

GRAMMATICAL PROBLEMS IN THE DISCUSSION SECTION OF MASTER THESES

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Abstract

The discussion section is the portion of the thesis that presents the research findings by demonstrating an in-depth understanding of the findings, interpreting the findings, and emphasizing their contribution to current knowledge. Additionally, the discussion section is the most difficult component of the thesis. This study sought to identify the most prevalent grammatical errors and their causes in the discussion sections of theses written by English Education postgraduate students at the University of Bengkulu. This study analyzed its data using a mixed methodology. The majority of grammatical problems were investigated quantitatively, while their causes were investigated qualitatively. This study's corpus consisted of thirty master's theses written by English postgraduates who graduated in 2021. The findings revealed that incorrect verbs comprised 65.4%, or 121, of the grammatical errors found in the discussion section of the thesis. These errors were dominated by tense confusion and subject-verb agreement. First-language interference caused the grammatical errors found in the discussion section of the thesis. This study's conclusion provides information about the most common grammatical errors and their possible causes in the thesis discussion section in order to raise the writer's awareness of the significance of grammatical writing in this section.

Keywords: Grammatical problems, discussion section, writing thesis, academic writing

INTRODUCTION

The composition of the discussion section in a thesis presents a formidable task that necessitates attention, for it assumes a pivotal role within the thesis by elucidating and amplifying the student's research discoveries. The discussion section has been composed by the student participants, employing their own specialized vocabulary to explicate the outcomes of the research. To facilitate reader comprehension, it is imperative that the presented results in this particular section are both lucid and easily understandable. When the findings are communicated in a comprehensible format, it minimizes the likelihood of misinterpretation by the reader regarding the outcomes of the researcher's inquiry. According

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to Karsli et al. (2018), it has been posited that the inclusion of a discussion section within academic papers holds utmost importance. This section serves the purpose of elucidating and providing an interpretation of the significance of the study's findings in relation to existing research that has been previously conducted. The production of words, phrases, and paragraphs necessitates a substantial reservoir of knowledge and a profound cognitive engagement, similar to the principles underlying proficient utilization of English grammar (Kumala et al., 2018). Therefore, it is of utmost importance to carefully take part to grammatical aspects while composing the discussion section of the thesis, given its nature as a scholarly document necessitating clarity in conveying the study's findings.

There exist a multitude of factors that contribute to the manifestation of grammatical errors. In a recent study conducted by Norrish and Wulandari (2021), a comprehensive analysis of grammatical errors was undertaken, revealing four primary sources. The first source, as identified by the researchers, is carelessness. This phenomenon, commonly referred to as carelessness, is intricately linked to an individual's level of motivation. According to the findings of Kumala et al. (2018), there exists a correlation between carelessness and a deficiency in motivation to learn English among students. The findings suggest a potential correlation between the two variables, indicating that there may be instances where they exhibit a strong association. Interference with the first language is observed in the second instance. The term in question serves as a linguistic equivalent for the aforementioned matter at hand. The study conducted by Ummah and Setiawan (2018) has provided evidence to support the notion that language acquisition, regardless of whether it pertains to one's native language or a foreign language, follows a habitual formation process. This implies that pre-existing habits play a significant role in shaping the development of new language habits. The ultimate stage in the process involves the act of translation. In Wulandari's (2021) study, it was observed that the act of translation among students often stems from a tendency to mechanically convert a sentence, phrase, or idiomatic expression from their mother tongue to the target language without considering the nuances and cultural context involved. The observed phenomenon can be attributed to the tendency of students to directly transfer sentence structures or idiomatic expressions from their first language to the second language.

In the context of this subject matter, the researchers have conducted observations on a cohort of students in Indonesia, specifically focusing on English education postgraduate students at the University of Bengkulu who have successfully obtained an undergraduate degree in a field related to English studies. However, it is important to note that there continue to be instances where language rules are violated, including the utilization of

incorrect verb tenses and the omission of definite and indefinite articles. The pre-observation, which took place on March 9, 2022, was carried out by a researcher affiliated with Bengkulu University. The researcher collected two samples of postgraduate theses for analysis and evaluation purposes. In the discussion section of a postgraduate thesis conducted at the University of Bengkulu, the researchers found a number of English grammatical inaccuracies. In light of the aforementioned empirical evidence and theoretical suppositions, the researchers undertook an empirical inquiry aimed at describing the root causes driving this observed phenomenon. The researchers' investigation discovered instances of grammatical errors within the master's theses composed by English postgraduate students at Bengkulu University, with a specific focus on the discussion section. As delineated in the aforementioned pre-observation conducted by the researchers, it is noteworthy to emphasize the indispensability of grammar in composing the discussion section, as it serves as a comprehensive elucidation of the research findings. However, it is disconcerting to note that a considerable cohort of individuals tend to disregard this crucial aspect when formulating the aforementioned section. The present study sought to examine and explore the research question as follow:

1. What are the most frequent grammatical problems found in the discussion section of the thesis written by the English education postgraduate study program students of the Faculty Teacher Training and Education of the University of Bengkulu?
2. What are the possible causes of the grammatical problems in the thesis discussion section written by the English education postgraduate study program students?

