INFLECTIONAL ERRORS FOUND IN THE DESCRIPTIVE TEXTS WRITTEN BY NINTH-YEAR STUDENTS OF SMPN 14 MALANG

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ABSTRACT: This descriptive qualitative study investigated inflectional errors found in the descriptive texts written by ninth-year students of SMPN 14 Malang. The data sources of this study were students’ writing of class 9-6, the best class among the other 5 parallel classes. This study analyzed the errors based on the surface strategy taxonomy (Dulay, et al, 1982:163). The errors found were omissions, additions and misformations. Besides the types of errors, the causes of the errors were also discussed.

Keywords: inflectional, omission, addition, misformation.

Errors are defined as any deviation from a selected norm of language performance, no matter what the characteristic or causes of the deviation might be. They are those parts of conversation or composition that deviate from some selected norm of mature language performance (Dulay, et al, 1982:138-139). Sometimes errors are the deviation between the right system and the competence of learners. Errors could not be stated as physical failures but the sign of imperfect knowledge of the learners. Errors are systematic and provide the researcher insight into the learner process.

Errors are different from mistakes. Errors are systematic while mistakes are accidental. Mistakes could be caused by several things such as a slip as the result of a brief moment's inattention, tiredness or stress, and is a mistake that the learner could correct if it were indicated that one had occurred. Sometimes we can also easily find errors or mistakes in structures that the learner has met but not yet mastered. The learner might, but not necessarily, be able to correct the errors by themselves later when they have understood about them. Errors might also arise from the learners who are trying to express an idea for which he or she has not yet met the necessary language.

Errors might happen in the smallest part of the sentences’ grammatical structure called morphemes. Morphemes themselves might be either free or bound morphemes. Free morphemes can stand by themselves, while bound morphemes
never occur in isolation. Free morphemes are usually bases, whereas bound morphemes are usually affixes which comprise derivational and inflectional affixes. Derivational affixes are morphemes which change the words’ meaning or part of speech while inflectional affixes are morphemes which give some additional grammatical meaning of the base with information of the word in a particular sentence and do not change both the meaning and the part of speech of the word.

Inflectional morphemes are attached to three parts of speech or the classification according to their functions in their classes. Those three parts of speech are identified as noun, verb and adjective.

The study was done by observing the students descriptive texts. They understood the parts of a descriptive paragraph and were able to generate a descriptive paragraph. Students identified a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a closing sentence in a paragraph. They also wrote these types of sentences in paragraph form and used sensory descriptions to add details to sentences in simple present tense. Inflectional morphemes could be easily found in descriptive texts such as –s verb inflection for third person singular subject, -s noun inflection to pluralize countable noun, -er and –est adjective inflection in comparisons. Then, the errors found in the inflectional morphemes were classified by surface strategy taxonomy which consists of omission, addition, and misformation.

**METHOD**

The design of the study was descriptive qualitative design, the population of which not only can be studied holistically but also be observed with close scrutiny. Besides, what is being observed can be carefully recorded. It evolves over time and whenever the data are gathered, the researcher looks for data patterns. It is called qualitative research because the data are in the forms of words in written language rather than numbers, and are taken in natural setting without any attempts to manipulate the situation under study. This study is called descriptive research, because the data of this study are explained descriptively.

The researcher’s existence in class did not change or disturb any situations inside the class because the researcher was the teacher himself. The
researcher’s role during the process of data collecting was as an English teacher who explained a descriptive text. The researcher had already prepared a lesson plan about descriptive texts and he tried his best to deliver the material and gave some understandable examples to the class through multimedia. Then, after the class could clearly understand this material, the researcher asked them to write any descriptive text on a given blank paper. Finally, when they finished, the researcher collected the paper so it seemed as if it had been a regular assignment to be checked by their teacher.

To analyze the data, the researcher applied Dulay, et al’s (1982) surface strategy taxonomy. Other instruments which were used in this research were Powerpoint presentation and a simple handout to help students understand the material easily, field notes about students’ difficulties in understanding the material, written documents which had been submitted by the students, students’ attendance list and an interview list. All of those instruments were aimed at identifying and classifying the inflectional appropriateness classification in the descriptive texts of ninth year students of SMPN 14 Malang in 2012.

The other instruments used in this research were a test to the learners and an interview with them after the researcher analyzed their errors. The test was in the form of a writing test. After the researcher was sure that the students were able to understand the generic structure, the structure of present tense and the communicative function of a descriptive text about daily life, the students were supposed to write correctly a description. The researcher also gave an example of a descriptive text beforehand so that they could understand it clearly.

The other instrument used in this study was an interview done randomly to the student in a meeting after they submitted their writing test. After the researcher had corrected and highlighted the students’ writing, he interviewed the students. In order that the interview was not realized as an interrogation, the researcher did it at ease. Researcher questioned some simple questions such as, ‘What part of the test that you think is the most difficult?’, ‘Do you have any problems in describing things?’, ‘Why did you omit this morpheme?’, ‘Why do you generalize this term for another term?’, ‘Why do you add this unnecessary item?’, ‘Why do you substitute this into that?’, etc.
The data source of this study were students’ writing of class 9-6, the best class in that school, which all the other parallel classes were supposed to keep up with. To know whether or not the students of that class still had difficulties on morphological processes, especially on inflections, the writing test was implemented.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Omission errors were found in a greater spread and across a greater variety of morphemes in the students’ writing. In some cases they omitted inflectional morphemes much more often than the content of words. Most of the omission errors were misperception of using the verbs according to the right subject. The –s inflection for the third person singular subject was a potential candidate for omission and it was omitted much more than other inflection. They also seemed confused in using the appropriate noun form which contains plural noun form and possessive noun form.

