

Errors on Sentence Structures Made by Students in Writing 2 and Writing 4 Classes

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the types of errors on sentence structures by students in Writing 2 and Writing 4 classes in the English Department, Petra Christian University, and their similarities and differences. Eight categories of common errors on sentence structures proposed by Ho (2005) were used to analyze the drafts. The types of common errors in this study were limited to four: Run-on Sentence, Fragmented Sentence, Inappropriate Subordinate Conjunction, and Misordering. The findings showed that both classes made all types of the errors and the most common error made was run-on sentences in the form of comma splice. Fragmented sentences with missing verb and subject were only found on writing 2 drafts while subordinating clauses in fragmented sentences were found on writing 4 drafts. Moreover, errors in relation to subordinating conjunction were more prominent in Writing 4. In conclusion, difficulties in utilizing conjunctions, and the different complexity of the drafts might affect the errors on sentence structures.

Keywords: errors, sentence structure, Writing 2, Writing 4

INTRODUCTION

Doff (2000) states that learning grammar can make students produce and express their thoughts in the form of phrases, clauses, and sentences. As a sentence is a part of grammar, how a sentence is structured is important. As learners, students are bound to make errors because "[e]rrors reflect gaps in a learner's knowledge; they occur because the learner does not know what is correct" (Ellis, 1997, p. 17). Errors regarding the structure are important as Burt and Kiparsky (1972 as cited in James, 2013) state that errors in sentence structure will make a sentence difficult or impossible to be understood. Thus, researching errors on sentence structures is interesting.

The writers chose to do the study in Writing 2 and Writing 4 classes for a few reasons. First, Writing classes have four levels (1-4). According to the English Department's curriculum chart (2020), Writing 2 class is supposed to be taken in the second semester and Writing 4 in the fourth semester. Therefore, the classes were attended by students of different batches. Another reason is the writers were interested in seeing the comparison between students in the earlier semesters (Writing 2) and those in upper semesters (Writing 4) as a study conducted by Sychandone (2016), found that lower proficiency students made more errors related to sentence structures.

There were parallel classes for both Writing 2 and Writing 4. The writers focused on Writing 2C class and Writing 4C class. The reasons for choosing these two classes are both classes had no repeaters and had the same number of students, namely twenty students. The writers decided to analyze only the first draft because the first draft portrays the students' errors most accurately. This was due to the fact that the first draft has not received any corrections from the lecturers.

This study used the theory on common errors in the use of sentence structures proposed by Ho (2005). The theory contains eight types of error in sentence structures: Dangling Modifier, Squinting Modifier, Jumbled-up or Illogical Sentence, Incomplete or Fragmented Sentence, Run-on Sentence, Inappropriate Coordinating Conjunction, Inappropriate Subordinating Conjunction, and Misordering or Inversion of Subject-Verb (Ho, 2005). However, the writers only analyzed the four most common types found in previous studies done by Chandra (2015) and Gunady(2018) namely run-on sentences, fragmented sentences, misordering and inappropriate subordinating conjunctions.

1. Run-on sentence

Nielsen (1984) categorizes run-on sentences into:

a. Comma Splice

Comma splice is when two independent clauses linked by only a comma (Nielsen, 1984). This is an example of an incorrect sentence due to comma splices.

"The ambulance driver examined the victim carefully, he did not say a word." (The Harper Handbook of College Composition, 5th edition p. 328 as cited in Nielsen, 1984)

The sentence is considered incorrect because the two clauses 'The ambulance driver examined the victim carefully,' and 'he did not say a word' can stand alone as a sentence but only connected with a comma.

b. Fused sentence

Fused Sentence is two independent clauses which are connected without any connecting word or punctuation to separate the clause (Ho,2005). For example:

Incorrect:

"I didn't know which CCA I should join I was too confused by all the options." (Ho, 2005, p. 75)

The two independent clauses are not linked with any conjunction or punctuation; hence, they are incorrect (Ho,2005).

