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Errors in Final Report Abstracts: A Case in English Report Writing Course at a Secretarial Academy

Error dalam Abstrak Laporan Akhir: Satu Kasus dalam Mata Kuliah Menulis Laporan Akhir di Salah Satu Akademi Sekretari

Wawan Hendrawan
Akademi Sekretari Manajemen Taruna Bakti
wawan.hendrawan@asmtb.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the common errors exist in the English report abstracts authored by the fourth semester students learning at a secretarial academy. The purpose of the study is to improve the outcomes of the abstracts written resides in an English report writing course. 95 abstract documents are categorized and analyzed using the frameworks from James (1998) and Richards (1974), then, interpreted descriptively using descriptive statistics. This is conducted under the umbrella of qualitative research method particularly a case study. The results demonstrate that, first, there are found several types of errors such as tense, missing word, passive and active voices, subject and verb agreement, misspelling, runs on sentence, capital letter, unnecessary word, punctuation, and incorrect use of word. Second, errors classified as grammatical categories are dominating the errors occurrences. Third, errors considered as lexical taxonomies become the least errors to happen. Fourth, the causes of errors identified are interlanguage, intralanguage, and negligence of the students when writing an English abstract. Implication for the development of abstract writing in an English report writing course is the discovered errors in the present study should be the main concern to be improved by the student writers.

Kata Kunci:

Errors,
Abstrak,
Menulis Laporan,
Mata Kuliah Menulis Laporan Berbahasa
Inggris

Riset ini menelaah tentang errors yang ada dalam abstrak laporan berbahasa Inggris yang ditulis oleh mahasiswi semester empat yang belajar di sebuah akademi sekretaris. Riset ini dilaksanakan dengan tujuan untuk meningkatkan hasil akhir dari abstrak yang ditulis dalam mata kuliah menulis laporan berbahasa Inggris. 95 dokumen abstrak diklasifikasikan dan dianalisis menggunakan teori dari James (1998) dan Richards (1974), kemudian data-data tersebut diinterpretasi secara deskriptif dengan menggunakan statistik deskriptif. Analisis dan interpretasi yang dilakukan termasuk ke dalam metode riset kualitatif, khususnya studi kasus. Hasil penelitian memperlihatkan bahwa pertama ditemukan beberapa errors seperti kala, penghilangan kata, konstruksi kalimat aktif dan pasif, persesuaian antara subjek dan verba, ejaan, pembentukan kalimat, hurup besar, kata yang tidak perlu, tanda baca, dan penggunaan kata yang salah. Kedua, errors yang dikategorikan ke dalam tata bahasa sangat mendominasi errors yang terjadi. Ketiga, errors yang termasuk ke dalam kelas leksikal menjadi errors yang paling sedikit terjadi. Hasil akhir mendemonstrasikan bahwa penyebab errors yang teridentifikasi dalam riset ini adalah pengaruh antarbahasa (interlanguage), ketidaktuntasan dalam belajar (intralanguage), dan kecerobohan para mahasiswi ketika menulis

abstrak berbahasa Inggris. Implikasi penelitian ini terhadap peningkatan penulisan abstrak dalam mata kuliah menulis laporan berbahasa Inggris adalah errors yang ditemukan dalam riset ini harus menjadi fokus utama untuk diperbaiki oleh para mahasiswi sebagai penulisnya.

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Introduction

The ability of making an English report abstract is one of the skills that must be mastered by the students of a secretarial academy. Without this skill, they will not, to some extent, be categorized as a capable graduate in the field of secretary. To realize it, they must learn and understand all of the aspects corresponding to the making of a good English report abstract. By doing so, eventually, they are expected to compose it well.

In actuality, however, writing an English report abstract for the students of a secretarial academy is a challenging task. It happens because a good English report abstract has its own characteristics like lexicon, grammar, and target audience (Hyland, 2003) just to mention few. For the students of a secretarial academy, to certain degree, these aspects are difficult to adept. It is due to their basic learning program which is not English. Even for the students whose major is English (Sermsook, Liamnimitr, and Pochakorn: 2017), they are still struggling in composing an English essay, let alone those who do not learn English as their main subject.