Addition errors were also found in some sentences that did not need an inflection. Most students added several unnecessary inflections as in generating plural noun by adding –s inflection and –d/–ed inflection in forming irregular past tense or past participle verb. The problem is that they did not recognize that there were some forms which did not need an inflection. The learners generalized the rule for regular form and applied it in irregular form, which was actually inappropriate. This is a good indicator that some basic rules were acquired by the students, but refinements were not yet made.
The frequency of omission errors was the highest of all (76.59%). The learners omitted –s inflection for third person singular subject and also for plural noun. Most of them thought that there was no problem to do that and it did not influence anything. Then, misformation errors (15.96) also occurred although they were not as many as omission errors. These errors seemed to be slip errors. They use the wrong form of morpheme or structure. Some of them who made these errors said that at first they did not realize that they made the error, but when they realized, they could easily recognize it. The addition errors (7.45 %) were the lowest number of errors that occurred on the students’ writing. They added several unnecessary inflections, as in generating plural nouns, by adding –s inflection and –d/ –ed inflection in forming irregular past tense or past participle verb. The problem is that they did not realize that there are some forms which do not need an inflection. The learners simply generalized the rule for regular forms and applied it in irregular forms, which is not appropriate. The point that needs to be noticed by the students is that they should pay more attention to how to make good sentences with correct grammatical forms. They should combine them with other sentences to compose a paragraph and then put them into a good descriptive text as well.

Causes of Errors

There are mainly two major sources of errors in second language learning. The first source is interlingual errors because of the interference from the native language into the second language, while the second source can be attributed to intralingual factors which occur due to the faulty or partial learning of the second language such as overgeneralization and oversimplification. Dulay, et al (1982: 171) stated that interlingual errors simply refer to second language errors that reflect native language structure, regardless of the internal processes or external conditions that spawned them. The native language of learners plays a significant role in learning a second language.

Overgeneralization and oversimplification as intralingual errors were also found in the students’ writing. Sometimes learners preferred simple forms and constructions to more complex ones. An example of simplification might involve
the use of simple present instead of the present perfect, which is more appropriate. Then, an overgeneralization where students used one form or construction in one context and extended its application to other contexts where it should not have been applied. Examples of overgeneralization include the use of *puted and *goed as the past tense forms of ‘put’ and ‘go’ and the omission of the –s verb inflection for third person singular subject in simple present tense. It should be noted that simplification and overgeneralization are used by learners in order to reduce their linguistic burden. Other learners’ errors were wrong hypotheses made by these learners to the target language. For example, some learners thought that ‘is’ was the marker of the present tense so they produced *He is go to school. Similarly, they thought that ‘was’ was the past tense marker then they wrote *It was happened last night.

The frequency of omission errors is the highest of all (76.59%). The learners omit –s inflection for the third person singular subject and also for plural nouns. Most of them thought that it was alright to do that because it did not change the meaning of the sentence. Then, misformation errors (15.96) also occurred though they were not as many as omission errors. These errors seemed to be slip errors. They used the wrong form of morpheme or structure. Some of the students who made these errors, at first, said that they had written correct sentences. But, after they realized, they could easily recognize their errors. The addition errors (7.45 %) is least errors occurring in the students’ writing. They added several unnecessary inflections as in generating plural noun by adding –s inflection and –d/-ed inflection in forming irregular past tense or past participle verb. The problem is that they did not recognize that there were some forms which did not need an inflection. The learners simply generalized the rule of regular forms and applied it in irregular forms, which was not appropriate. The point that needs to be noticed by students is that they should pay more attention to how to make good sentences with good grammar, too. They, then, can combine it with other sentences to compose a paragraph and then put them into a good descriptive text.
CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

The researcher found out all types of inflectional error in students’ writings. The types of inflectional errors found were omission when the learners omitted some certain inflectional morphemes from the sentences; addition when the learners added those which must not appear in a well-formed utterance; and misformation when the learners supplied certain inflectional morphemes though it was incorrect. The total occurrences of inflectional errors was 94 times in thirty five sheets of students’ writing.

Based on the findings, he found out that the omission errors were the highest frequency made by students (76.59%). Most of the omission errors were misperception of using the verbs according to the right subject. The –s inflection for the third person singular subject is a potential candidate for omission and was omitted much more than others. They also looked confused in using the appropriate noun form which contains plural noun form and possessive noun form. They simply generalized them as the same form with a singular noun. This result shows that they are still confused in placing the verbs and auxiliary verbs according to the grammar context. The misformation errors are on the second position (15.96%). The learners substituted the right inflections with the wrong ones, that is –est for –er. The selection of certain inflection related to a particular present tense is still misformed. The learners who had made these errors said that they had written correct sentences but after they realized the errors, they could easily correct them. The last one is addition errors (7.45%). In this errors, the learners added several unnecessary inflections as they just generalized about plural nouns by adding –s inflection, and –d/–ed inflection in forming irregular past tense or past participle verbs. The problem is that they did not realize that there are some forms which do not need an inflection. The learners generalized about the rule for regular form and applied it in irregular forms, which is not appropriate.
Suggestions

Based on the percentage of errors, it is suggested that the teacher should give more attention to simple verbs and its –s inflection that must be added to the third person subject singular in present tense as it was the highest percentage of errors. Most students thought there is no problem for omitting the –s inflection. It will become a crucial problem if they still think that there is no difference between simple verb with –s inflection and simple verb without –s inflection for the third person singular subject in simple present tense.

REFERENCE: