

# THE ANALYSIS OF GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURE IN WRITTEN TEXTS OF EFL LEARNERS

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## ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyze the grammatical structures used in the written texts of two English as a foreign language (EFL) learners. One of the EFL learners was from stage 2 and the other was from stage four. Therefore, both learners had different periods in learning English, and also grammatical knowledge of English. The learner in stage 2 has studied English for three terms and the learner in stage 4 has learnt English for two terms. The study was conducted using mixed-method approach. The results of the study showed that writing competence highly relied on the learners' grammatical structure knowledge in order to express a clear message in writing. The learner of stage 4 was more capable of expressing his message in his writing because of his better ability to use grammatical knowledge in his sentences. The study concludes that the better English grammatical knowledge the learners have, the better expressions can be written by them.

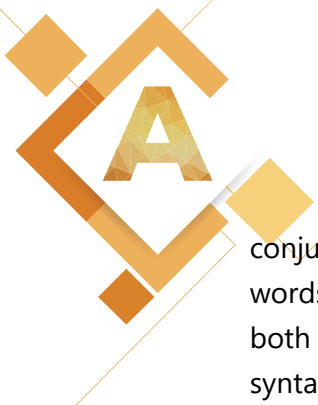
**KEYWORDS:** *EFL Learners, Grammatical Knowledge, Writing.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Grammatical knowledge is one of prominent aspect in learning English, used both in receptive and productive skills (Richards & Renandya, 2002; Schleppegrell, 1998). In terms of productive skills, writing requires adequate knowledge of grammar in order to express clear ideas or messages of the writer to the readers (Ananda et al., 2021; Rosdiana, 2020; Ur, 2008). The aspects of grammar comprise of types of sentences, types of clauses, subordinate clauses, tense and aspect, types of verb, subject, direct object, and references.

Therefore this study aims to discuss the use of grammar in writing of two learners of English from different stages related to some issues in written texts of the English learners as follows: type of sentence, type of clause, subordinate clause, tense and aspect, type of verb, subject, direct object, and reference, the ambiguous use of



conjunction, and the issues of word use and word formation including dysphemistic words, derivational, borrowing, blending and compounding words in written text of both learners. Furthermore, the study also aims to find out the learners' knowledge of syntactic structures in their writing that focuses on the frequent use of syntactical structures including types of sentences, types of clauses, and types of subordinate clauses, references and antecedent, and the progressive learning of English learners in terms of the ability use of grammatical structure in their writing texts.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

McGregor (2009) explains that all languages are placed together in sequences in order to describe the meaning for words which is called syntax. Syntax provides the means of 'opening' to grammatical system to express the new meanings, ambivalent of meanings, precious in meaning and correlation between ideas. "The openness" is described as the characteristic of all systems of grammar, phonological, morphological, lexical, and syntactic which is very significant in syntax. Yule (2006) also explains that syntax is studying about structure and the ordering components within sentences. Syntax focuses on the word arrange structure of phrase and the words within the sentences.

Fromkin et al. (2003) suggest that syntax relates to part of grammar and its rule in the sentences that is expressed by learners' knowledge. According to Fromkin et al. (2003), every sentence in English and other languages consists of sequence of words. However it is not always that the sequence of words is a sentence. Words sequence should be based on grammatical rule or according to the rules of syntax. Furthermore, they explain that syntactic structure is important to explain the ambiguous meaning or structural ambiguity in sentences. Syntax is also significant for the English users to determine the relation of grammar in sentence including grammaticality of sentence, word order, hierarchical organization of sentences, grammatical relations and either the different structures have different meaning or the same meaning. McGregor (2009) further describes that syntactic units consist of words, morphemes, phrases, sentences, and clauses.

#### SENTENCES

According to McGregor (2009), sentences consist of various types of morphemes from the simplest morphemes such as interjection to the complex syntactic form. There are three types of sentences. First one is simple sentences which contain only one verb, and describe a single event. Simple sentence may be modified by combining two simple sentences to produce a complex sentence. Two or more simple sentences can be joined together to construct the complex sentences which specify the combination

events by using the conjunction such as *so*, *when*, and *because*. Two simple sentences which are joined by coordinate conjunction *and*, *but*, and *or* can construct compound sentence which is two main sentences can stand alone without corresponding to each other.