Many problems are faced by university students, in general, when composing an English report article or essay. It has been reported (Chan, 2004; Chiang, 1993; Huang, 2001; Jung, 2013; Sermsook, Liamnimitr, and Pochakorn, 2017; Singh, *et.al.*, 2017) that the students often made errors considered as grammatical errors, substance errors, lexical errors, and syntactic errors. More specifically, the errors commonly encountered were the use of word categories, capitalization, punctuation, spelling, word selection, and sentence structures. Similar to the obstacles aforementioned, the students in a secretarial academy faced the same dilemma. Based on the report of the previous study (Pramadya, 2018), the difficulties frequently appeared when the students uttering English sentences in a course of business presentation were tenses, passive sentence, subject-verb agreement, double marking verb, and preposition (*ibid*). These errors, to some degree, mirror the typical hindrances endured by the students of a secretarial academy and in turn will affect the results of their English learning.

In responding to the above problems, the proposed study investigates the errors typically taken place in students' English report articles. It concentrates more specifically to one part of the report that is its abstract. Therefore, it is different with the study done by Pramadya (2018) that focuses on the grammatical errors existed in students' oral presentations at a course of business presentation. Besides examining the errors occurred, this study also explores the causes of errors and their indications.

To classify the errors performed, the framework related to the categories of errors written by James (1998) is used. Whereas, for the explanation of the causes of errors, the framework taken from Richards (1974) is applied. Both of the frameworks (James, 1998; Richards, 1974) are supported by other interconnecting sources relevant to the issue being investigated.

The present study is very significant to the development and improvement of the English report writing course resides in a secretarial academy, since it will describe the most encountered topics hindering the students when learning to write an English report notably its abstract. By knowing the most troublesome matters, it can be taken some precautions or ways to solve them (Dulay, Burt and Krashen as cited in Sermsook, Liamnimitr, and Pochakorn: 2017). Thus, the learning will be progressing as expected.

Besides that, as far as my knowledge, the study of analyzing errors in a report abstract existing in an English report writing course is very scarce. Because of this, the literature related to it is not much. As the consequence, the reference does not provide sufficient evidences to deter or even remedy the prevailing problems as experienced by the students in a secretarial academy (see Pramadya, 2018). This situation creates a recurring pattern of errors in the making of a report abstract carried out by the

students of a secretarial academy. Consequently, the outcome of the report abstracts written will not be exceptional.

To concentrate the inquiry, two research questions are applied. The first research question asks about the types of errors made by the students in their report abstracts and what are significances brought by these. The second question probes the causes of errors and their indications.

Literature Review

In the context of language research and language teaching research, an error has been defined differently from a mistake (Brown, 1994; Corder, 1967; Ellis, 2012). Error can be defined as a faulty of performing the language where the doer does not realize that he/ she makes a failure (Ellis, 2012). Mistake, conversely, is an inaccuracy of performing a language because of spontaneous act or slip (Brown, 1994; Ellis, 2012).

To recognize the errors done in a language learning manuscript, a technique of investigation should be made. This is known as error analysis (henceforth EA). EA focuses its analysis to the end results (Singh, *et.al.*, 2017). It means that the final outcome performed will be analyzed based on the best practices prevail in the language learned. Therefore, it will be identified what is lack and what needs to be improved from the learners' learning a language (James via Sermsook, Liamnimitr, and Pochakorn: 2017).

The sources of errors can be categorized into five aspects such as grammatical errors, substance errors, lexical errors, syntactic errors, and semantic errors (James, 1998). Contrary to James (1998), Richards (1974) asserts that errors can be originated from two aspects that is interlingual and intralingual errors. Interlingual errors manifested when learners used the rules of their mother tongue to the learned language. Whereas, the intralingual errors are the errors caused by unfinished learning (Kaweera, 2013; Richards, 1974).

In the similar fashion, Hinnon (as cited in Sermsook, Liamnimitr, and Pochakorn: 2017) concludes that there are three different sources of errors. The first is the errors caused by the distinctions between words and sentence structures of the source language and the target language. The second is the errors triggered by the lack of knowledge of the learners towards the target language. The last is the errors originated from the interference of mother tongue to the learned language.

