

# Common Errors Found in the Use of Sentence Structure: A Case Study

Desy Chandra<sup>1</sup> and Henny Putri Saking Wijaya<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> English Department, Faculty of Letters, Petra Christian University, Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia  
Emails: Desy\_c94@yahoo.com, hennypsw@petra.ac.id

## ABSTRACT

This study is done to find out: (1) the common errors in the use of sentence structure and (2) the similarities and differences on the types of errors in the use of sentence structure between original draft in the first topic, second topic, and third topic of Written English 4B class English Department in Petra Christian University. The writer chooses the theory of common errors in the use of sentence structure as proposed by Ho (2005). The findings of this study show that there are seven (7) out of eight (8) types of errors that occur in the students' drafts. Fragmented Sentence is the most common error made by the students in their drafts. In addition, there were similarities and differences on the types of errors and the frequency of occurrences of errors among the students. In conclusion, most of the students have understood about the use of sentence structure.

**Keywords:** error, sentence, sentence structure.

Nowadays, English is one of the international languages. Many people choose and learn English as their second language. However, learning a second language is not as easy as learning first language or mother tongue. Every language has its own rules called grammar. The rules in first language might be different from the rules in second language. People need to put a lot of efforts in learning the grammar rules. Batsone (1995, p. 4) states "Grammar is an essential part of the use of language, both in spoken and written language." It is impossible to learn language effectively without knowing the grammar rules.

In acquiring second language, people need a lot of efforts and motivation in order to learn the grammar rules. Even though people work very hard in acquiring second language, sometimes they still make errors. "Errors reflect gaps in a learner's knowledge; they occur because the learner does not know what is correct" (Ellis, 1997, p. 17).

Littlewood (1984, p. 17) states "Errors play an important role in learning process. Errors show that the language learners are still building the new knowledge in order to be able to use the language." By making errors while acquiring second language, learners can build language learner abilities because they can learn something from errors.

This study wants to find out the common error in the use of sentence structure made by the students and whether there are any similarities or differences on the types of errors in the use of sentence structure between original draft in the first topic, second topic and third topic. Therefore, the research questions are provided: 1. What are the types of error in sentence structure made by the students in the original draft of the first topic, second topic and third topic? 2. Are there any similarities and differences on the types of errors in the use of sentence structure between original draft in the first topic, second topic and third topic?

By conducting this research, the writer wants to find out the common errors in the use of sentence structure made by students in the original draft of the first topic, second topic and third topic. In addition, the writer wants to find out the similarities and differences on the types of errors in the use of sentence structure between original draft in the first topic, second topic, and third topic. The writer wants to see the similarities and differences based on the percentage of errors that occurs.

The main theory for this study is Ho (2005) about Common Problem with the Sentence Construction or Structure which supported by Hogan (2012). Ho (2005) states there are eight (8) common errors in students' writing : Dangling Modifier, Squinting Modifier, Jumbled-up or Illogical Sentence, Incomplete or Fragmented Sentence, Run-on Sentence (Fused Sentence), Inappropriate Coordinating Conjunction, Inappropriate Subordinating Conjunction, and Misordering or Inversion of Subject-Verb. Each of them will be explained below.

First, Dangling Modifier occurs when the sentence is not clearly stated what is being modified. In other words, the subject or the doer in the sentences is omitted or the word does not appear in the sentence.

Second, Squinting modifier occurs when the phrase has been split up unnecessarily so it is not clear what words are being modified.

Third, Jumbled-up or Illogical Sentence is sentence that has illogical or jumbled-up ordering of clause. The clause is linked by coordinating conjunction with another clause. In order to make the sentence become logical or make sense, Ho (p.74) stated that the sentence which is linked by the coordinating conjunction needs to be re-ordered or re-arranged.

Fourth, Incomplete or Fragmented sentence is a subordinate clause that stands by its own. Remember, subordinate clause cannot stand by its own, subordinate clause considered as dependent clause. The subordinate clause should be linked to the main clause. According to Hogan (2012), a complete sentence must have subject and verb. Fragmented sentence is an incomplete sentence. It is not only a dependent clause which stands by its own, but it is also a sentence that does not have a subject, a verb, both subject and verb or a helping verb.

Run-on Sentence (Fused Sentence)

Fifth, Run-on Sentence or Fused Sentence is two independent clauses which are connected to each other but there is no connecting word or punctuation to separate the clause. So, in one sentences there are two independent clauses without connecting word or punctuation.

Inappropriate Coordinating Conjunction

Sixth, inappropriate coordinating conjunction is the word that used to link co-ordinate clause with main clause is not suitable or the choice of the coordinating conjunction is incorrect.

Seventh, Inappropriate Subordinating Conjunction is the word that used to link subordinate clause with main clause is not suitable or the choice of the coordinating conjunction is incorrect.

Eighth, Misordering or Inversion of Subject-Verb happens when the location of subject and verb is not suitable with the inversion in English. In English there are some formats for a sentence. For example, indirect question, direct question and etc. Misordering happens when the format incorrect or different from the format in English.

These theories will be used by the writer as guideline to analyze the common error in the use of sentence structure made by the students. Next, the writer is going to discuss how the writer collected and analyzed the data.

## **METHODS**

In this study, the writer will use qualitative approach. The key instrument of this study was the writer herself, who collected the data and analyzed the data. The focus of this study was common error in the use of sentence structure made by the students in their writing. The source of data of this study was all of the students' drafts collected by the writer. The data of this study were the sentences which contained errors in the use of sentence structure made by the students in their drafts.

The writer started to copy the students' draft of the three (3) topics. The students were required to write three (3) topics of essays in Writing English 4B class. First, they would write about cause-effect essay, second, they would write argumentative essay, and last, they would write problem-solving essay. After collecting all of the data, the writer read the drafts of the students. Then, the writer examined each sentence to identify the errors.

The writer used the different color underline to differentiate between one error and other. Then, the writer started to count the number of errors made by each of the students and put it on the table frequency of occurrences. After that, the writer came up with the result of the analysis and put it on Chapter 4 Findings and discussion.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Frequency of Occurrences of errors made by each student

No	Students	Frequency of occurrences in the 1 <sup>st</sup> Topic								Frequency of occurrences in the 2 <sup>nd</sup> Topic								Frequency of occurrences in the 3 <sup>rd</sup> Topic							
		DM	SM	IS	FS	RS	C	S	M	DM	SM	IS	FS	RS	C	S	M	DM	SM	IS	FS	RS	C	S	M
1	Student 1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2	Student 2	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3	Student 3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
4	Student 4	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	
5	Student 5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	
6	Student 6	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
7	Student 7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
8	Student 8	-	-	-	7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	1	-	1	-	1	-	7	3	-	-	1	
9	Student 9	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	
10	Student 10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	3	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
11	Student 11	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
12	Student 12	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	4	3	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	
13	Student 13	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	2	
14	Student 14	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	
15	Student 15	-	-	-	2	2	-	-	-	1	-	-	6	2	-	-	3	-	-	6	2	-	-	-	
16	Student 16	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	

Notes:

DM: Dangling Modifier  
IS: Illogical Sentence

RS: Run-on Sentence  
S: Subordinating Conjunction

SM: Squinting Modifier  
FS: Fragmented Sentence

C: Inappropriate Coordinating  
M: Misordering

## The Types of Errors Made by the Students

The types of errors which were made by students in the drafts of 1<sup>st</sup> topic, 2<sup>nd</sup> topic, and 3<sup>rd</sup> topic were presented in the following table. The table showed that from eight (8) types of errors which are proposed by Ho (2005), the students only made seven (7) types of errors on the use of sentence structure: Dangling Modifier, Squinting Modifier, Illogical Sentence, Fragmented Sentence, Run-On Sentence, Inappropriate Coordinating Conjunction, and Misordering or Inversion.