The string of words that contains either a modified form of a simple sentence is named a clause. Clause can be as a minor clause which only contains simple structure and a word such as interjection and command sentence. The second one is called a major clause which has a complete verb and come together with nouns and conveys the event in the real or some imaginary world. The major clause in one hand can stand alone which is called main clause or independent clause. On the other hand, the major clause cannot stand alone and is called a subordinate clause or dependent clause which corresponds to the main clause. Tense aspect as one of students' grammatical knowledge is very crucial for the English learners to be able to express the correct meanings (Idaryani, 2015; Idaryani & Sari, 2021).

#### *PHRASES*

Phrases are group of words but are not formed a complete clause and become a part of clauses. There are five types of phrases. They are noun phrases (NPs), verb phrases (VPs), prepositional phrases (PPs), adjectival phrases, (AdjPs), and adverbial phrases (AdvPs). NPs derive from nouns that become the most significant words or morphemes which refers to some entity such as person or animal or abstract such as idea or emotion in the real or imaginary world. VPs are a group of words and morphemes which contain a lexical verb and describe the significant information of lexis. VPs come together with other morphemes including grammatical or lexical morphemes and bound or free morphemes. VPs constitute the events involving entities of NP. *Wanted*, *was written*, and *should look* are the example of VP. PPs are followed by noun or words such as *on the table*, *in the box*, *about holiday*. AdjPs contain of adjective and a modifier that indicates intensity of words such as *very tall* and *quite rich*. AdvPs also contain one adverb and a modifier that indicate to intensity a word as well. PPs can involve a PP in a larger PP which is called embedding PP: a PP within a large PP such as *through the mountains and the house on the hill* is usually come at the end of phrase for instances *the end of the universe* and *the man on the moon*.

Furthermore, Ur (2008) explains that the aim of writing is to express ideas and to convey messages to the reader. Writing should concern to formal aspect including good grammar, and appropriate lexical choice. The writer has to consider good construction, more precise and correctness expression in writing. Since writing relies heavily on grammatical features on tenses particularly simple present and simple past, it will help

the students to use appropriate verb phrases in different tenses, aspects and appropriate conjunction to sequence the event and link the idea of the topic in writing skill. According to Carter (2002), for writing purpose in classroom, all teachers should enable the students to reflect their writing through linguistic features particularly in grammar and lexis which contribute to particular acts of communication such as telling stories, arguing, negotiating a decision, and giving a formal talk.

## RESEARCH METHODS

Two written texts are analyzed from two English as a foreign language (EFL) learners who have different backgrounds of English. The learner from stage 2, whose first language is Korean, has studied English in an English language school for three terms. The second learner from stage 4, whose first language is Vietnamese and born in Vietnamese, has studied English for two terms in an English language center in Victoria, Australia. The first of writing texts of learner stage 2 was about the writer's experience as a pirate. The title of the text is *Travelling in the Sea*. The second writing text from learner stage 4 was about his response to a controversial issue of the dead of a mountaineer from England, David Sharp, which happened in 2006 May. The title of the writing is *Letter to the Editor*.

The data were gathered by adopting the quantitative and qualitative approaches. The purpose of quantitative method was to find out the frequent use of syntactic features in both of EFL students' writing including types of sentences, types of verbs, tense and aspect, reference and antecedents. The qualitative approach described the different development use of syntactic structures including variation of sentences, and types of subordinate clauses in order to find out the grammatical knowledge of both learners in their writing skill.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### QUANTITATIVE DATA OF SYNTACTIC STRUCTURES

**TABLE 1.** The occurrence of types of sentences of stage 2 and 4

TYPE OF SENTENCE	EFL LEARNER STAGE 2	EFL LEARNER STAGE 4
simple sentence	17	7
compound sentence	7	3
complex sentence	12	15



**TABLE 2.** The occurrence of subordinate clauses

TYPE OF SUBORDINATE CLAUSE	EFL LEARNER STAGE 2	EFL LEARNER STAGE 4
relative clause	1	2
adjunct clause	11	11
complement clause	3	6

**TABLE 3.** The occurrence of tense and aspect

TENSE AND ASPECT		EFL LEARNER STAGE 2	EFL LEARNER STAGE 4
tense	past	24	23
	non past	25	18
aspect	perfect	0	5
	non perfect	36	21
	progressive	10	3
	non progressive	30	24

The data on the above tables present the different frequency use of syntactic features of both learners. Table 1 shows that EFL learner from stage 2 tended to use type of simple sentences more frequent than complex sentences with 17 occurrences of whole writing. On the other hand, the least frequent use of compound sentences happened in the written text of EFL learner stage 4 with 3 times of occurrences. Stage 4 learner showed a significant use of complex sentences with 15 occurrences in the whole written text. Both of written texts showed the less occurrence of compound sentences.

Table 2 presents the different occurrences of kinds of subordinate clauses including relative clause, adjunct clause, and complement clause. The finding showed that both of the students showed the same number in the use of adjunct clauses with the frequency of 11 times. It also showed almost the same occurrence of relative clause of both students, in which the student of stage 2 used only once relative clause and the other learner used the relative clause just twice.

Table 3 shows the frequent use of tense and aspect in both written texts. The different number showed the different use of aspect between two students. The learner of stage 2 never used the perfect aspect in the whole of writing, but the occurrence of progressive aspect was 10 times. However, the data showed no significant different occurrences of past and non past tenses. The student of stage 4 showed more occurrence of past than non past tenses. However, the occurrence of perfect aspect between both students showed significant differences. The students of stage 4 used five times of perfect; however, he used less frequent progressive aspect compared to

the student of stage 2 with the occurrence of progressive of 10 times in the whole written text.

#### *THE USE OF REFERENCES AND ANTECEDENTS*

The analysis revealed that both learners used less adequate references and antecedents in their writings. For example, the learner from stage 2 used less adequate antecedent in term of reference 'they' which referred to antecedent 'people' and he overused the pronoun 'they' and 'we' in whole of his writing. Furthermore, the learner from stage 4 used less appropriate reference 'they' which referred to antecedent '40 climbers'. He also overused pronoun 'they' which indicated the noun phrases 'those 40 climbers'.

The student from stage 2 used a lot of simple sentences in his writing than complex sentences. It seems that the knowledge of complex sentences of the learner was still much less appropriate to explain two sequence event in forms of complex sentences. As a result, he often did repetition in his writing by using simple sentences. However, the data of syntactic features showed the students of stage 4 used a lot of complex sentences in his writing. It seems that the learner of stage 4 was more aware of the use of complex sentences. He was able to combine simple sentences into complex sentences by using a lot of adjunct clauses and some other various subordinate clauses, such as complement clauses and relative clauses. He was more capable of using various complex sentences in his writing to express the events in complex sentences.

In terms of tense and aspect, the learner of stage 2 never used perfect aspect. It is contrary to the student from stage 4 who used five times of perfect aspect. The learner of stage 2 used less of progressive aspect with just 3 times in whole writing. It seems that the knowledge of learner of stage 2 in terms of perfect aspect was very weak. He never used it to express the previous occasion on his writing. He was still not able to express the past action appropriately so that he tended to use a lot of tense of past. He also overused simple sentences in order to express the events on his writing. However, the student from stage 4 seemed to be able to use perfect aspect appropriately to express his sequence ideas instead of using simple sentences. He showed good development of perfect aspect.

The student of stage 4 used aspect of perfect and types of sentences in complex sentences more frequently than the other indicating that his knowledge of grammatical rule in his writing was more developed. The syntactic structure in his sentences was more appropriate than student from stage 2. It becomes the indicator that the development of syntactic structure of learner in stage 4 was more improved than the student of stage 2. The wider range of various syntactic unit used in the writing of

student stage 4 indicated his grammatical knowledge in his sentences. The student of stage 4 also showed the good knowledge of tenses. He was able to choose appropriate tense to sequence the event in his writing. He used non past tenses appropriately to express the past events.

Moreover, both students still had less adequate knowledge in using reference and antecedent. Both of them still misplaced and overused the reference of pronoun or noun phrase to refer the adequate antecedents. Both of the students often obscured the meaning of their writing due to ill-grammatical forms of the sentences in terms of antecedents of reference use.

Overall, the results of the analysis showed that the different levels of knowledge of both EFL learners have had syntactic structure competence including the use of types of sentence, subordinate clause, and tense and aspect in writing. It means that the better ability of students in the use of syntactic structure in their writing, the better grammatical competence it will be in their sentences. The better grammatical competence one has, the better syntactic structure one uses in the writing. Good writing relies on good knowledge of grammatical rule. If the learners are able to write in well-grammatical sentences, they will be able to deliver her message to the reader appropriately.

#### SELECTION

The use of selection verbs, transitive and intransitive, in both their writings showed that both of them used intransitive verbs more predominantly than transitive verbs.

#### WORD FORMATION

The analysis also found that both of the learners used various word formations in their written texts including compounding, derivation, and borrowing words. The student from stage 2 used many derivational words such as word *gold* derived from word *gild*, *dying* derived from *dye* and *ing*, and *digging* from *dig* and *ing*. Some other formation words found in his writing was compounding, such as *sometimes* coming from *some* and *time*, and *something* coming from *some* and *thing*. The word blending was *another* which came from words *one* and *other*.

The student from stage 4 used a lot of derivational words and some other formation words including compounding and borrowing. The derivational words were used in his writing such as *mountaineer*, *alive*, *dying*, and *life*. The word of compounding was also found such as *preventable* coming from *prevent* and *able*, *anyone* from *any* and *one*, *frostbite* from *frost* and *bite*, and *someone* derived from *some* and *one*. He also used

dysphemism word *cut* instead of word *amputate* in his sentence '*Doctor must cut his four limbs*'.

Both students used a lot of derivational words in their written texts. However, the student from stage 4 used more various formation words than the other. His lexical choice seemed better than the student of stage 2. The learner of stage 4 was able to choose appropriate words such as *frostbite* and *preventable* to convey his ideas.

#### THE AMBIGUOUS CONJUNCTION

There are two types of conjunctions: coordinate conjunction and subordinate conjunction. Coordinate conjunctions are *and*, *but*, and *or*. Subordinate conjunctions are such as *because* and *so*. Two main sentences that are connected by coordinate conjunction are classified as compound sentences. The sentences are independent and do not correspond to each other. However, two sentences that are joined by subordinate conjunction are called as complex sentences. Subordinate conjunction has function as complementizer to introduce the dependent clause. The dependent clause is called adjunct clause that should correspond to the main clause. Hence, two sentences are joined by subordinate conjunction is a complex sentence which consists of independent and dependent clauses.

Therefore, the writing competence highly relies on syntactic structure knowledge in order to express the clear message in writing. The analysis showed that both of written texts from different level EFL learners demonstrated the different abilities of syntactic structures in their sentences in order to express their ideas and convey the meaningful messages to the readers. The learner of stage 4 was more capable of expressing his messages to the readers about the tragedy of Mountaineer, David Sharp since he had better ability to use syntactic knowledge in his sentences. Hence, the meaning of his writing was clearer and constructed in better grammatical forms. However, the writing of the learner of stage 2 still showed low knowledge of syntactic structure in his sentences. Instead of using various sentences, he only expressed his ideas by adopting simple sentences predominantly in his writing. Both learners also showed different abilities in choosing appropriate vocabulary in their writing. The student from stage 4 seemed to have a better ability in using more appropriate words than the other learner.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Grammatical knowledge is one of the prominent factors in learning English as a foreign language because it is always applied in English skills. In terms of productive skills, writing requires heavily on correct grammatical structures in order to display the clear



messages to the readers from the author. The better knowledge of grammar the learners have, the better expressions they can write with various different sentences to carry out the clear messages in written texts. It is suggested that further studies need to be done to find out the challenges faced by the English learners in learning English grammar.

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