# STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN WRITING ADJECTIVE PHRASES

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## ABSTRACT

Students of EFL countries find it difficult to break down their ideas from their native language into English, and one of the difficulties is related to conduct adjective phrases. The objective of this research is to discover kinds of difficulties that students face in writing adjective phrases. Qualitative research is applied in order to explain the problem more specifically and descriptive method is employed to maintain alongside the approach used. Triangulation data turn to be the instruments which include documentation, questionnaire distribution and semi-structured interview. The class for participating in this research is 4th semester of English students in Pakuan University. Students are participating in documentation by compiling their essays to identify glitches in adjective phrases before questionnaire session. Meanwhile, interview session is conducted to the lecturer of the essay writing class. The result shows that error in addition (56.67%) becomes the highest rate, then selection (21.67%), omission (15%) and ordering (6.67%). Associated with the reasons above, there are two major causes of students' difficulties, namely interlingual and intralingual errors, but then the data show that students struggle in Mother Tongue Interference.

Keywords: Writing Ability, Grammar, Interlingual Errors, Mother Tongue Interference (MTI)

## ABSTRAK

*Mahasiswa dari negara yang menggunakan Bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing menghadapi kesulitan untuk mengekspresikan ide dari bahasa penutur asli ke bahasa Inggris, salah satu kesulitannya mengacu pada merangkai frasa kata sifat. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mendapatkan klasifikasi kesulitan saat mahasiswa menyusun frasa kata sifat. Penelitian kualitaitf diterapkan untuk menjelaskan kendala lebih spesifik, serta dilengkapi dengan metode penelitian deskriptif.agar mempertegas pendekatan penelitian yang digunakan. Instrumen yang digunakan yaitu Triangulasi yang mencangkup dokumentasi, angket dan wawancara. Kelas yang berpartisipasi dalam penelitian merupakan mahasiswa semester empat prodi Bahasa Inggris di Universitas Pakuan. Mahasiswa andil dalam dokumentasi yang berupa pengumpulan esai untuk mendeteksi kesalahan dalam frasa kata sifat sebelum mengacu ke angket. Sedangkan wawancara ditujukan kepada dosen pengampu mata kuliah bersangkutan. Hasil penelitian mengindikasikan kesalahan di penambahan kata (56.67%) menempati urutan pertama, disusul dengan pemilihan kata (21.67%), pengurangan kata (15%) serta runtutan kata (6.67%). Berdasarkan perolehan diatas, terdapat dua penyebab utama kesulitan mahasiswa, yakni kesalahan interlingual dan intralingual, namun hasil penelitian menyatakan bahwa mahasiswa menghadapi kesulitan dalam pengaruh bahasa ibu.*

*Kata kunci: Kemampuan Menulis, Tatabahasa, Kesalahan Interlingual, Bahasa Ibu*

## INTRODUCTION

It is believed that kinds of difficulties regarding to EFL students to elaborate the word using adjective remain continual. Students are still dealing with some difficulties in using adjective phrases. For that reason, outcome by conducting this research is to identify kinds of students' difficulties in writing adjective phrases. Ellis in 2008 study (as cited San 2016:2) describe students' difficulties as two major branches, the first is complexity in comprehending and developing the features in grammar then the second one is internalizing of the structures in grammar. In brief, classifications of errors committed by students referred to Ellis (as cited by Ratnah 2013:160) are omission, addition, selection and ordering.

According to Ellis (cited in Gayo & Widodo 2018:62), omission is specified by omitting particular item in a well-formed statement. Otherwise, addition is meant to insert extra item in the sentence or statement. Meanwhile, selection or misinformation is indicated by inappropriate use of certain word from L1 into L2 situation. The last, ordering is characterized by arranging the pattern of L2 context improperly.

Meanwhile the source of errors, as being described by Brown (Cited by Fatmawati 2016:20), are interlingual transfer and intralingual transfer. The factor that is affecting students' error in interlingual comes from mother tongue interference. Students using the context from their mother tongue to compose product for target language commonly produce fatal errors due to the dissimilarities (Lado as cited by Sari 2016:89).

Intralingual errors are divided into four aspects, which are overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restriction, incomplete application of rule, and false concepts hypothesized. Overgeneralization turns to be errors influenced by students' basic experience in target language that is unsuitable, as the result students create a new rule in L2 structure (Hasyim 2002:47, Richard cited in Sari 2016:90). Then ignorance of rule restriction, which is caused by the

fallacy in discovering exception rules in target language (Richard as cited in Ratnah 2013:161). Also, incomplete application of rule is a type of error in omitting the rule of target language in composing sentences (Gayo & Widodo 2018:63). The last aspect is false concept hypothesized. This error occurs when students are unable to distinguish the difference between words for precise occasion of time (Richard as cited in Ratnah 2013:161).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this research, qualitative approach became the basic approach of analyzing students' difficulties in writing adjective phrase. To maintain the approach chosen, the writer implied descriptive method. In addition, triangulation data collection was involved, starting from documentation, following by the questionnaire distribution before interview session. Target of the research was 4th semester English students in Pakuan University from March 1st to March 26th 2019.