Correct:

"I didn't know which CCA I should join; I was too confused by all the options." (Ho, 2005, p. 75)

2. Fragmented sentence

Incomplete or fragmented sentence can be separated into three types:

a. A subordinate clause

It is when a subordinate clause is not accompanied by a main clause; hence, they are not a complete sentence (Ho,2005). For example:

Incorrect:

"Although she was sick. She went to the concert to support her classmate." (Ho, 2005, p. 74)

Correct:

"Although she was sick, she went to the concert to support her classmate." (Ho, 2005, p. 75)

b. Missing Subject

The missing-subject fragment has a missing subject and is detached from the main or independent sentence. It usually begins with a coordinating conjunction (Stilman, 1997 in Nurhusna, 2012). For example:

Incorrect: "Prim named him Buttercup, insisting that his muddy yellow coat matched the bright flower. He hates me. Or at least distrusts me." (Nurhusna, 2012, p.171)

The sentence in the example above is missing a subject and refers to the subject in its preceding sentence namely Buttercup.

c. **Missing a Verb**

According to Bram (1995 as cited in Yaqin, 2020), a sentence that does not contain a verb can be considered a fragmented sentence since it is not complete. For example:

Incorrect: "The students in the office" (Yaqin, 2020)

Correct: "The students study in the classroom" (adding a verb) (Yaqin, 2020)

3. Misordering

Ho (2005) states Misordering or Inversion of Subject-Verb happens when the location of subject and verb is not suitable with the inversion. Ho (2005) provides an example below:

In a direct question format, the verb comes before the subject:

Why are we taught this?

V S

The sentence is considered as misordering if the format is inverted.

Why we are taught this?

S V

4. Inappropriate subordinating conjunction.

Ho (2005) states that Inappropriate Subordinating Conjunction is the word used to link the subordinate clause with the main clause is not suitable or the choice of the subordinating conjunction is incorrect. For example:

Incorrect:

"They did not inform her of the outcome unless they did not want to disappoint her." (Ho, 2005, p. 76)

This sentence is incorrect since the word 'unless' should be used to show an exception.

Correct:

"They did not inform her of the outcome as they did not want to disappoint her." (Ho, 2005, p. 76)

METHODS

This study used a qualitative approach to analyze the data, following the characteristics outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2018). The data collection process involved gathering sentences from the first drafts of students in Writing 2C and Writing 4C classes, specifically focusing on sentences that contained errors in sentence structures. The data collection took place in March 2023, and only the first drafts were analyzed to capture the students' authentic errors. The writers underlined the errors, put them in a table and analyzed the type of errors based on Ho's theory (2005).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section is divided into three parts. The first part discusses the types of errors made by Writing 2 students. The second part describes the types of errors made by Writing 4 students. The last part explains the differences and similarities.

Types of Errors Made by Writing 2 Students

The students made four types of most common errors in the use of sentence structures. The types included:

1. Run-on Sentence

Run-on Sentence or Fused Sentence are two independent clauses which are connected without appropriate connecting word or punctuation to separate the clause (Ho, 2005). There were 8 students who made this type of error: Student 2, 3, 5, 11, 12, 13, 15, and 18. The type of run-on sentences found can be separated into two different types as shown below:

a. Comma Splice

Comma splice is the most common type of run-on sentence found in the drafts of Writing 2C students. For Example:

- 1.12.1 I first started watching The golden girls at the age of 15, at that time I was still learning and growing, I'm very grateful that I discovered this TV show because while it is very entertaining, it also has a lot of value within the TV show and I have learned a lot of moral values because of this TV show.

This sentence contains four different clauses containing its own ideas. The correction can be done by separating the sentence into four as such: "I first started watching The Golden Girls at the age of 15. At that time I was still learning and growing. I'm very grateful that I discovered this TV show because it is very entertaining. It also has a lot of value within the TV show and I have learned a lot of moral values because of this TV show."

2. Fragmented Sentence

There are two main types of sentence fragments found:

a. Missing a Subject

The following is the example:

- 1.9.2 I remember went on *ayunan putar* for about 3 times.

The sentence above was not a complete sentence since it was missing a subject. The sentence can be separated into the main subject, main verb and noun phrase. The correction can be done by adding a subject: "I remember I went on *ayunan putar* for about 3 times."

b. Missing a Verb

The example is shown below:

- 1.9.1 Additional attractions and photo spots like the spectacular show, the lampion garden, the rumah kaca, and the 4D theater.

The example above was not a complete sentence since there was not a verb in the sentence. The correction is as follows "Additional attractions and photo spots were like the spectacular show, the lampion garden, the rumah kaca, and the 4D theater." 'Were' acts as the verb, 'Additional attractions and photo spots' acts as the subject, and 'the spectacular show, the

lampion garden, the rumah kaca, and the 4D theater' acts as the object as a noun phrase, constructing a complete sentence.

