

GRAMMATICAL PROBLEMS IN THE METHODOLOGY SECTION OF MASTER THESES

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ABSTRACT

The methodology section is one of the most important aspects of a master thesis because it describes how the research was done and what method and procedure was taken in that research. This research aimed to discover the most common grammatical problems and possible causes of grammatical issues in master theses written by English education postgraduate program students at Bengkulu University, especially in the methodology section. This study used a mixed method, namely qualitative and quantitative. Most of the grammatical problems were investigated quantitatively, and the causes of grammatical problems were studied qualitatively. The corpus of this study was 20 master theses written by English education postgraduate program students who graduated in 2021. The findings showed that the most frequent grammatical problems found in the methodology section of the master theses were incorrect verbs, 38,60% or 44 times, which were dominated by tense confusion and subject-verb agreement, which confused the reader. Further, they also often lack the necessary syntactic connections between the verb and the nearest subject. The cause of the grammatical problems found in the methodology section of the theses was carelessness, first language interference, and translation. Carelessness becomes the highest possible cause of the grammatical problems committed by students. The conclusion of this research provides information about the most frequent grammatical problems and possible causes in the master theses of methodology section.

Keywords: Grammatical Problems, Methodology Section, Writing Theses.

INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the skills in learning that must be adequately mastered. The writer can convey ideas, information, and thoughts to the reader. For many students, writing is viewed as a complex and challenging activity because there are several crucial problems to be considered, one of which is grammar. Huan et al. (2021) said that writing

is a complex process involving several aspects, such as model texts, prepositions, spell-check, punctuation, and grammar. So, writing cannot be separated from grammar because good grammar will make it easier for readers to understand what the author means.

Grammar is considered the most crucial aspect of language learning for second-language learners. The students need to master how to transfer the knowledge of grammatical concepts to the written. Most of the students need help with English grammar. This also happens to postgraduate students who are writing a thesis, as we know that the thesis is one of the requirements that postgraduate students must fulfill to get a master's degree. Dinamika (2021) stated that a thesis is commonly written by students who take a specific major or graduate program as a requirement to finish all the courses that have been selected and is a key to graduation.

The most common problems in a student's thesis are grammatical problems. Students can develop great ideas related to the topic they are working on, but ultimately, messages or information cannot be spelled out clearly due to grammar problems. In writing a thesis, the students must pay attention to the main body of scientific writing, such as the background of the study, research question, literature review, research methodology, data analysis, and findings.

Based on pre-observation in October 2022, which was done by the researcher in master theses by postgraduate students of the faculty of teacher training and education of the University of Bengkulu, the researcher found several master theses which have some problems in grammar, especially in the methodological section. For example, "in collecting data, researchers collected questionnaire data by following some procedures." In this sentence, the word "researchers" must be written as "researcher" because the writer in this research is just singular. In a sentence, "s" at the end of a noun mentions a plural or a noun with more than one.

Therefore, based on the previous explanation above and the fact that no researchers took the research, the researcher wants to find out about Grammatical Problems in the Methodology Section of the Master Theses of the English Education Postgraduate Study Program Students of the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of the University of Bengkulu.

RESEARCH METHOD

In this research, the researcher used mixed methods, namely quantitative and qualitative methods. Mix methods combine quantitative and qualitative approaches by including quantitative and qualitative data in a single research study (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). The researcher used a quantitative method to show the percentage of the most frequent grammatical problems found in the master thesis of a postgraduate student at Bengkulu University. Aliaga and Gunderson (2002) argue that quantitative research methods acquire numerical data and evaluate it using mathematical tools, particularly

statistics, to understand a problem or phenomenon. Besides, the qualitative method was used to discover the cause of grammatical problems in this research.

The corpus for this research derived from the master's theses of English postgraduate students from the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of Bengkulu University who graduated in 2021, especially for students with grade "A". There were two types of corpuses, namely written and oral corpus. Sinclair in Hasko (2012) argue that corpus is the analysis of written and spoken material in a comprehensive and natural format for documentation. The researcher chose a written corpus as a data source. Pett and Salkind, cited in Corder and Foreman (2009), propose that the minimum requirement for the number of texts included in quantitative or qualitative analysis is 20 documents.

The data was collected by filling observation checklist and conducting interview. Several steps in collecting data were: first, the researcher come to library to get sample of master thesis of postgraduate students. Next, identified grammatical problems found in each word, phrase, or sentence. After that, analyzed and classified the data based on the grammatical problems from a theory by Hollister. Then, the researcher asked the co-rater for help analyzing the data in order to get the validity. After that, compared the data analyzed between the researcher and the co rater. Next, researcher took an interview to the students and asked about causes of grammatical problems which occur in the thesis based on Norrish theory.

Finally, the researcher described the results based on the data obtained through documentation and interviewed data.