### a. Documentation

The lecturer who teaches writing class was being contacted for the authorization of getting the data of students' essays. After that, the writer collected two samples of students' essays to discover glitches in the tasks. The errors are grouped into classification of errors, namely omission, addition, selection, and ordering.

### b. Questionnaire Distribution

One target class chosen beforehand was contacted for participating to this research. Students were provided questionnaire sheet related to the indicators from the framework of the previous chapter. Type of the questionnaire was open-ended questionnaire with seven questions.

### c. Interview

In conducting the interview session, the participant, who was the lecturer of Essay Writing 4B class, was asked by seven questions that might have been developed by numbers determined by the responses. Interview session occupied by the lecturer was preferred as the crosscheck from the questionnaire answers from students.

## DATA DESCRIPTION

### a. Data from Documentation

Process of collecting the documentation was gathered through the paper work that students were submitting each week for two meetings, started from February 15th to February 22nd. The data taken during the class contained the result to students' errors in writing adjective phrases. Referring to the types of errors from preceding chapter, the writer separated the classifications into four parts to reveal the frequent error committed by students in the first two weeks' tasks.

From 14 respondents, the data defined the qualification of students' error during writing adjective phrases into four parts: omission, addition, selection and ordering. Students' error in omitting particular words in writing adjective phrases reaches 15 % with total of nine errors. On student's works, it was found that they missed to put determiner adjective '*the*' in superlative form.

Furthermore, the percentage of students' error in addition becomes the highest number, which has 56.67% with 34 errors. As the example, students tended to describe English as taught in foreign language, but instead they wrote '*The English language*' which is considered inappropriate.

Next, error in selection turns to be the following issue as the percentage reaches 21.67% with 13 errors in total. In this case, students were unable to differentiate '*important*' and '*importance*'.

The last, error in ordering is the least error made by students, within four totals of error and the percentage is on 6.67%. As the conclusion, all of the respondents (100%) face difficulties in composing adjective phrases. The example was when student found to compose adjective phrase that was not suitable to L2 pattern.

### b. Data from Questionnaire

Questionnaire distribution was occupied in March 14th 2019, by the end of the Essay Writing subject. Questionnaire sheets were distributed

to 13 students in the class. The type of questionnaire was open-ended with seven questions. Also, no maximum words to reveal the problems that respondents' faced in writing adjective phrase.

From the first question, respondents were asked to mention several points that students suffered in writing adjective phrases. More than a half of the respondents (53.84%) clarified that concerning the sequence of adjective order became the main problem for the respondents. Three respondents admitted for vocabulary issues (30.76%) that challenged the respondents to choose appropriate words. The next problems (23.07%) were grammar rule, contextual divergence and student's inability to determine adjective phrase accumulated from each respondent for one issue.

In the second question, respondents were asked about the causes in ordering adjective phrases. Based on the result, respondents assumed that remembering adjective order is hard (53.84%). Besides, some of the respondents (23.07%) are anxious in ordering adjective to reduce misunderstanding meaning or errors in the sentence. Also, two respondents (15.38%) claimed they face difficulties because there were kinds of adjectives to memorize. Additional reason caused by grammar also took place in recognizing adjective order (7.69%).

The third question asked about respondents' comprehension of using past/present participle in adjective phrase. Five respondents (38.46%) misinterpreted the use of present/past participle as tenses to complete a sentence as a predicate. Next, four respondents (30.76%) described the use of participle takes roles in sentence function, whether to determine as a subject or object. Three respondents (23.07%) presumed the use of participle was known as the meaning, while one respondent (7.69%) said that the importance of using participle in adjective was to indicate time.

In the fourth question, respondents were asked to measure their frequency of errors in adjective phrase. There were two dominated answers, the first one was accumulated as five responses (38.46%) that they repeatedly made errors and other five respondents (38.46%) assumed they sometimes made errors in ordering adjective. Three respondents (23.07%) predicted that errors were occurred in almost every time.

The fifth question asked the respondents for their opinion to prefer simple adjective phrase than to use adjective order in sentences. Six respondents (36.15%) explained that using simple adjective phrase is simpler than ordering adjective. Related to the first statement, three respondents (23.07%) reasoned the use of simple adjective sentence is easier because adjective order is difficult. Though, two respondents (15.38%) implicitly said that using adjective in sentences is important. The least answer described that lack of vocabulary and different meaning

became their consideration for the rest two respondents (7.69%).