There are significances of knowing errors for practical purposes like teaching and researching language. Error analysis is one of the ways to help educators in the process of language teaching by departing from the errors made by learners (Singh, *et.al.*, 2017). In the area of language learning the approach of error analysis has proven to be contributing in improving the learners' skill for instance in writing ability (Sermsook, Liamnimitr, and Pochakorn, 2017). In addition, error analysis has been regarded as the assets, in term of information, to refurbish the production of the target language (Pastor and Mestre, 2014) by comparing the target language forms with the source language (Crystal, 1999). Finally, errors done by learners are not "pathologies to be eradicated or diseases to be healed;" instead, they should be seen as "necessary stages in all language-learning, as the product of intelligent cognitive strategies and therefore as potentially useful indicators of what processes the student is using" (Kroll & Schafer as cited in Tseng, 2016).

Previous Study

Many studies related to error analyses have been reported (Chan, 2004; Chiang, 1993; Huang, 2001; Jung, 2013; Sermsook, Liamnimitr, and Pochakorn, 2017; Singh, *et.al.*, 2017). The studies tried to scrutinize the errors prevailed in the manuscripts written by learners. Chan's investigation (2004) focused on five errors types such as copula, adverb, there structure, relative clause, and verb transitivity. The data taken from the work of 710 Hong Kong Chinese ESL learners who had various proficiency levels. The study indicated that there was syntactic transfer found from Chinese to English in the five areas investigated.

Chiang (1993) scrutinized 160 compositions produced by Taiwan senior high school. It was found that the most identified errors were the construction of subject, object, and complement, run-on sentences, and conjunctions. In addition, the errors related to interlanguage was numbered as 70.58% of overall errors related to learning strategies. Along the similar lines, Huang (2001) did a study to 46 Taiwanese students majoring in English. The results demonstrated that there were six major errors found. These were word choice, preposition, article, noun, verb, and spelling. They were taken place due to interlanguage and intralanguage causes.

Jung (2013) figured out the errors found in 264 essays made by Korean university students. The most errors performed were article and grammar. The study suggested that peer review and teacher feedbacks were the components helping the learners improving their writing. On the same vein, Rattanadilok Na Phuket and Othman (as cited in Sermsook, Liamnimitr, and Pochakorn, 2017) did a study in the area of narrative essays written by Thai undergraduate students. From the investigation it was revealed that there were many errors discovered related to tenses, prepositions, word choice, and comma. They concluded that the main cause of the errors was the influence of source language to the target language.

Sermsook, Liamnimitr, and Pochakorn (2017) investigated writing errors made by second year English major students learning in a Thai University. The writing errors were taken from 104 manuscripts produced by 26 students who followed the course of Writing II. The results described that the most errors happened were punctuation, articles, subject-verb agreement, spelling, capitalization, and fragment, consecutively. These errors were resulted from several causes like students' carelessness while doing the writing, limited knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary, intralingual interference, and interlingual interference. They advised that vocabulary and English grammar be taught to the students.

Singh, *et.al.* (2017) examined one hundred and forty-four written essays produced by diploma students who sat for a university entrance exam in Malaysia. The results illustrated that subject-verb agreement and tenses were the most common types of errors. Another common error found was in the students' construction of complex sentence. From these findings, it was recommended that suitable instruction of grammar and comprehending learning obstacles of the student were crucial factors for the success of teaching in the field of English as a second language.

Methodology

This study was conducted in English report writing course taught at an academy of secretary located in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia. It was a course that intended to make the fourth-semester students able to write an excellent English report. It was a two-credit course meaning that it was presented in 100 minutes. In it, there were fourteen sessions delivered with the addition of two exams (middle and final exams). The first phase, seven sessions before middle exam, was filled by the theories related to the definitions, kinds, and examples of the reports as well as their abstract components. Whereas the second phase, seven sessions after middle exam, was used to perform the writing practices in relation to the materials given previously.

There were 95 abstract documents analyzed in this study. These were authored by 95 female students. Prior to the making of abstract they had been exposed to the characteristics of an abstract writing and had done an exercise. Two weeks after that, they were requested to make an abstract. They were given around 80 minutes to compose it. The content of the abstract told about an apprentice who followed the job practice in a university career center. This should be composed not exceeding than 9 sentences or around 170 words.