3. Misordering

The example below shows the error on misordering:

1.3.2 As the time pass by, eventually she can open up to me.

In this example there was a misordering due to the misplacement of 'eventually'. When 'eventually' is used to describe something done in the past, it is generally written before the main verb. The verb in the example was 'open'. Hence, the sentence can be corrected as follows: "As the time pass by, she eventually opened up to me." This way the word 'eventually' was put before the verb 'open' making the sentence more structurally sound.

4. Subordinating Conjunction

1.2.1 Avatar The Last Airbender is an American cartoon about a young kid named Aang who went on an adventure across the world with his friends in order to defeat the Fire Nation that has been attacking many tribes because of their power that they use to commit mass genocide, corruption, brain washing and many more crimes.

The use of 'because' here would imply that the fire nation attacked the tribes who used their power for crimes. However, this was not the case. When taking the whole text into context, student 2 was trying to explain that the fire nation used their power for crime. The correction can be: "Avatar The Last Airbender is an American cartoon about a young kid named Aang who went on an adventure across the world with his friends in order to defeat the Fire Nation that has been attacking many tribes with their power that they use to commit mass genocide, corruption, brain washing and many more crimes." The use of preposition 'with' here is more appropriate since it describes the relationship between 'power' and 'attacking'.

Types of Errors Made by Writing 4 Students

The students made all four types of the most common types of errors in the use of sentence structure. The writers found that the most common errors found were Run-on sentences, followed by subordinating conjunction, fragmented sentence, and misordering.

1. Run-on Sentence

A run-on sentence or a fused sentence is two independent clauses which are connected without any connecting word or punctuation to separate the clause. Run-on sentence is the most prominent error in Writing 4C drafts. This was inconsistent with Chandra's (2015) study that found fragmented sentences to be more prominent followed by run-on sentences. In the findings, there are two types of run-on sentences found in the drafts written by Writing 4C Students.

a. Fused Sentence

The following is the example of a fused sentence:

2.6.2 Indonesia prefers to gloss over the ugly truth rather than face it head on turning a blind eye on the indisputable truth that sexual urges are a biological need and that their repression will bring negative consequences, Indonesia tries its hardest to conceal the fact that not even moral and religious obligation can curb this requisite.

The sentence above can be separated into two different clauses. The first and second clauses were put together without any conjunctions or punctuations. This makes the sentence

fused since the clauses brought about two completely different ideas and could stand alone as a sentence. The correction can be done as such: "Indonesia prefers to gloss over the ugly truth rather than face it head on. Turning a blind eye to the indisputable truth that sexual urges are a biological need and that their repression will bring negative consequences, Indonesia tries its hardest to conceal the fact that not even moral and religious obligation can curb this requisite."

b. Comma Splice

This is an example of comma splices:

- 2.12.1 Besides that, careless oversharing makes kidnapping or even possible murder easier to be committed by criminals as it has been mentioned before, people might spill their location and condition to social media which is dangerous, one crucial piece of crucial information is all it takes for them to take people's life.

This sentence can be separated into 3 clauses that contain 3 different ideas. It can be corrected as such: "Besides that, careless oversharing makes kidnapping or even possible murder easier to be committed by criminals as it has been mentioned before. People might spill their location and condition to social media which is dangerous. One crucial piece of crucial information is all it takes for them to take people's life."

2. Fragmented Sentence

In the drafts written by Writing 4 students, only fragmented sentences in the form of subordinate clauses were found. This is the example:

- 2.7.2 But it can also be the level of perceived attractiveness.

The incomplete sentence was made by Student 5 of Writing 4. It can be seen as a subordinate clause since it uses 'but'; however, there were no clauses to complete the use of the conjunction. The correct sentence would be: "It can be caused by hoax, but it can also be the level of perceived attractiveness." A main clause should be added to make it a complete sentence.

3. Misordering

The example below is related to misordering:

- 2.14.1 Job vacancies usually are looking for people who own the title as an expert.

This example was found to have an error in the misordering of the adverb 'usually'. The adverb 'usually' modifies the verb 'are'. The word 'usually' normally comes after an auxiliary verb or 'be'. Thus, in this sentence, the position of 'are' which is a form of 'be' is switched with 'usually'. The correction is done as follows: "Job vacancies are usually looking for people who own the title as an expert."

4. Subordinating Conjunction

The following is an error related to subordinating conjunction:

- 2.10.3 Young teenagers aged 12 to 14 are more influenced by their peers' opinions when they are by adults' according to a study that was published in Psychological Science.