From the question number six, the question asked about respondent's opinion of getting confused in choosing adjective words. Five respondents (38.46%) assumed that choosing inappropriate adjective words led into misconception to the meaning. Another reason came from three respondents (23.07%) who said that vocabulary is necessary to choose exact words into sentences. Moreover, two respondents (15.38%) assumed that the rule impacted them to elaborate sentences with adjective words. One respondent (7.69%) predicted that it is difficult to choose adjective word while other two respondents (15.38%) explained that they have no problem in choosing adjective words.

On the seventh question, respondents were expected to tell the reasons for causing errors in writing adjective phrases. Respondents' recognition to differentiate adjective to either adverb or other part of speech became the main issue voted

in the questionnaire, with five respondents out of thirteen (38.46%). Also, four respondents (30.76%) believed that vocabulary is important to determine suitable adjective word. Moreover, two respondents (15.38%) assumed the sequence in adjective order leads errors in the sentences. One respondent (7.69%) reasoned because of L1 transfer, and another respondent (7.69%) said that limited knowledge affected the errors.

## c. Data from Interview

The interview session occurred on 15th of March 2019 at 4:03 PM. The interviewee contributed into this research was the lecturer of Essay Writing subject from the target class. Semi-structured interview was chosen with seven questions. Thus, additional two questions improvised to elaborate certain questions.

On the first question, the writer asked whether the lecturer could mention problems that students find it difficult to write adjective phrases. It is predicted that students found problems because some of them were

unable to distinguish the difference between adjective and adjective phrases. Also, another statement was confirmed by the lecturer that students often made mistake to settle on precise adjective words.

In the second question, the writer was questioning to students' difficulties in adjective phrases, especially in ordering adjective according to the lecturer's opinion. The lecturer said that in Indonesian, to imply more than one adjective word in order, there should be an '*and*' between two adjectives. As the result, some students included L1 in the context of L2, in this case is English.

The third question was expecting her opinion of students' awareness in using participles in writing adjective phrases. She once predicted that students' perspective in writing participles was directed to tenses rather than participles as adjectives.

Meanwhile, the fourth question was about students' inclination to choose simple adjective phrase over ordering adjective phrase. The lecturer responded to mention about

students' habits while writing in mother language. She predicted that in L1, students did not have to consider about rule restriction also assumed the exposure of students' reading in daily life impacted the quality of embracing more words.

Then in the fifth question, the lecturer was asked about the frequency of students' errors in adjective phrases. According to the first question, regarding to the less of students composing adjective phrases to their essays, she assumed there was not too often for students

On the sixth question, the writer expected for the reason of students' difficulties to choose proper adjective word. The lecturer replied that the aspect of students' misunderstanding to choose article was caused by students' source language.

The last question asked about students' errors in writing adjective phrases. For this question, the lecturer presumed for lack of vocabulary as the issue faced by students.

## DATA ANALYSIS

Reflecting to the results of this research, students are considered to face difficulties during writing adjective phrases from both interlingual and intralingual transfer. Mother Tongue Interference (MTI) is chosen as the indicator for interlingual error while Overgeneralization, Ignorance of Rule Restriction, and Incomplete of Rule Restriction are the indicators for intralingual errors.

Based on the data result from the documentation, students' products contain errors in writing adjective phrase. Classifications of errors for this session are omission, addition, selection, and ordering as stated by Ellis (as cited in Ratnah 2013:160) which is necessary in order to identify errors committed by students. The highest percentage of errors is caused by addition, which reaches 56.67% with 34 errors out of 60. However, the lowest rank of errors is coming from ordering with four errors and percentage 6.67%.

While denoting to the answers from the questionnaire, a number of respondents admit to confront some problems regarding to write adjective

phrases. Several problems are faced by students, starting from unable to distinguish kinds of adjective words, to commit errors in ordering adjective phrase and to choose appropriate adjective words. Above all, some students admitted that adjective order is difficult.

Consequently, Mother Tongue Interference appears on first of the leading cause for students in writing adjective phrase because students mistook for choosing determiner adjective, failed to differentiate certain words and L1 transfer. Al-Khresheh in Sari (2016:89) defines Mother Tongue Interference (MTI) as error led by students to define the structure target language than transferring from mother tongue, caused the products sounds inappropriate to the target language culture (Ariyanti & Fitriana 2017:113). Students admit to have difficulties because of their mother tongue, but the result of the questionnaire is lower than students' response to accuse the rule in ordering adjective. Therefore, impact of students struggling ordering adjective is directed to L1, which is Indonesian that

does not utilize adjective order. This statement is approved by the lecturer whom predicts errors in ordering adjective is affected by background knowledge.

