

FRAGMENT AND RUN-ON SENTENCES ANALYSIS ON STUDENTS' ESSAYS

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ABSTRACT

This research is conducted based on the writer's concern on the linguistic problems found in her Writing class. Fragment and run-on sentences become the focus of the study because the two are among basic errors students make in their essays. If students' essays are still problematic in the two areas, it can be guaranteed that other aspects of their essays are also problematic. To analyze the data, the writer investigates 269 sentences of 17 essays written by Writing IV students of STKIP PGRI Banjarmasin. From the results, it is found that 51.3% of sentences written by the students are not well-formed. 27.14% of the sentences are fragments and 24.16% of them are run-ons. Of the seven types of fragment sentences, the most prominent types are (1) conjunctive clause fragment (36.99%), (2) lonely subject fragment (23.29%), and (3) missing subject + verb fragment (19.18%). Of the five types of run-on sentences found, the most prominent types are (1) superfluous verb (38.46%), (2) two or more sentences into one (30.77%), and (3) comma splices (16.92%). Students' problems in fragment and run-on sentences are considered the case of interference because of three considerations: high occurrences of errors, patterns of errors formed, and the fact that the problems are found in all students' essays.

Keywords: fragment, run-on, error, essay

1. INTRODUCTION

EFL teachers all over the world must have struggled to overcome their students' writing problems – shall they be linguistic or non-linguistics ones. The most essential job of a writer, according to Bram (2002, p.25) is to make sure the writer's messages across to the readers. This is why writing is never an easy activity to do for most students learning English in EFL setting. Not only they have to make sure that they deliver the messages well, students also have to pay attention to the correct use of the foreign language they are learning.

In STKIP PGRI Banjarmasin, students of the English Department are required to take four writing classes gradually. They are prepared to write in English from the very basic writing – the creation of sentences – to advanced writing. However, based on my routine observation as the lecturer assigned for

Writing IV class, students still find it hard to compose an essay in English despite the fact they have taken three previous writing classes before. Dependencies towards translation machine, copy-pasting habit from internet sources, vocabularies as well as grammatical problems are among issues that students encounter in their writing class.

My routine observations in the writing class where I am currently teaching lead me to carry out the research focusing on fragment and run-on issues in students' essays. These two are problems that students encounter in sentence level. Fragment and run-on are associated with the wrong placement of subject and verb in a sentence. The understanding of subject and verb placement is the basic linguistic competence that students need to have in order to be able to produce English writing. When the basic is problematic, then we do not need to question the rest.

2. METHODS

This research is a descriptive research intended to describe the phenomena found in a certain context. The data of this research are taken from essays written by 17 students taking Writing IV class in STKIP PGRI Banjarmasin. The essays made by students of Writing IV class are chosen as the subjects of study because the students taking Writing IV are now taking the last class of Writing class series offered by the campus. After this, the students are hoped to be ready for thesis writing. Therefore, revealing their problems in terms of fragment and run-on sentences is necessary so that the students and other related parties have ideas on things they need to work on prior to a higher level of writing activities such as writing thesis for the students' graduation.

There are total 269 sentences of 17 essays analyzed in the study. The sentences are classified into complete sentences, fragment sentences, and run-on sentences. After the classification, fragment and run-on sentences which are structurally similar are categorized into the same group to determine types and frequency of their occurrences. The final analysis is to determine whether or not the phenomena of fragment and run-on sentences found in the data fall into

interference case by considering textual and contextual factors underlying the occurrences of these problematic sentences.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the analysis, the results found can be summarized into the following table:

Table 1. *The Distribution of Fragment and Run-on Sentences in Students' Essays*

FRAGMENTS		RUN-ONS	
Conjunctive clause fragments	36.99%	Comma splices	16.92%
Participle phrase fragments	2.74%	Two or more sentences into one	30.77%
Afterthought fragments	2.74%	Conjunction misuse	1.54%
Lonely subject fragments	23.29%	Superfluous subject	12.31%
Lonely verb fragments	9.59%	Superfluous verb	38.46%
Appositive fragments	5.48%		
Missing S + V fragments	19.18%		
Total	100%		100%

Of 269 sentences analyzed, there found 73 sentences in fragment forms and 65 sentences in run-on forms. It means that more than half of the sentences the students wrote for their essays (51.3%) are not syntactically well-formed. 27.14% of the sentences are fragments, and 24.16% of them are run-ons. The results indicate students' problem in writing in English, despite the fact that English is their major of study. Moreover, though 48.7% of the sentences written by the students have complete components of subject and verb and deliver complete thought, not all of them are acceptable because there are many syntactical and semantic errors still found. Word orders, wrong choices of dictions, and wrong tenses are among the errors found. However, in this study, those errors are neglected since the focus of this study is fragment and run-on sentences only.