The data taken from the abstracts were analyzed descriptively with the addition of simple calculation. This was conducted under the umbrella of qualitative research method particularly a case study (Hancock and Algozzine, 2006). To analyze the data, again, the frameworks from James (1998) and Richards (1974) were used along with the other interconnecting theories and research results.

The analyses of data were performed in several steps (Creswell, 2003). First, the data were analyzed according to their categories (James, 1998). Second, the data were reduced. It meant that the irrelevant data were discarded. Third, the data were calculated using simple addition. Lastly, the data were displayed and interpreted (Richards, 1974).

Result and Discussion

Result

After analyzing 95 abstracts used as the data in this study, it was discovered several types of errors such as tense, missing word, passive and active voices, subject and verb agreement, misspelling, runs on sentence, capital letter, unnecessary word, punctuation, and incorrect use of word. The number of error occurrences was varied. It meant that each sum of data category was different to each other as portrayed by the table 1 below:

Table 1
Types of errors and their occurrences

No.	Types of errors	Specific parts	Total occurrences
1	Tense	Present= 202 is= 116, are= 31, do= 26, demonstrates= 15, demonstrate= 5, go= 3, entitle= 2, choose= 1, has= 1, have= 1, goes= 1 Past= 5 was= 2, communicated= 1, was demonstrated= 1, were= 1	207
2	Missing words	Verb: is= 4, was= 23, were= 3, did= 3, taken= 2, show= 1, demonstrated= 20, acquired= 2, know= 1 Relative pronouns: that= 46 Adjective: how= 22 Preposition: to= 4, for= 3, of= 3, from=2, at= 1, between= 1 Adverb: there= 13, when= 1 Noun: report= 1, communication= 1, title= 3 Article: the= 5 Subject pronoun: she= 1, he= 1, it= 1	168
3	Passive and active voices	Passive: 95 acquiring= 50, entitle= 23, choose= 14, title= 7, has done= 1 Active= 10 were demonstrated= 5, was demonstrated= 4, chosen=1	105
4	Subject and verb agreement	were= 41, was= 29, is= 18, are= 9, demonstrates= 5, do= 2	104
5	Misspelling	Partical= 8, choosed= 3, achive= 2, choosen= 2, roll= 2, bot= 1, focusus= 1, entiled= 1, hourse= 1, wit= 1, equired= 1, carrer= 1, assosia= 1, effectif= 1, isntalment= 1, manajemen= 1, thelated= 1, arsip= 1, direc= 1, demonsttran= 1, evective=	41

		1, govenence= 1, carer= 1, dos= 1, partice= 1, direc= 1, primaty= 1, auther= 1, acquaried= 1	
6	Runs on sentence		37
7	Capital letter		31
8	Unnecessary words	The= 7, of= 4, is= 2, 's= 2, and= 2, how= 1, communication= 1, for= 1, secretary= 1, suitability= 1, staff= 1, '= 1, was= 1, to= 1, length= 1, governance= 1, types= 1, which= 1	30
9	Punctuation		21
10	Incorrect use of word	Noun to verb: discussed to discussion= 4, communicate to communication= 1 Preposition: to= 1, at= 1 Adjective to noun: suitability to suitable= 1 Verb to noun: choice to chosen= 1 Verb to verb: done to chosen= 1, took to done= 1	11

Discussion

Types of Errors and Their Significances

As seen from the above results, there are nine types of errors made by the students in their report abstracts. These are tense, missing word, passive and active voices, subject and verb agreement, misspelling, runs on sentence, capital letter, unnecessary word, punctuation, and incorrect use of word, ordered from the highest to the lowest. The most error occurred is tense with 207 appearances, meanwhile the fewest error happened is incorrect use of word with 11 incidences.

Tense considered as the first position of errors done by the students in their abstract manuscripts. From the table 1 above, it can be seen that there are two different tenses identified, present and past. The errors related to present tense numbered 202 times. In contrast, errors using past tense found only 5 happenings. 'Is' is the word mostly misused in the case of present tense. While, 'was' is the utmost error done when applying the past.

