ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study is to find out (1) the dominant errors made by the eighth graders of SMP Lab UM and (2) the types of errors that occur in using simple past tense in recount text written by the eighth graders of SMP Lab UM. The research design applied in this study is descriptive quantitative. Since the population consisted of six classes, cluster random sampling was used to collect the data to represent each of the classes, so that they were all well represented. Then, the data was described by using the technique of descriptive quantitative. The study found out that (1) there are three out of eleven types of errors classified as the dominant errors, namely Omission of to be, Wrong form of to be, and Wrong form of verb; (2) the types of errors are intralanguage and interlanguage errors.

Key Words: errors, simple past tense, recount text.

Based on the 2006 Standard of Content, English teaching in junior high schools covers four skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among the basic skills, writing is considered to be the most complicated skill because in writing the writer should be able to combine and express his/her opinions in good written forms. In writing, the writer should not neglect the language components (structure, vocabulary, and spelling) because the content of writing can only be understood if those language components are written in correct forms. When the writing skill is taught in the classroom, the students are expected to be able to write in English using a correct structure. Structure or grammar is one of the basic components of language which must be learned. Harmer (2001: 12) defines grammar as the description of the ways in which words can change their forms and can be combined into sentences in that language. Gerot and Wignell (1994: 2) state that grammar is a theory of a language, of how language is put together and how it works. However, the structural differences between Indonesian and English could cause students to make some grammatical errors. In other words, the Indonesian students may find difficulties in using the correct structure in English. This might mostly be because the students are influenced by their mother tongue on the acquisition of the new structures.

Since students’ learning English is still affected by their mother tongue, they often find problems in grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and the like. Nevertheless, the students usually face a difficulty in English grammar, particularly in arranging words into correct utterances or sentences. It means that grammar is one of the most important parts of English to communicate with others. There are many topics of grammar that cannot be ignored. They are articles, parts of speech, modal auxiliaries, tenses, etc. However, there is part of the grammar that is considered to be the most difficult to learn for the Indonesian students, namely, tenses. Simple past tense is the example. The use of simple past tense often makes students confused with its complexity, especially for the eighth graders of junior high schools. Based on the researcher’s experience while doing a preliminary
observation, he noticed that the use of simple past tense often makes students confused with its complexity. They often write “He go to school yesterday,” instead of “He went to school yesterday.” The verb form has to be changed from infinitive into past tense. It shows that Indonesian students do not consider that in English there are verbs formed infinitive and past tense. In Indonesian language, there are no verb changes that affect the language.

In this final project, the researcher discusses the students’ English skill in writing recount text using the simple past tense. Writing a recount text should be clear, vivid, and concrete. If a student has made a mistake in using simple past tense, it means that he/she is not competent yet in making his/her text. The readers can be confused and also they may find difficulties understanding the content of the text which he/she has written. Therefore, through recount text, the researcher would like to find out the students’ learning problems, the causes and to know the students’ achievement and difficulties in learning the simple past tense. Hopefully, it will help students use the simple past tense correctly.

METHOD

This study used a descriptive quantitative approach. It describes the data taken from the sample which is the eighth graders of SMP Lab UM. In this study, the researcher would show the most dominant errors in using simple past tense in recount text based on the result of statistical analysis of data and describe the types of those errors, namely intralanguage errors and interlanguage errors. To get recount texts, the researcher constructed a writing task which the subjects had to do.

The population of this study was the eighth graders of SMP Lab UM in the academic year of 2011/2012. The eighth graders of SMP Lab UM were divided into six classes. Each of them consisted of 32, 39, 32, 31, 33, and 18 students, and the total number of the population was 185 students. The researcher took 28 students as the samples from the total number of population in which he took 5 students from 8A, 5 students from 8B, 5 students from 8C, 4 students from 8D, 5 students from 8E, and 4 students from 8F. Five students were taken from 8A, 8B, 8C, and 8E because the number of students is larger than other classrooms.