3.1 PROMINENT FRAGMENT SENTENCES

Based on the analysis, there are seven types of fragment sentences found in students' essays. These seven types are conjunctive clause fragments, participle phrase fragments, afterthought fragments, lonely subject fragments, lonely verb fragments, appositive fragments, and missing s + v fragments. Of those types, the most prominent types of fragments are (1) conjunctive clause fragment (36.99%), (2) lonely subject fragment (23.29%), and (3) missing subject + verb fragment (19.18%).

CONJUNCTIVE CLAUSE FRAGMENT

Conjunctive clause fragment happens when conjunction that is functioned to connect two clauses is inserted in a single clause. This makes the conjunction loses its function. In many cases, this happens because the students put full stop in the wrong place. The example of conjunctive clause fragment found in the data is as follow:

Even I think that I've grown to be a mature person. It is difficult...

In the sentence above, subordinator 'even' that is supposed to connect one independent clause and one dependent clause stands alone in a single clause. This happens because the students who wrote the sentence inserted a wrong punctuation mark. The student inserted full stop (.) instead of comma (,) that makes the sentence deliver incomplete thought. Students' understanding on the function of connector and the use of punctuation can help them avoid this type of fragment sentence.

LONELY SUBJECT FRAGMENT

Lonely subject fragment is the case when verb is missing in the sentence. This happens because most of the students still use direct translation method from Indonesian language when writing in English. In Indonesian language, it is acceptable for a sentence to have subject without verb. However, in English, subject and verb are compulsory elements of a sentence. If a sentence misses one of these components, then the sentence will become fragment sentence.

The following is the example of lonely subject fragment found in the data:

If I at home, my mother always fed me food.

The first clause of the sentence above is fragment because it has no verb. When translated into Indonesian language, the students may find the sentence acceptable. However, when applying English rules of creating correct sentence, the sentence above is incomplete since it misses the auxiliary verb 'am' after subject 'I' in the clause *If I at home*.

MISSING SUBJECT + VERB FRAGMENT

It surprises me as the researcher that students still make missing subject + verb fragment in their essays. It surprises me more that this type of fragment is in the top three in terms occurrences. One of the sentences in the category of missing subject + verb fragment found in the data is as follow:

Many things that people do not know about me.

In the sentence above, the sentence has no subject and verb. It makes the sentence incomplete. This may happen because of one of the two reasons or the combination of both. First, this may happen because of the students' lack of understanding on English grammar. Second, this may potentially happen because the students directly translated the sentences that they made from Indonesian language into English using Indonesian grammar. This finding shows that lecturers responsible for grammar and writing classes need to put special attention on how to make students aware of the differences on grammatical rules between L1 and L2.

3.2 PROMINENT RUN-ON SENTENCES

In terms of run-on sentences, it is found that the errors made by the students form five different types of run-on sentences. These five types are comma splices, two or more sentences into one, conjunction misuse, superfluous subject, and superfluous verb. Of the five types, the types with highest occurrences are (1) superfluous verb (38.46%), (2) two or more sentences into one (30.77%), and (3) comma splices (16.92%).

SUPERFLUOUS VERB

Superfluous verb is the situation when two verbs or more exist in a sentence without properly connected with phrase or clause connector. In many cases, it happens because the students insert unnecessary auxiliary verbs when the sentences already have main verbs.

The example of superfluous verb case found in the data is as follow:

I **have** a principle in life **is** when I fail I will still try to be successful.

In the above example, there are two verbs ‘have’ and ‘is’ in the first clause of the sentence. It makes the sentence becomes run-on. The other two verbs, ‘fail’ and ‘will still try’ in the rest clauses are acceptable since they are connected with the subordinate ‘when’. There are at least two ways of fixing the sentence above. First is by changing the first clause of the sentence *I have a principle in life* into phrase *my principle in life* so that the phrase can be the subject of the sentence with ‘is’ as the verb. Second is by dropping ‘is’ and connecting the first clause of the sentence with the rest with semi colon (;).