The use of subordinating conjunction 'when' here is inappropriate for the meaning that the student intends. The conjunction 'when' is used to refer to time. However, in this particular sentence, the conjunction is combining two clauses with the meaning to compare. Hence, in this context, the conjunction 'than' is more appropriate. The corrected sentence is as follows:

“Young teenagers aged 12 to 14 are more influenced by their peers' opinions than they are by adults', according to a study that was published in Psychological Science.”

The Similarities and Differences

After analyzing the types of errors made by Writing 2C and Writing 4C students in the use of sentence structures, the writers could identify several similarities and differences. In terms of similarities, both Writing 2 and Writing 4 students made errors in all types of the common errors which are: Run-on Sentence, Fragmented Sentence, Inappropriate Subordinate Conjunction, and Misordering. This shows that students enrolled in both Writing 2C class and Writing 4C Class experienced difficulties in the use of sentence structure.

Another similarity is that students in both classes showed a similar tendency to make errors in the form of run-on sentences. More than half of the errors found in sentence structures made by Writing 2C and Writing 4C students were related to run-on sentences. The type of run-on sentences that came up the most were comma splices. In all the drafts, the high occurrences of run-on sentences found could be attributed to the students' lack of ability in using conjunctions when formulating complex sentences. Clauses were often connected only using commas when a conjunction or period (full stop) should have been used.

Several differences were also found after comparing the errors in sentence structures in the drafts written by Writing 4C students and Writing 2C Students. The first difference is the writing 2C students struggled more with run-on sentences than the Writing 4C students. Student 13 of writing 2C in particular was worth mentioning. Three out of the nine sentences in Student 13's draft were run-on sentences. In the Writing 2 students, no errors in the form of fused sentences were found. On the other hand, for the drafts made by writing 4 students, comma splice and fused sentences were found.

Another difference is that in the writing 2C, the fragmented sentences were caused by a missing verb and a missing subject. The drafts written by Writing 4C students only made fragmented sentences in the form of subordinating clauses. This difference might be affected by the content of the drafts in which writing 4C students tended to use more complex sentences. Hence, fragmented sentences found were in the form of subordinating clauses.

The next difference is that only two students on Writing 2C class made an error on inappropriate use of subordinating conjunction, while on Writing 4C there were seven students using inappropriate subordinating conjunction. The students on Writing 2C made errors in the use of conjunction 'because' and 'where'. Errors in the usage of 'where', 'so', and 'when' were found on the Writing 4C drafts. This might be affected by the content. Writing 2C drafts involved explaining a topic in a single paragraph while Writing 4C drafts required writing a full essay on the topic. This meant that in Writing 4C drafts, there were a lot more ideas that needed to be portrayed and connected. As a result, subordinating conjunctions were frequently used to construct complex sentences. This is why errors related to subordinating conjunctions were more prominent in Writing 4C drafts.

CONCLUSION

In summary, there were errors on run-on sentences, fragmented sentences, misordering, and inappropriate use of subordinating conjunction. The most common errors found on both the drafts were errors on run-on sentences. There were also similarities found in the drafts written by the two different categories of students. The first was the four types of errors found in both Writing 2C and Writing 4C classes, and the most common error found namely run-on sentences in the form of comma splices. There were also differences found in the types of common errors

on sentence structures when comparing the two classes. Writing 2C students did not form any fused sentences while writing 4C class students were found to have made errors in the form of fused sentences and comma splices. The next difference is errors on fragmented sentences in the form of missing verb and subject were only found on Writing 2C drafts while only those in the form of subordinating clauses were found in writing 4C.

Based on the findings, the writers concluded that the students' lack of ability in using conjunctions when formulating complex sentences might affect the high number of run-on sentences found in all the drafts. Clauses joined into a sentence were often connected only using commas when a conjunction or full stop (.) is supposed to be used. The fact that the content of the drafts were highly different could also affect the findings when comparing the two classes. Writing 2C drafts consisted of a paragraph that explained a topic while Writing 4C draft had to write about a topic as a full essay. This meant that there are a lot more ideas that need to be portrayed and connected in the Writing 4C drafts, resulting in the frequent use of subordinating conjunctions to make complex sentences. As a result, more errors regarding subordinating conjunctions, in the form of inappropriate use and fragmented sentences, were more prominent on writing 4C drafts.

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