The data collection was carried out on February 8th, 2012. In gathering the data, the researcher was helped by the teacher. Firstly, the researcher chose the samples randomly. Then, the teacher organized an appropriate time and place to assemble the samples at the same time in the same classroom. Then, the researcher gave a writing task to the students by asking them to write a recount text. Before the task was conducted, first the researcher explained to the subjects the use of simple past tense and the rules in writing a recount text. Next, he held the task by preparing question sheets and answer sheets. The researcher controlled the test to avoid a heating among the students. The students were not allowed to copy other students’ writings. Finally, the students were asked to submit their recount composition directly to the researcher.

In analyzing the data, first the researcher made a list of students’ errors, and then checked the sentences that the students made whether they used the simple past tense correctly or not. After that the researcher classified their errors individually and then calculated their percentages of errors individually. The formula for finding the percentages of errors individually is
\[ X = \frac{\sum Er}{\Sigma W} \times 100\% \]

where: \( X \) = the percentage of errors
\( Er \) = various kinds of errors
\( W \) = words, and
\( \Sigma \) = the total number

Then, the researcher carried out an error analysis in order to find out the dominant errors that often occurred. Here, the researcher classified their errors into several types. Then, the percentages of each type of errors were counted by using ‘Preselected Category Approach’ (Etherton, 1977, as stated in Norrish, 1983) in which the statistical computation was based on Gulo’s formula as follows:

\[ \pi_i = \frac{f_i}{n} \times 100\% \]

where: \( \pi_i \) = the proportion of frequency of errors.
\( f_i \) = absolute frequency of a particular type of error, and
\( n \) = the total number of errors observed

After computing the proportion or percentage of each type of error, then the researcher calculated the average proportion of frequency of occurrence. In this study, the researcher used a simple statistical method namely the proportion as whole (100\%) was divided by the types of the errors observed. The result was called the mean (PI). The formula is as follows:

\[ PI = \frac{F_I}{N} \times 100\% \]

where: \( PI \) = the proportion of frequency of occurrence of errors as a whole,
\( F_I \) = the absolute frequency of types of errors of all categories, and
\( N \) = the total number of possible errors of all the categories.

The final step was to identify the degree of dominance of the particular error. Any errors whose \( (\pi_i - PI) \) is plus (+) are considered to be dominant. On the contrary, if the result of \( (\pi_i - PI) \) is minus (-), the errors are considered to be less dominant. The dominant errors were considered to be the students’ problem.

**FINDINGS**

**Statistical Analysis of the Data**

Since there were 28 students participating in this study, the researcher had 28 computations for the percentages of errors in using simple past tense. The students were asked to write at least 8 sentences in their writing. The total number of the simple past tense occurrences is 403. The researcher found that there were 227 simple past tense errors which mean that the errors took more than a half proportion of the students’ writing.

After finishing the computation of the percentage of errors, the researcher conducted an error analysis in order to find out the dominant errors. In this calculation, the researcher used the ‘Preselected Category Approach’ (Etherton, 1977, as stated in Norrish, 1983). The formula can be seen as follows:

\[ \pi_i = \frac{f_i}{n} \times 100\% \]

where: \( \pi_i \) = the proportion of frequency of errors.
\( f_i \) = absolute frequency of a particular type of error, and
Based on the data, the students’ errors are classified into several types. The result of the data can be seen in this following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Type of Errors</th>
<th>Fi</th>
<th>Pi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Omission of <em>to be</em></td>
<td>9.46</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Wrong form of <em>to be</em></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>13.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Wrong form of <em>infinitive to</em></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Addition of <em>to be</em> (before/after)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Wrong form of verb</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>53.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Wrong form of modal auxiliary</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Omission of verb</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Wrong form of negative sentence</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Wrong form of question sentence</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Omission of subject pronoun</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Wrong use of subject pronoun</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total (n)</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table I above shows eleven types of errors made by the students in dealing with the use of the simple past tense. The mean of the proportions of each type of errors is derived from the total proportion of error of frequency of errors divided by the total number of errors types.