The revised versions of the run-on sentence above are:

1. My principle in life is when I fail, I will still try to be successful.
2. I have a principle in life; when I fail, I will still try to be successful.

Of course the two revisions above are only examples on how the students can improve such sentence so that they are not considered run-on. Other alternatives are possible. However, what I need to outline in this study is the fact that students still find it hard to apply English rules verb placement in sentences. The high frequency of superfluous verb in students’ essays (38.46%) shows their confusion in using appropriate verbs for their sentences.

TWO OR MORE SENTENCES INTO ONE

Sometimes, students have two or more complete ideas that they deliver in a sentence without being separated by proper punctuation or connector. It leads to the phenomenon in which two or more sentences unacceptably become one. The example of two or more sentences into one is as follow:

For example I always read comic while walking or playing my yoyo in front of class while waiting for the teacher come playing with my Gundam.

In the sentence above, there are several sentences that are crammed into one. In order to avoid run-on sentence, the sentence needs to be split into two or three different sentences. The possible improvements for the sentence above include:

1. For example, I always read comic while walking or play with my yoyo in front of the class while waiting for the teacher to come. I also love playing with my Gundam.
2. For example, I always read comic while walking. I also often play my yoyo in front of the class while waiting for the teacher to come. Besides, I love playing with my Gundam.

Students need to consider how to split their ideas in their essays. They cannot cram too many ideas in a sentence unless they are able to insert appropriate connector or punctuation.

COMMA SPLICES

Comma is used to separate words or phrases not clauses or sentences. In the sentence where comma splits clauses without connector or when it splits two or more sentences instead of full stop (.), then this is when comma splices case occurs. The example of comma splices found in the data is as follow:

I don't deny that, I love being different to other people, love to do what normal people don't usually do, I love to try something new.

There are too many complete ideas delivered in the sentence above. The sentence is supposed to be broken down into several different sentences separated by full stop (.) instead of comma (,). If not, then the sentence is classified into comma splices type of run-on sentence.

3.3 THE CASE OF INTERFERENCE

Before deciding whether or not fragment and run-on sentences in this study are considered the case of interference, it is better for us to have one idea of what interference is. Skiba (1997) defined interference as the transfer of one language into the learning of another. It means that interference happens when students' mother tongues or their national language affect their production of foreign language.

Based on my investigation in this study, I conclude that fragment and run-on sentences phenomena in students' essays are caused by interference. There are three reasons why I come to the conclusion. The reasons are both textual and contextual.

First, the occurrences of fragment and run-on sentences are high. 51.3% is enough evidence showing fragment and run-on sentences in the data are not simply mistakes, but they are errors made by students. Mistakes only happen once or twice, but if they are repetitive, then they are errors. Brown (2007, pp. 257-259) stated that errors are the observable alterations of grammatical competence of a language learner in his native language which affects his target language. This definition from Brown is the evidence to claim that errors found in students' essays happen because of the interference of students' L1 towards their L2.

Second, the errors in terms of fragment and run-on sentences form certain patterns. These patterns can be related to the syntactic patterns of Indonesian language. Therefore, it is the evidence that students' understanding on Indonesian syntactic patterns affect their English grammar.

The last, I conclude that problems of fragment and run-on sentences in this study as interference case because the problems are faced by all students becoming the subject of my study. Of 17 students, none of them is free from fragment and run-on sentences problems. It proves that all students studying in the same place and coming from the same social background potentially face similar problems in learning foreign language. This is because they have almost equal exposure. If only the problems of fragment and run-on sentences happened to merely one or two or three students, my conclusion might be different.

4. CONCLUSIONS

There are three conclusions that can be drawn from this research. First, considering the fact that the students still have problems in forming good sentences in English, they need more practices in this area. The students need to be given more opportunities to write and to get the review of their writings so that they can find which aspects of their writings that still need improvements. Asking students to write and simply giving them scores without feedbacks are not a wise option for the lecturers in charge for Writing classes. Second, the syllabus of Writing course series in STKIP PGRI Banjarmasin need to be reviewed to see if the materials offered have met students' needs and if they are enough to prepare the students to write their thesis report later on. The last, in relation to interference, students need to be given awareness of how their mother tongues and Indonesian language are different in several areas from English so that they can be more aware not to write anything in English the way they write in their mother tongues or Indonesian language.

5. REFERENCES

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