Most of the students wrongly applied the present tense when they tried to reveal the information regarded as a past-time activity. This misuse of tense is often manifested in information which describes the jobs done while acting as an apprentice. Most of them, reveal it using present tense. The same goes with the past. When the information is needed to be exposed in present, the students used past. From this analysis, it can be concluded that the misuse of present tense and past tense in the abstracts written is related to the point of view presented by the students as the writers.

The second result of most errors performed is related to the missing words. In this case, it is found 168 cases. These involved several categories of words embracing verb, relative pronoun, adjective, preposition, adverb, noun, article, and subject pronoun. 'Verb' has the most numbers of occurrences, around 59 times. On the reverse, subject pronoun is the fewest incident happened, about 3 times. The case involving missing words to some degree will make the sentences produced incomplete. Therefore, it will lead to the reduction of the messages delivered.

The third position of error taken place is the cases of passive and active voices. These are found 105 times. The misuse of passive sentences dominates the errors in this regard. The students are wrongly

applying the passive sentences in their abstracts, this situation recurs 95 times. While for the active construction, it is only 10 occurrences.

In the error related to passive voice, the word ‘acquiring’ is the most word causing the error. In this context, this word should be written as ‘acquired’. The use of the word ‘acquired’ is in conjunction with how ‘the data are acquired or taken’. The same goes with the error of active sentence. The students wrongly apply the phrasal verbs ‘were demonstrated’. In this situation, it is needed active construction not passive construction. Therefore, they should use passive voice because this construction related to how the results demonstrate something. By their use of active voice, they make the sentence illogical. The errors related to passive and active constructions occurred because the students cannot differentiate between the ‘doer’ and ‘result’ taken place.

The fourth position of most error occurred is subject and verb agreement. In this area, the students often make errors regarding to the logical relationship between subject and its verb. The errors found in this context are ‘were, was, is, are, demonstrates, and do’. The most occurrence takes place is the word ‘were’ that happened 41 times. Whereas, the fewest word identified is the word ‘do’. The subject and verb agreement take place because the students fail to recognize the relationships between the numbers of the subject, whether it is singular or plural, and their corresponding verbs. The recognition of this aspect is very crucial in forming logical relationship between them. Failure to identify them will cause the illogicality of the message conveyed.

The fifth area of errors is misspelling with 41 occurrences. The most word mistakenly spelled, in this case, is the word ‘partical’. In this context, this word should be written as ‘practical’. In fact, the existence of this word is combined with other words such as ‘... practical report’. The failure in spelling the correct words will cause misunderstanding to the readers because their forms are not identified or included into English language vocabulary.

The sixth position of error is runs on sentence. This happened around 37 times. This case prevails because the students do not write the sentences correctly. It means that the sentences written do not follow the correct pattern like subject-verb-object or subject-verb-complement. The misplace of sentence parts (e.g. subject-verb-object or subject-verb-complement) will create confusion since those parts bring their own significances to the message delivered.

The seventh position of error is capital letter. This case’ occurrences take place 31 times. In this state, the students forget to install the capital letters at the beginning of words in some sentences when they write the abstracts. Therefore, the first words of the sentences are not written by capital letters. Instead, they use small letter as the commencement of the sentences. This error will lead to the shrinking of numbers of sentences in the abstract written.

The eighth position of error is unnecessary word. The error in this part acted 30 incidences. These include the words ‘the, of, is, ‘s, and, how, communication, for, secretary, suitability, staff, ‘, was, to, length, governance, types, and which’. The word ‘the’ is considered the most occurred word in this context. Whereas, the word ‘which’ is the fewest word happened. This case will lead to redundancy. It means that the sentences written will be bulkier and thus leading to imprecision.

The ninth position of error is punctuation. The cases of error in punctuation happened around 21 times. The cases triggered by lack of comma or punctuation marks like full stop, question mark, or exclamation mark. Errors in this area existed because the students do not accurately end the sentences either by comma or punctuation marks. Lack of coma or full stop will make a sentence considered unfinished.

The tenth position of error is incorrect use of word. This case happens around 11 times. The cases prevailed because the words are misused. It means that one category of word is replaced by another category of word. If this replacement does not fit, it will cause error. The misused categories discovered are ‘noun to verb, preposition to preposition, adjective to noun, verb to noun, and verb to verb’. The most case prevailed is the incorrect use of ‘noun’ that replaced by ‘verb’, e.g. ‘discussed

to discussion'. On the opposite, the fewest incident is the replacement of 'verb by verb'. If done continuously, it will lead to the misunderstanding of the message given. This happened since every category of word brings their own meanings.