### **The types of errors occurred in the first draft of 1<sup>st</sup> topic.**

The types of errors that occurred in the first draft of 1<sup>st</sup> topic were Illogical Sentence, Fragmented Sentence and Run-on Sentence. Each of them is presented below.

#### **1. Illogical Sentence**

Jumbled-up or Illogical Sentence is sentence that has illogical or jumbled-up ordering of clause so that it makes the meaning of the sentence becomes weird. Student 13 was the only one student who made this error. The example is presented in the following:

1.13.1 *Tour and travel businesses that is the first effect will suffer lots of huge losses.*

#### **2. Fragmented Sentence**

Incomplete or Fragmented sentence is a subordinate clause that stands by its own.

Remember, subordinate clause cannot stand by its own, subordinate clause considered as dependent clause. The subordinate clause should be linked to the main clause. Fragmented are also the sentences which are missing subject, missing verb, missing both subject and verb and missing a helping verb. There were eight (8) students who made this error: student 2, 4, 6, 8, 11, 14, 15, and 16. The examples are presented in the following:

1.2.1 *So that it cannot adverse each other.*

1.6.1 *However, the public needs to know that instead of harming, Ahok's policy in intended for improving Jakarta current condition.*

#### **3. Run-On Sentence**

Run-on Sentence or Fused Sentence is two independent clauses which are connected to each other but there is no connecting word or punctuation to separate the clause. There were three (3) students who made this error: student 12, 14 and 15. The examples are presented in the following:

1.4.1 *Ms, Risma was also involved this activity, she gave 500 trees to be planted there (Kesra, 2012)*

1.14.1 *"Let's not forget that a few years ago when Indonesia was struck by the Indian Ocean tsunami Australian sent \$1 billion worth of assistance, we sent a contingent of our armed forces to help in Indonesia with humanitarian relief."*

### **The types of errors occurred in the first draft of 2<sup>nd</sup> topic.**

The types of errors that occurred in the first draft of 2<sup>nd</sup> topic were Dangling Modifier, Fragmented Sentence, Run-on Sentence, and Misordering/Inversion. Each of them was presented below.

#### **1. Dangling Modifier**

Dangling Modifier occurs when the sentence is not clearly stated what is being modified. In other word the subject or the doer in the sentences is omitted or the word does not appear in the sentence. There were five (6) students who made this error: student 1, 2, 5, 7, 11, and 15. The students made the same pattern of Dangling modifier. They changed the subject into 'it' so it was not clear what the word 'it' referred to. The examples are presented in the following:

2.2.1 *So, by closing those illegal minimarkets, it can help traditional markets to get their customer.*

2.7.1 *Second, by stopping ISL it will prevent Indonesian football from developing.*

## 2. Fragmented Sentence

Incomplete or Fragmented sentence is a subordinate clause that stands by its own. Remember, subordinate clause cannot stand by its own, subordinate clause considered as dependent clause. The subordinate clause should be linked to the main clause. Fragmented are also the sentences which are missing subject, missing verb, missing both subject and verb and missing a helping verb. There were six (6) students who made this error: student 1, 8, 12, 13, 14, and 15. The examples are presented in the following:

2.1.1 *Shinkansen is a high-speed train which originally operated in Japan.*

2.8.2 *Because I think it might not increasing the percentage of the drug users or distributors.*

## 3. Run-On Sentence

Run-on Sentence or Fused Sentence is two independent clauses which are connected to each other but there is no connecting word or punctuation to separate the clause. There were six (6) students who made this error: student 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, and 15. The examples are presented in the following:

2.6.1 *It does not have to be death penalty, Indonesian government can focus on how to shape teenagers' mindset about drugs consuming by giving seminars or campaigns.*

2.12.5 *He realized he will make a war with many corrupt people inside the government when he marked the budget proposal that he indicated as "Stealth Funds", He knows well how many people will fight against him, but for the truth he choose to stand in the truth side, not the safe side.*

## 4. Misordering/Inversion

Misordering or Inversion of Subject-Verb happens when the location of subject and verb is not suitable with the inversion in English. In English there are some formats for a sentence. For example, indirect question, direct question and etc. Misordering happens when the format incorrect or different from the format in English. There were two (2) students who made this error: student 8 and 10. The examples is presented below:

2.8.3 *Another reason why do I against the death penalty for the drug user or distributor is because it will create conflict with other countries.*

## The types of errors occurred in the first draft of 3<sup>rd</sup> topic.

The types of errors that occurred in the first draft of 3<sup>rd</sup> topic were Dangling Modifier, Squinting Modifier, Fragmented Sentence, Run-on Sentence, Inappropriate Coordinating Conjunction and Misordering/Inversion. Each of them was presented below:

### 1. Dangling Modifier

Dangling Modifier occurs when the sentence is not clearly stated what is being modified. In other word the subject or the doer in the sentences is omitted or the word does not appear in the sentence. There were six (6) students who made this error: student 2, 3, 7, 10, 11, and 15. The students made the same pattern of Dangling modifier. They changed the subject into 'it' so it was not clear what the word 'it' referred to. The examples are presented in the following:

3.2.1 *It is because by implementing this regulation, it can decrease the number of illegal minimarkets in Surabaya.*

### 2. Squinting Modifier

Squinting modifier occurs when the phrase has been split up unnecessarily so it is not clear what words are being modified. Student 8 was the only one who made this error. The example is presented in the following:

3.8.1 *A lot of people still cannot read in Indonesia especially for adult*

### 3. Fragmented Sentence

Incomplete or Fragmented sentence is a subordinate clause that stands by its own. Remember, subordinate clause cannot stand by its own, subordinate clause considered as

dependent clause. The subordinate clause should be linked to the main clause. Fragmented are also the sentences which are missing subject, missing verb, missing both subject and verb and missing a helping verb. There were seven (7) students who made this error: 5, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, and 15. The examples are presented in the following:

3.4.1 *Since then education became the first priority for many people.*

3.5.2 *Build direct communication between the parents and children.*

#### **4. Run-on Sentence**

Run-on Sentence or Fused Sentence is two independent clauses which are connected to each other but there is no connecting word or punctuation to separate the clause. There were two (2) students who made this error: student 8 and 15. The example is presented in the following:

3.15.2 *There are also some organizations which concern about bullying cases, they offer some anti bullying programs, prevention bullying programs, or even a program to help the bullying victims.*

#### **5. Inappropriate Coordinating Conjunction**

Inappropriate coordinating conjunction is the word that used to link co-ordinate clause with main clause is not suitable or the choice of the coordinating conjunction is incorrect. Student 16 was the only one who made this error. The example is presented in the following:

3.16.1 *In society, teenagers or young adult are the ones who have a tendency to do self-harm the most because they still have an unstable mental state.*

#### **6. Misordering/Inversion**

Misordering or Inversion of Subject-Verb happens when the location of subject and verb is not suitable with the inversion in English. In English there are some formats for a sentence. For example, indirect question, direct question and etc. Misordering happens when the format incorrect or different from the format in English. There were four (4) students who made this error: student 1, 4, 8, and 13. The examples are presented below:

3.1.1 *Why the government do not try to allocate the money for subsidizing the fresh food price?*

### **The similarities on the types of errors in the use of sentence structure between original draft in the first topic, second topic and third topic**

There were three similarities in the students' drafts. The first was on the types of errors. All of the students did not have any error in Inappropriate Subordinating Conjunction. Moreover, Fragmented Sentence and Run-On Sentence were the types of errors that always occurred in the three topics. Second was on the pattern of errors. The pattern of Dangling Modifier made by the students was similar. The students changed the doer/ the actual subject into 'it'. Thus, it was not clear what the word 'it' referred to. The third was on the frequency of errors. Fragmented Sentence was the most frequent error that occurred in the three topics. Fragmented Sentence was the error that had the biggest number in every topic.