In a quantitative method, there were several steps to analyze students' grammatical problems in the methodology section. The first step was researcher collected of copies master theses especially in the methodology section. After that, the researcher analyzed the data based on Hollister theory. Next, the researcher classified the data into the subcategories of grammatical problems namely verbs, adverbs, pronouns, preposition, and conjunction. The last step was calculated the percentage of types of grammatical problems based on the formulation from Sudijono (2019) as follows:

$$P=(F/N) \times 100$$

Where:

S= Percentage of grammatical problems

F= Frequency of grammatical problems

N= Number of total grammatical problems

Besides, in qualitative method the researcher also was used theory of Miles et al. (2014). Four types of data analysis can be explained: first, data collection. In this step, all the required data is collected by documenting and interviewing the participants. The second step was data condensation. In this step, the researcher did some activities: categorized the problems by documentation, transcribed the interviews, and selected and sorted the necessary data. The third step was data display. It was an organized and compact information set that allowed for drawing conclusions and action. The researcher described the data and information in this step as a description or narration. The last step

was a conclusion (drawing and verifying). In this step, the researcher made a conclusion from the study's results or findings. Using the study's results or findings, the researcher could give clear descriptions and conclusions about the possible causes of the grammatical problems based on the theories.

FINDING

Grammatical problems were still a usual mistake committed by students when writing theses. In this research, the researcher found grammatical problems in the postgraduate students' methodology section of the master theses as many as 114 data out of a total of around 37718 data. It can be shown by the results obtained from the data on the four indicators of grammatical problems in academic writing by Hollister(2014). There are verbs: tense confusion and subject-verb agreement, prepositions: prepositions overuse and unnecessary prepositions, pronouns: relative pronouns and possessive pronouns, adverbs, and conjunctions: overusing conjunctions and misusing subordinates.

The Most Frequent Grammatical Problems Found in the Discussion Section of Master Theses

The researcher found grammatical problems in the postgraduate students' result section of the master thesis is 128 data. The researcher focused on the problems related to using grammar in academic writing by Hollister (2014). They were Verbs, Pronouns, Prepositions, Adverbs, and Conjunctions. It can be seen in table below:

Table 1. The Percentage of grammatical problems found in the Methodology section of Master Theses

No.	Types of Problems	Frequencies	Percentage (%)
1.	Verbs	44	38.60
	Tense Confusion	24	21.06
	Subject-Verb Agreement	20	17.54
2.	Adverbs	9	7.89
3.	Pronouns	28	24.56
	Personal Pronoun	18	15.79
	Relative Pronoun	10	8.77
4.	Prepositions	22	19.30
5.	Conjunctions	11	9.65
	Total	114	100

Based on Table 1 shows that there were some grammatical problems found in

students' master theses, especially in the methodology section, such as verbs, adverbs, pronouns, prepositions, and conjunctions. Verbs were the highest percentage of grammatical problems primarily found in the methodology section of the student's master theses, which happened at 38,6%. Pronouns follow it in the second place about 24,56% or 28 times. Then, prepositions follow it in the third place about 19,30% or 22 times. Next, conjunction follow it in the fourth place about 9,65% or 11 times. While, adverb become the lowest type of grammatical problem made by the English postgraduate students with 7,89% or 9 times.

Possible Causes of the Grammatical Problems Found in the Methodology Section of the Master Thesis

The researcher used Norrish (2018) theory to organize the various causes of grammatical problems in the methodology section of master theses made by postgraduate students. Based on Norrish opinion, grammatical problems are caused by three factors: carelessness, first-language interference, and translation. The highest percentage identifies possible causes of grammatical problems in students writing. This is seen in table below:

Table 2. Causes of the Grammatical Problems Found in the Methodology Section of the Master Theses

No.	Causes of Grammatical Problem	Frequencies	Percentage
1.	Carelessness	74	43,02%
2.	First Language Interference	55	31,98%
3.	Translation	43	25%
Total		172	100%

Based on table 2, the researcher found the possible causes of the grammatical problems in the grammatical section of the master theses made by the English education postgraduate students. The causes were: carelessness (43,02%), first language interference (31,98%), and translation (25%). Carelessness became the highest possible cause of problems committed by students which occurs 74 times or 43,02%. It happens because of carelessness committed by students in writing sentences. In accordance with the characteristic of the cause of this category, misreading frequently occurs when words are spelled similarly and students are too quick and do not pay attention, such as when the student wrote "*The researcher explains the data gathered and analyzed it using explanation and hypothesis quantitatively*" (T15P50). The researcher was sure that actually, the student would like to write "*explained*" because the sentence happens in the

past situation. But he failed to write “*explained*” for the verb because of their carelessness.

First language interference was the second highest cause of students’ grammatical problems, which occurs 55 times or 31,98%. This happens because the students are still influenced by their mother tongue in making sentences when writing. The students think the words they write are correct sentences English and Indonesian grammar rules are the same. Based on the analysis, there was sentence that can be categorized into caused of first language interference. Based on the analysis, there were several sentences that can be categorized into caused of first language interference, for instance “*The proceeds to the next step. It classifies the data. At this stage, the groups the data into smaller units based on the research idea (T20_page 33)*”. The student would like to write “*The proceeds to the next step is classified the data. At this stage, grouping the data into smaller units based on the research idea (T20_page 33)*”. *Langkah selanjutnya adalah mengklasifikasikan data. Pada tahap ini, mengelompokkan data ke dalam unit-unit yang lebih kecil berdasarkan gagasan penelitian.* This happens because in Indonesian language does not require tenses in making sentences. But, in English sentence we must consider about tenses. The writing style of English grammar is different from the writing style of Indonesian. This is made causes problems in student writing.