Followed by Overgeneralization, students are puzzled in applying accurate word in adjective phrase. Some students get errors to distinguish between important and importance, to use specification for general aspect and double meaning. According to James in Heydari & Bagheri (2012:1584), overgeneralization occurs when students are unable to implicate precise context in either grammar rules or word use. Referred to students' statement in using participles in adjective phrase, 38.46% of total respondents misjudge participle as tenses, which also become a consideration from the lecturer. Furthermore, students get confused in choosing inappropriate adjective words with adjective phrases as being mentioned by the lecturer.

Related to how often students do errors in writing adjective phrases, some of students admitted they seldom make mistakes. Hence, quite a lot of students

also assumed that errors in their essays are not too often. Overgeneralization is counted as one of errors caused by students to generate a new rule that is inappropriate in target language (Hasyim 2002:47, Richard cited in Sari 2016:90). Reviving to the lecturer's supposition and a number of errors from products taken from documentation, then it is believed that students' errors in adjective phrases are not too often. Nevertheless, it is proving the eligibility that overgeneralization becomes another issue of students' difficulties.

Afterward, Ignorance of Rule Restriction is described as source of errors because students are unable to recognize exception rules from the target language (Richard cited in Ratnah 2013:161). Based on students' essays, there are some fallacies for referring English as 'the English language' for the context of describing English as the international language in general, not as implicating English alongside with the nationality or the people. On the other hand, students avoid using more complicated phrases and preferring more on simple adjective phrases. They think that using complex adjective order causes misinformation from the students supposed to tell verbally. From this statement, the lecturer presumes to claim students' L1 context as the cause. As being mentioned in the interview, the lecturer uses the use of article and order in phrases which is not available in mother tongue, leading to have impacts on other aspects.

The last indicator included in this research is Incomplete Application of Rule. This instrument becomes the least frequent of errors from the data in documentation, and students get errors more in omitting particular item that is supposed to be involved into phrases. Students are unaware of employing some rules from the target language, but they fail some points that cause errors. From the questionnaire, respondents predict that their errors are caused by the faulty in opting adjective words to other kinds in part of speech besides vocabulary issue. In the other hand, on the lecturer's respond, vocabulary turns to be the reason for students in omitting a particle in phrases.

In conclusion, there are two categories of students' difficulties, namely interlingual and intralingual transfer (Brown, as cited by Fatmawati 2016:20). Students encounter difficulties in writing adjective phrases although the number of occurrence is not too frequent. Accordingly, Mother Tongue Interference, Overgeneralization, Ignorance of Rule Restriction and Incomplete Application of Rule are discovered from the data analysis.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of conducting this research is to identify kinds of difficulties that students faced in writing adjective phrase. Therefore, triangulation was engaged as the instruments for collecting the data to the fourth semester students of English Language Education Study Program. Students' glitches from two tasks were compiled before classifying into four aspects of errors. Above all, the highest rate of error was influenced by addition with 34 errors (56.67%).

Concluding to the result of documentation and questionnaire answers, there are some causes which lead students to students' difficulties in writing adjective phrases. The data were substantiated by the lecturer of the Essay Writing class from the target class during interview session. Overall, there is categorization of students' difficulties related to this research, including Mother Tongue Interference, Overgeneralization, Ignorance of Rule Restriction and Incomplete Application of Rules. Although each indicator is accused to students' difficulties, Mother Tongue Interference becomes the leading issue as the misconception of students to entirely use the rule of the target language due to the dissimilarity to student's source language. In summation, according to the data, most of students participated in this research face difficulties to their mother tongue divergence.

Therefore, there are several suggestions as the reflection in order to abate the similar faults during composing adjective phrases. Students are recommended to adapt more on the context of the target language essay, which is English writing. As the lecturer

said throughout interview session, reading will expand students' knowledge, including their habit to readjustment perspectives with the context of target language or enrichment their vocabularies through drillings.

Moreover, to the lecturers who are dealing with writing courses, this research is adequate as the advice of students' problems while acquiring with any kinds of writing, especially in writing adjective phrases. By knowing the difficulties that influenced students to write, it is expected for the lecturers to solve the issues by contributing best solutions for the following performances in the class.

The last recommendation is bestowed to English Language Education Study Program. Even though the data show that the frequency of errors in students' essays is not recurrently appeared, the indicator unveiled table 4.1 conveys that all participants committed errors. As a consideration, knowledge in basic adjective phrases is important to be the additional lesson to emphasize their

comprehension during writing essays or in conducting communication verbally.

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