To sum up, if we refer to the framework proposed by James (1998), we will know that the grammatical error is the most errors occurred. This is proven by the errors related to tense. As for the least error takes place is lexical error. These high and low frequencies of errors signal that the students have lack understanding about the grammar and knowledge about vocabularies. Therefore, they should learn grammar and vocabularies simultaneously in order to improve their writing.

The Causes of Errors and Their Indications

After analyzing the data, one of the causes of errors to happen is the influence of mother tongue, bahasa Indonesia. In word formation, bahasa Indonesia is almost similar with English. This can be proven from the misspelling occurred in the results presented in table 1 above, take for example the word 'manajemen'. If we analyze it carefully, this word clearly pictures the influence of the mother tongue. In the correct English spelling, this word should be written as 'management'. This type of error can be included into interlanguage error (Richards, 1974).

By the same token, the errors identified as intralanguage can be exemplified from the misuse of the word 'discussed' to 'discussion'. This misapplied rule of using the verb to noun is the mark that the students do not know the rules of using certain words in a sentence. This intralanguage is the sign of student unfinished learning (Kaweera, 2013; Richards, 1974). Moreover, another case vividly depicting it is the finding of the errors in connection with subject-verb agreement. In this context, the students fail to recognize that there are certain rules governing the relationships of subject and its verb in forming of English sentence. Take for example, singular subject must have singular verb, in present tense it is signified by the present of suffix '-s' at the end of a verb.

Eventually, the other trigger is the negligence of the students when writing an English abstract. This materializes in the findings of errors with respect to the cases of using capital letters that written at the beginning of sentences and to the application of punctuation marks at the end of the sentences. In the context of applying capital letters, some students do not write the initial words of the sentences using capital letters. In the same manner, in the punctuation situation, they do not put any endings like full stop, exclamation, or question marks signaling the end of a sentence. These two occurrences are considered as negligence of attitude while writing the abstract. Why is it considered as negligence? It is because that the knowledge of applying capital letters and punctuations are the general knowledge. It means that both are learned as a general knowledge in the source language and target language, Indonesian and English. Therefore, the errors in connection with them to some degree cannot be included into interlanguage and intralanguage, again, because there is no interference occurred in both languages.

Conclusion

Having discussed the results of data analyses, the researcher comes to some concluding remarks. First, some errors found in this study are tense, missing words, passive and active voices, subject and verb agreement, misspelling, runs on sentence, capital letter, unnecessary words, punctuation, and incorrect use of word consecutively. These errors are to same extent confirm the findings of previous studies performed by Chan (2004), Chiang (1993), Huang (2001), Jung (2013), Sermsook, Liamnimitr, and Pochakorn (2017), and Singh, *et.al.* (2017). Second, errors classified as grammatical categories are dominating the errors occurrences existing in abstract writing of academy secretary students. Third, errors considered as lexical taxonomies become the least errors to happen. Fourth, the causes of errors in this study are interlanguage, intralanguage (Richards, 1974; Kaweera, 2013), and negligence of the students when writing an English abstract (Hinnon as cited in Sermsook, Liamnimitr, and Pochakorn: 2017).

Implication

There are some implications emerging from the present study. First, for the sake of the development of abstract writing in an English report writing course, the discovered errors should be the main concern to be improved by the student writers. It means that they need to revisit these topics. Second, other lecturers teaching in secretarial academies may use the findings of this study as the baseline to determine the learning materials and how to teach them in an English report writing course. Finally, the lecturers tutoring English report writing course ideally must know the issues related to the causes of errors and how to remedy them.

Future Research Direction

Following this study, a similar study is needed to be conducted. The study can embrace more data collections from several secretarial academies and in-depth analyses towards the specific parts of errors as can be seen from the table 1 alluded. By this, it is hoped that the future study will bring much light to the enrichment of error analysis existing in academies of secretary which at the end will contribute to it as a discipline in applied linguistics.

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