Translation was the lowest cause of students' grammatical problems, which occurs 43 times or 25%. The cause of this problem occurs when students translate their first language sentences into foreign language sentences word by word. This happens when students think the formation between first language and second language sentences has the same rules or writing structure. Based on the analysis, there were several sentences that can be categorized into causes of translation, for instance, “*The instrument of research is the equipment that is used by the researcher to collect the data in which it is important to get the accurate data*” (T7P30). This sentence is an example of a student problem caused by the translation. It can be seen that the word “*The instrument of research is the equipment that is used by the researcher to collect the data*” means “*Instrumen penelitian adalah alat yang digunakan oleh penulis untuk mengoleksi data*”. From this word, it can be said that students translate the sentence word by word. It should be written “example of a student problem caused by the translation. It can be seen that the word “*The instrument of research is the equipment used by the researcher to collect the data*”.

DISCUSSION

In the first research question, some grammatical problems were discovered in the methodology section, especially in the students' master theses, including verbs, adverbs, pronouns, prepositions, and conjunctions. Verbs are the most common grammatical problems that are seen in the methodology section of student theses. In this kind, students

struggled with subject-verb agreement and tense misunderstanding. According to the findings, students still frequently made mistakes in employing single and plural forms and using unsuitable tenses in a phrase that confused the reader.

Several studies have revealed problems with appropriate subject-verb agreement and tense confusion. This was consistent with Singh et al. (2017) and Fitrawati & Safitri (2021) discovered that the most common grammatical errors were in verbs, particularly in subject-verb agreement and tenses. It may be argued that the students have limited capacity to use verbs effectively in their writing. Most students struggled with agreement since the verbs did not closely follow their subject and the number of subjects was unclear. Furthermore, Utami (2018) indicated that tense confusion and a lack of subject-verb agreement were the most common problems encountered by students. This is due to the use of tenses that are not appropriate according to the rules, as well as the use of inappropriate subjects and verbs or singular and plural forms, which presents challenges for students.

In addition, Candra (2019) found that tenses and subject-verb agreement are the most common issues which identified in students writing. Many problems create in student writing as a result of inappropriate use of tenses such as the present tense and present perfect tense. As a result, tense misunderstanding and subject-verb agreement remained the most common issues identified in student writing.

The second subject concerned possible causes of grammatical problems in the methodology section of master theses. Based on the findings, the researcher concluded that carelessness could be the primary cause of student's grammatical problems. This was followed by first language interference and translation. Carelessness was the primary factor, since students lacked ambition to study English. Students become less careful with their writing, which leads to grammatical problems. This was consistent with the results of (Niati & Eripuddin, 2019; Kumala, 2018), who discovered that carelessness was the most common cause of problems in student writing. Students who lack sufficient ambition to learn more English make numerous blunders, particularly when double-checking their writing. Furthermore, Rinata (2018) discovered that carelessness results from students lack of motivation in learning. However, it is not totally their fault. This may be due to the material provided by the teacher to the students. Not only on the material, but also the teaching.

However, it was opposed with Nazir (2018), which found that first language interference is the primary cause of grammatical problems commonly committed by students when writing. This occurs because students are still impacted by their native tongue. Students become accustomed to translating sentences from their first language (Indonesia) to English since the first language influences it. Students believe their sentences are correct, however English and Indonesian grammar rules differ significantly. This study's findings are consistent with Erlangga et al. (2019), who found that first language interference affects new students' understanding of their information. Students fail to acquire a new language, resulting in frequent errors, particularly in grammar structures. Furthermore, when writing, students employ their first language (Indonesian)

to construct English phrases.

This contrasted with Sari (2019), which found that translation was the primary cause. Other causes of grammatical problems were a lack of vocabulary and grammar. As a result, it may cause students to make mistakes when writing essays. Several factors can be identified as the source of students' grammatical problems. The researcher identified three factors, including carelessness, first language interference, and translation.

CONCLUSION

This research intended to determine the grammatical problems and possible causes which found in the methodological section of the master thesis written by the English education postgraduate study program students. There are some types of grammatical problems found in students' master theses, such as: verbs (tense confusion and subject-verb agreement), pronouns (personal pronoun, relative pronoun, and possessive pronoun), adverbs, prepositions (overusing prepositions and unnecessary prepositions), and conjunctions (overusing conjunctions and unnecessary conjunctions). From those types, it was found that verbs were the first highest percentage of grammatical problems primarily found in the result section of the students' theses. Then, followed by pronouns, prepositions, and conjunctions, then adverbs as the lowest grammatical problems found in students theses. In addition, there were the possible causes of the grammatical problems in the methodological section of the master theses made by the English education postgraduate study program, such as: carelessness, first language interference, and translation. Carelessness was the highest cause of grammatical problems in students' theses. Then, first language interference was the second highest and translation was the lowest cause of grammatical problems carried out by students.

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