Before the degree of dominant errors was found out, the proportion of frequency of occurrences of errors as a whole was counted by using the formula:

\[
PI = \frac{FI \times 100}{N}
\]

The PI was computed as follows:

\[
PI = \frac{FI \times 100}{N}
\]

\[
PI = \frac{100 \times 100}{11}
\]

\[
PI = 9.1\%
\]

The final step was to identify the degree of dominance of the particular error. Any errors whose (pi - PI) is plus (+) are considered to be dominant. On the contrary, if the (pi – PI) is zero or minus (-), it is considered to be less dominant. After the calculation, there are three out of eleven types of errors whose degree of dominance result is in plus (+). They are omission of *to be* (0.36%), wrong form of *to be* (4.86%), wrong form of verb (44.50%)

In conclusion, omission of *to be*, wrong form of *to be*, and wrong form of verb were the students’ dominant errors in using the simple past tense made by the eighth graders of SMP Lab UM in the academic year of 2011/2012 based on the statistical analysis. Then, the researcher discusses those errors based on non-statistical analysis.
Intralanguage Errors

Based on the data, the researcher found the intralanguage errors as proposed by Richards (1974). There are four categories of intralanguage errors which are presented below:

The first category is *overgeneralization*. The errors of addition of *to be* (before and after verb) are classified as the overgeneralization errors. The proportion of errors occur in this type of errors is 6.76%. The example is “I was do many activities”.

The sentence above shows that the addition of *to be* occurred before the verbs. The students should drop *was* to make it correct in the form of the simple past tense. Since the sentence tell the event that happened in the past, the verb *do* in the sentence should be replaced by *did*. The correct sentence should be “I did many activities”.

The second category is *ignorance of rule restriction*. There are five types of errors classified as ignorance of rule restriction errors. The errors are as follows:

The first is wrong form of *to be* (13.96%). The example of the sentence is “I am so happy”. Since the sentence tells the event that happened in the past, *to be* (am, is, and are) must be in the form of past tense. The correct sentence should be “I was so happy”.

The second is wrong form of modal auxiliary (6.31%). The example of the sentence is “I can helped my grandmother”. Since the sentence uses modal auxiliary, the verb should not be changed into past tense although the sentence tells about the activity which happened in the past. The sentence should be reconstructed as “I can help my grandmother”.

The third is wrong form of negative sentence (2.25%). The example of the sentence is “I don’t brought it”. To make the negative sentence in the simple past tense, we should put *did not* (followed by the verb form of infinitive) or *was/were not* after the subject followed by an adjective, noun, or adverb. The sentence should be revised as “I did not bring it”.

The fourth is wrong form of question sentence (0.45%). The wrong sentence is “Do you brought my phone and your computer? The revised sentence should be “Did you bring my phone and your computer?”

The fifth is wrong form of verb (53.60%). The example of the sentence is “We go home”. The sentence is ill-formed in the use of infinitive verb. Since the sentences tell the event that happened in the past, the verbs *go* should be replaced by *went*. The correct sentence should be “We went home”.

The third category is *incomplete application of rules*. There are three types of errors classified as incomplete application of restriction errors. The errors are as follows:

The first is omission of *to be* (9.46%). The example of the sentence is “I sleepy”. The students, in this case, failed to apply a complete structure in the simple past tense as they omitted an element that is *be* (was/were). The revised sentences should be “I was sleepy”.

The second is omission of subject pronoun (2.25%). The example of the sentence is “Before go home, we buy lots of fish”. The sentence is ill-formed because the students omitted the subject pronoun before verb. The subjects of the sentences could be singular (I, you, she, he, it) or plural (we, you, they). In the
sentence, the verb *go* should be replaced by *went*. The sentence should be revised as “Before we went home, we bought lots of fish”.

The third is *omission of verb* (0.90%). The example is “I vacation on there just with my little brother”. The sentence is incomplete because the students omitted the verbs after the subjects. The correct sentence is “I had vacation on there just with my little brother”.