### **The differences on the types of errors in the use of sentence structure between original draft in the first topic, second topic and third topic**

In the types of errors, the students had four differences. The first difference was on the types of errors which were Dangling Modifier and Misordering or Inversion. Dangling Modifier and Misordering/Inversion did not occur in the original draft of first topic. On the other hand, those errors occurred in the original draft of second and third topic. The second difference was on the students who did not make any error in the original draft of first, second and third topic. There were seven (7) students who did not make any error in the original draft of first topic. There were two (2) students who did not make any error in the original draft of second topic. There was one (1) student who did not make any error in the original draft of third topic. The third difference was that there

were thirteen (13) students (student 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16) who had more than one type of errors in their drafts. There was one student (student 8) who had the most variation of errors (4 types of errors).

The fourth difference was the student 8 and 15 had the most frequency and variation of errors. The students kept repeating the same mistake (Fragmented Sentence) in the original draft of first topic, second topic, and third topic. Both of the students also had more variation of errors in the second and third topic.

In the pattern of errors, the students had only one difference. The difference was all of the students had the different pattern of Fragmented Sentence. There were four (4) students who had more than one patterns. Student 8 had the most patterns of Fragmented Sentence (5 patterns).

In summary, there were seven (7) out of eight (8) errors that occurred in the students' drafts: Dangling Modifier, Squinting Modifier, Illogical Sentence, Fragmented Sentence, Run-On Sentence, Inappropriate Coordinating Conjunction and Misordering or Inversion. The most frequent errors that made by students was Fragmented Sentence because it had the highest number in the three topics. In addition, there were similarities and differences on the occurrence of errors and the patterns of errors among the students. The similarity was all of the students did not have errors in Inappropriate Subordinating Conjunction. The students also have differences on the pattern of Fragmented Sentence. There were four (4) students who had more than one patterns. Student 8 had the most patterns of Fragmented Sentence (5 patterns).

## CONCLUSION

The findings revealed that there were seven (7) out of eight (8) types of errors on the use of sentence structure made in the students' writing drafts. There were errors in Dangling Modifier, Squinting Modifier, Illogical Sentence, Fragmented Sentence, Run-On Sentence, Inappropriate Coordinating Conjunction, and Misordering or Inversion. The most common error made by the students was Fragmented Sentence because it had the highest numbers which were 55 Fragmented Sentences.

In addition, there were similarities and differences on the types of error, percentage of errors and the patterns of errors among the students. All of the students did not have any error in Subordinating Conjunction. Also, the students had different pattern in terms of Fragmented Sentence. There were four (4) students who had more than one patterns. Student 8 had the most patterns of Fragmented Sentence (5 patterns).

Most of the students have understood about the use of sentence structure. It can be seen from the frequency of occurrences of errors made by each student. Mostly the students made few mistakes related to the use of sentence structure. There were only two students (student 8 and 15) who still had difficulty related to the use of sentence structure so that the errors kept increasing in the second topic and third topic.

## REFERENCES

- Batsone, R. (1995). *Grammar*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodologies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (1997). *Second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ho, C. M. L. (2005). Sentence structure. In *Exploring errors in grammar* (Second ed.). Singapore: Pearson Education South Asia Pte..
- Hogan, G. (2012). Writing an essay. In *Building Better Paragraphs* (1st ed., pp. 201-202). Cengage Learning.
- Littlewood, W. (1984). *Foreign and second language learning: language acquisition research and its implications for the classroom*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Richards, J., Platt, J., & Weber, H. (1985). *Longman dictionary of applied linguistics* (p. 95, p. 284). Burnt Mill: Longman.
- Richards, J., & Schmidt, R. (2010). *Longman dictionary of applied linguistics* (4th ed., pp. 522-523). Longman: Pearson education limited.