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The present study employs a mixed-method research design. It aimed to examine the prevalent grammatical errors through the utilization of a quantitative approach, while the underlying factors contributing to these grammatical problems were explored through a qualitative analysis in the discussion section of the thesis. The research was conducted on a corpus consisting of 30 theses written by postgraduate students enrolled in the English Education Program at the University of Bengkulu. These students had successfully completed their studies in the year 2021, with a particular focus on those who achieved a high grade point average (GPA).

Instruments

The present study employed a combination of documentation analysis, an observation checklist, and interviews as data collection methods. As suggested by Arikunto (2010), the concept of documentation encompasses a wide range of textual artifacts, such as notes, transcripts, books, newspapers, inscriptions, and agendas. The primary source of documentation for this research study was the thesis of a postgraduate student who successfully completed their studies at the University of Bengkulu in 2021. The researchers' focus was primarily on the analysis and investigation of different grammatical problem types, with a particular emphasis on their discussion within the context of the study. The observation checklist emerged as an additional instrument that yielded insights into the underlying factors contributing to grammatical difficulties. As stated by Gorman and Clayton (2005), an observational study is characterized by the deliberate and methodical documentation of identifiable events or behaviors within an authentic environment. The primary objective of incorporating an observation checklist within this study is to facilitate the writer, who successfully completed their thesis at the University of Bengkulu in 2021, in identifying the underlying causes of grammatical difficulties. This process involves utilizing the checklist to systematically categorize the various traits outlined in Norrish's theory, thereby enabling a comprehensive analysis of the identified categories. The interview was employed as an additional methodological instrument in the present study's exploration of the underlying factors contributing to grammatical difficulties, as elucidated by the thesis writer. This study aimed to investigate the sources of grammatical problems encountered by postgraduates who completed their studies in 2021 at the esteemed University of Bengkulu. In order to achieve this objective, the researchers conducted interviews with the thesis writers, seeking to gain insights into the factors contributing to their grammatical difficulties. The research design employed purposive sampling as the method of choice for selecting participants for the study's interview sessions. In order to obtain interview data, the researchers implemented a purposive sampling strategy as well. The present study aimed to conduct research interviews with a sample of thirty writers. However, it is noteworthy that only six writers accepted to participate in the study.

Data Collection Technique

The data was collected through the completion of an observation checklist and an interview. Several data collection steps included: 1) Made a formal request to the administrative staff at the University of Bengkulu Library for the necessary documents, specifically a 2021-graduated master's thesis in English education; 2) Obtained a master's degree; 3) Identified errors in each word, phrase, and sentence; 4) Classified the data into

subcategories of grammatical issues in accordance with the Hollister theory; 5) Interpreted and described data that has been systematically classified; 6) Conducted an observation checklist and interviews to gather information on the causes of grammatical errors; 7) concluded the findings as the last step by describing it thoroughly.

Data Analysis Technique

The most common grammatical errors were calculated using the Sudijono formula (2019), and the data were then analyzed using the Miles et al. (2014) theory. The four different kinds of data analysis are as follows: data reduction comes first. In this study, the co-rater was also employed to validate the data. Data refers to the information that is chosen, concentrated on, observed, abstracted from, and modified in field notes or written transcriptions. The data display comes next in the data analysis process. The third step is to draw a conclusion and verify it. At this point, the researcher describes and interprets the data with the goal of drawing conclusions about potential reasons for and fixes for grammar issues based on the theories. The Cohen Kappa principle was used to analyze the data collected from the co-rater and researcher. In terms of the indicators of grammatical errors, the Kappa value is 0.83. It implies that the researcher and co-rater's analysis yielded excellent or reliable results.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

The findings of this study showed that students who graduated from the Postgraduate Program of English Education at the University of Bengkulu in 2021 had grammar problems in their discussion section of their theses. The findings from Hollister's (2014) analysis of 185 data points on the five indicators of grammatical errors in academic writing demonstrate this. Verbs include: Tense confusion, subject-verb agreement, overused and unnecessary prepositions, relative and possessive pronouns, conjunctions with the wrong subordinates, and adverbs are all examples of grammar mistakes.

The Most Frequent Grammatical Problems Found in the Discussion Section of Master Theses

This study discovered every sign of grammatical errors. There are also adverbs, prepositions, pronouns, conjunctions, and possessive pronouns. Verbs include tense confusion and subject-verb agreement, preposition overuse and unnecessary prepositions, pronouns, relative pronouns, and possessive pronouns. According to the table below,

confusion over verb tenses occurs 85 times, or 46% of the time, in the discussion section of theses written by postgraduate English students at the University of Bengkulu.

Table 1. The Result Data of Postgraduate Students' Grammatical Problems in Master Theses

No.	Types of Grammatical Problems	Indicators	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Verbs	Tense Confusion	85	46%
		Subject-Verb Agreement	36	19,4%
2.	Prepositions	Preposition Overuse	3	1,6%
		Unnecessary Preposition	22	12%
3.	Pronouns	Relative pronouns	9	4,8%
		Possessive Pronouns	5	2,7%
4.	Conjunctions	Overusing Conjunctions	5	2,7%
		Misusing Subordinate	9	4,8%
5.	Adverbs		11	6%
Total			185	100%

According to the table above, verbs—especially verb tense confusion, which occurred 46% or 85 times—are the most common grammatical error made by postgraduate students in the discussion section of the thesis. The master's thesis' 30 discussion sections also discovered 19,4% or 35 instances of subject-verb agreement. Prepositions were also discovered in this study; they were overused 3 times (1.6%), and they were unneeded 22 times (12%). Relative pronouns were used 4,8% or 9 times and possessive pronouns 2,7% or 5 times in the master's thesis discussion section. The researcher discovered that postgraduate students overused conjunctions 2,7% or 5 times and misused subordinates 4,8% or 9 times after identifying and categorizing the grammatical errors. Conjunctions are still overused in the master's thesis discussion.

The Causes of the Grammatical Problems Found in the Discussion Section of Master Theses

According to the results of the interview, first language interference is the root cause of the grammatical issues found in the discussion section. The primary cause of grammatical issues is first-language interference. Because writers still heavily rely on their mother tongue and customs when creating sentences in their mother tongue (Indonesian), this occurs. Writers believe the words they produce are correct and comprise complete sentences. The correct spelling of the phrase "The finding about misunderstanding the instruction" is "The finding is about misunderstanding the instruction." It seems like the verb misunderstand is

used in this sentence in the wrong form. When a writer accidentally or unnecessarily changes the tenses in a sentence, this is known as tense confusion.

All of the writers revealed their reasons why the grammatical problems can occur because the writer said: "*Saya sering menggunakan pola bahasa pertama tanpa disadari karena saya ingin cepat dalam menuangkan ide yang sudah ada dengan secara tidak sengaja saya menggunakan tulisan sama seperti aturan bahasa pertamayang saya gunakan.*" The writer also stated, "*Secara tidak langsung bahasa pertama mempengaruhi kalimat yang akan di tulis,*" ["I often use first language patterns without realizing it because I want to express existing ideas quickly."] "Indirectly, [the first language affects the sentences to be written.]"

The second reason for the grammatical errors in the master's theses' discussion sections is carelessness. This occurred as a result of the writer's careless use of conjunctions. When conjunctions in a sentence are redundant, this is where students make mistakes. Conjunctions are added by the writers even though they shouldn't be in a sentence. These errors were brought about by the student's carelessness, or one could say that the student was careless when using conjunctions in sentences. On the other hand, there are a variety of reasons why students write thesis papers incorrectly. The correct phrase is "Hyland and Tse (2005) explained that the complement is a significant lexical signal," as opposed to "Hyland and Tse (2005) explained that the complement is a significant lexical signal". The writer of this sentence overuses the conjunction "that" by using it twice in one sentence. When one of the writers wrote, "*Saya mengoreksi Kembali, agar jika terjadi kekeliruan dapat diperbaiki, meskipun terkadang masih ada terdapat kekeliruan,*" they revealed the reason why grammatical errors can occur. ["Yes, I corrected it again so that if a problem arises, it can be fixed, even though there are occasionally still flaws."]

The third reason for the grammatical errors in the discussion section of the master's thesis is translation. It occurs when English graduate students translate their sentences directly from their native languages into English. The writers' thesis writing was still influenced by their native language. Some of them continue to inappropriately translate from English to Indonesian. They believe that the construction and arrangement of sentences in English and Indonesian are identical, despite the fact that the grammatical rules of the two languages differ considerably. They essentially translated Indonesian into English. For example: tThe phrase "Then you will see that there is actually learning" should read "Then you will see that there is learning." Because it has no bearing on the sentence's overall meaning, the adverb that is present there needs to be deleted. In response, they advised, "*Saya*

tidak menggunakan terjemahan karena hal itu akan membuang-buang waktu dalam menyusun discussion section." ["I don't use translation because creating a discussion section would be a waste of time,"]

As a result, the results of the interview and the observation checklist demonstrate that the writer introduces grammatical errors by allowing first-language interference. By accident, using the Indonesian language's structure in writing as opposed to the English language's structure, the writer claimed that the first language also had an impact on grammar. Even though they occasionally make grammar mistakes, they can avoid that by paying attention to the grammatical structure of their writing and the knowledge they already possess. This includes the second reason—carelessness—as a cause of grammatical issues because they continue to make mistakes in writing despite having checked more than once, as well as the minor reason—lack of use of tools for translation in writing—as a cause of grammatical issues in translation. To the best of their ability, they keep verifying.

Discussion

Verbs are the most frequently encountered grammatical issue in the discussion section of the thesis written by postgraduate students in English education at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of the University of Bengkulu. This happens as a result of the tenses' structure not adhering to English grammar rules. After all, altering the sentence's time will affect the verb in English.

Similar to subject-verb agreement, the key is to choose the right time for the action or condition to take place or exist. In contrast to English, where singular and plural verbs are used differently, Indonesian does not distinguish between the use of the verb for the subject. According to Utami (2018), 27% of all student errors were classified as tenses errors, and 23% were subject-verb agreement errors. Additionally, keep in mind that lengthy after-subject attributes may confuse students and cause them to choose the incorrect verb. Tenses and subject-verb agreements are still the most typical issues in students' writing, according to prior research. They use imprecise tenses frequently in their introduction section and frequently choose the wrong time for an action or past condition, whether the act or condition occurred or existed at a specific time. Additionally, they have trouble matching sentences' subjects and verbs. This occurs as a result of the differences between the structure elements (tenses and subject-verb agreement) and the language structure they have.

There were grammatical errors in the discussion section of the thesis that postgraduate English education students wrote. The conclusion suggests that the primary contributing

factor to grammatical issues is first-language interference. This can occur due to the influence of the first language, which has a negative transfer for the students, and their limited understanding of the grammar of the target language can also lead to grammatical errors. The term "mother tongue effect" describes how the learner's native language affects their ability to pick up the target language (Nordquist, 2017). This conclusion thus agrees with Nisa's (2018) research, which found that unclear grammar rules have a negative impact on students' ability to write English, with the mother tongue having the most pervasive and common influence. In addition, students who write discussion sections tend to write extensively, which forces them to occasionally write in their native tongue using the grammar they are familiar with. According to Niati and Eripuddin (2019), the tenses in each thesis are where most issues are found. This study demonstrated that differences between the components of the writer's first language and the target language lead to grammatical issues in the use of tenses and subject-verb agreements.

Adverbs of time are used at the beginning and end of sentences in Indonesian to further describe the time at which an action takes place. The time at which an action takes place can be expressed in English using a variety of tenses. This distinction may lead the writer to use the wrong tense. In addition, the amount between the subject and the verb need not match the writer's first language, unlike in English, where a plural verb or vice versa must come after a plural subject. Because of the grammatical distinctions between the two language systems, this finding is consistent with Nhut's research on how to reduce the negative effects of mother-tongue to English translation. Mohammed & Abdulhussein (2015), who contend that grammar problems arise as a result of the mother tongue's grammatical and linguistic structure influencing the written production of their target language (i.e., interlingual sources), also support this. It is evident from the analysis that postgraduate students' discussion sections frequently contain grammatical errors.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the findings presented in the previous section, it can be said that the primary factors contributing to grammatical errors in the discussion sections of master's theses written by postgraduate English students at the University of Bengkulu are verb tense confusion and interference caused by their first language. The results of the study revealed that in cases where the sentences were excessively complex, the writer inadvertently exhibited a lack of awareness regarding the grammatical distinctions between the two languages. The purpose of this research is to explore the pedagogical implications of the findings, specifically in relation

to grammatical errors commonly found in theses, particularly in the discussion section. The aim is to provide a valuable resource for students, teachers, and lecturers of English, as well as individuals who use English as a second language, in order to address and rectify these errors effectively. Therefore, it is essential for students to develop the necessary skills to effectively compose a discussion section for their thesis, thereby reducing frequent errors and enhancing their comprehension of typical linguistic challenges. To help reduce the occurrence of negative transfer from one's native language to English, individuals should possess an understanding of the grammatical errors that exist between the two linguistic systems.

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