The fourth category is *false concept hypothesized*. There are two types of errors classified as false concept hypothesized errors. The errors are as follows:

- The first is *wrong use of subject pronoun* (2.25%). The example of the sentence is “Me helped grandmother in kitchen”. The sentence is incorrect because the appearance of *me* (object pronoun) as the subject at the beginning of the sentence. The sentence should be revised as “I helped grandmother in kitchen”.

- The second is *wrong form of infinitive to* (1.80%). The example of the sentence is “My mother wanted to went shopping”. The sentence is ill-formed because of the incorrect form of *infinitive to* after verb. The revised sentence is “My mother wanted to go shopping”.

**Interlanguage Errors**

The researcher found out two kinds interlanguage errors. They are omission of *to be* and wrong form of verb. Many students still had a difficulty in using the correct form of *be* in the sentences. The example of omission of *to be* such as the sentence “I so happy”, they tend to omit the presence of *be*. The sentence should be revised “I was so happy”.

The example of wrong form of verb in the sentence “We go home”, is another type of errors in which the students are also still affected by their mother tongue. In this case, the students did not realize that in writing simple past tense sentences, the verb *go* should be replaced with *went*.

**DISCUSSION**

**Statistical Analysis of the Data**

From the data analysis result, it was found out that there were 403 sentences in simple past tense which occurred in the texts which the students wrote. Two hundred and twenty of those sentences are classified as errors. It means that the errors took more than a half proportion of the students’ writing. Since the mean of the error proportion of the students is 54.46%, it means that there were still some students who faced some difficulties in using correct structure.

In order to find the dominant errors made by the students, the researcher classified 11 types of errors in dealing with the use of simple past tense. Out of the 11 types of errors, 3 of them are identified as the dominant errors, namely, omission of *to be*, wrong form of *to be*, and wrong form of verb. The biggest proportion of errors among the three types is the wrong form of verb. It shows that the students still find difficulties in paying attention to the existence of a particular rule applied in English language that is the changes of the verb form from infinitive into past tense in the simple past tense especially in writing recount text.

Since the errors took more than a half proportion of the students’ writing, it seems that the students’ competence in using simple past tense in writing recount text is still low.
Non-Statistical Analysis

Errors, as Brown writes, arise from several possible general sources, namely interlingual errors of interference from the native language, intralingual errors within the target language, the sociolinguistic context of communication, psycholinguistic and cognitive strategies, and no doubt countless affective variables (Brown, 1980: 66). In this study, the researcher found out that the errors were caused by both intralingual and interlanguage errors.

Intralanguage Errors

The first source of errors that will be discussed in this study is what is called intralanguage (intralingual) source of errors. Here, Brown considers the significance of the intralingual source of errors, namely those which occur within the target language itself. According to Richards (1974), the interlanguage errors are caused by several factors.

The first factor is overgeneralization to draw a general conclusion from the previous strategies. Overgeneralization errors arise when the students apply a structure that they already experience in another new situation, for example, “I was went to Malang” or “We visited be Jatim Park”.

The second factor is ignorance of rule restrictions. These errors occur when the students ignore restriction of certain structures as in the following sentences:

- The waves is not too dangerous.
- I can helped my grandmother.
- My parents not accompany.
- Do you brought my phone and your computer?
- I and my friend swimming.

All of the sentences above are grammatically incorrect because the students failed to use the correct structure of sentences, such as in the first sentence, “The waves is not too dangerous”. The students should use are because the subject is plural, and since the sentence tells the event that happened in the past, the correct sentence is “The waves were not too dangerous”.

In this case, the students may be confused to use what kind of be that must be used in the sentence, because in their mother tongue rules there is no difference in meaning between both of them.

The third factor is incomplete application of rules, Here the learner fails to apply the correct English spelling pattern to different words. This cause of errors refers to the students’ failure to fully develop a structure, like in sentences below:

- I sleepy.
- Before go home, we buy lots of fish.
- I vacation on there just with my little brothers.

These types of errors occur when the students fail to make complete and correct sentences. Based on the examples of the sentences above, the types of errors which occur in incomplete application of rules are omission of to be, omission of subject pronoun, and omission of verb.

The fourth factor is false concept hypothesized. Here the learners borrow an element from one part of English pronunciation and put it into another. False concept hypothesized derives from the students’ faulty comprehension of distinctions in the target language. It may be due to poor gradation of teaching item which lead to students’ confusion to distinguish two or more structures.
sentence “Me helped grandmother in kitchen” is the result from the students’ faulty comprehension to distinguish between subject pronoun and object pronoun. Another example is “My mother wanted to went shopping”. In this sentence, the students failed to distinguish infinitive to and past simple. The students seemed confused in distinguishing when they have to use past simple of the verbs and infinitive to. They may think that in the sentences of simple past tense, every verb that occurs after subjects must be written in the form of past tense.

Interlanguage Errors

Norrish (1983) states that learning a language (a mother tongue or a foreign language) is a matter of habit formation. When someone tries to learn new habits the old ones will interfere the new ones. This cause of error is called first language interference”. According to Brown (1980), interlingual errors are caused by the interference of the mother tongue which has something to do with a contrastive analysis hypothesis that aims at describing the differences and similarities between the two languages with a view to predicting possible learning problems. In this study, there are two kinds of errors from the types of errors which are categorized into interlanguage errors. The two errors also resulted from intralanguage errors; they are omission of to be and wrong form of verb. These two types of errors occur because of the negative transfer to the target language. It means that the students make some errors by the effect of their mother tongue, for examples in sentences “I sleepy” or “We go home yesterday”. In the first sentence, the students omit the presence of be. As stated before, English maintains the presence of be to make sentences comprising of noun, adjective, or adverb.

This type of errors occur because be does not exist in the students’ mother tongue, so the causes of errors is called over differentiation in which a certain target language item is not found in the native language.

The second sentence, is another type of errors in which the students are still affected by their mother tongue. As we know, in their native language there are no verb changes such as in English. So, when the students write the sentences of the simple past tense, they tend to use the infinitive verbs without changing them into the verb form of past simple because of the effect of their native language.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the analysis, the researcher found that the students have most dominant problem particularly in dealing with the changes of the verb form from infinitive into past tense in the simple past tense. The proportion of the errors is 53.60%.

There are eleven types of errors classified by the researcher based on his own category, namely, omission of to be, wrong form of to be, wrong form of infinitive to, addition of to be (before/after), wrong form of verb, wrong form of modal auxiliary, omission of verb, wrong form of negative sentence, wrong form of question sentence, omission of subject pronoun, and wrong use of subject pronoun. The errors made by the students resulted from both the mother tongue influence (interlanguage errors) and target language causes (intralanguage errors).

The interlanguage errors are caused by both over differentiation in which a certain target language item is not found in the native language and by the effect
of the students’ mother tongue rules. The intralanguage errors are subdivided into overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of rules, and false concept hypothesized.

Since the most dominant error is wrong use of verb, it seems that the wrong use of verbs can be found in almost every student’s recount texts. In conclusion, in using simple past tense in recount texts, most of the students are still affected by their mother tongue rules in which there are no verb changes in their native language.

**Suggestions**

Based on the result of the study, the researcher would like to offer some suggestions to the teachers and the students to improve the students’ ability in using the simple past tense especially in writing recount text. The teachers should give clearer explanation of grammatical rules in English, particularly in the simple past tense, so that the students will understand more about this kind of tense. The teachers should know their students’ ability in order to find out the students’ difficulties, thus the teachers can solve the students’ problems. The students should be given more chance to have writing exercises and should be encouraged in using correct grammar. The students should also be given more clear explanation about other grammatical rules, such as the verb form, personal pronouns, spelling, sentence pattern, parts of speech, etc so that the students can apply those rules correctly both in oral and in written ways.

The students should learn more about the simple past tense. They should provide more time for themselves to read books that provide knowledge about simple past tense.

**REFERENCES**


