctly. In line with Jiang (2000), he pointed out that the English learners lexical formation awareness is not automatically built. Therefore, the teaching

learning process in class should be designed to improve the students' ability to overcome this issue.

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