Grammatical Error Analysis in Writing of ESL Diploma Students

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ABSTRACT---- *This research was conducted to analyze the grammatical errors types in the use of simple past and past continuous tense. This research identified the grammatical errors committed by second language learners of English (ESL). It was conducted on 28 Diploma ESL students. For their grammatical errors to be identified, samples of their written work under the genre of narrative writing were collected. Subsequently, the errors were recorded and classified based on types and forms of errors such as the wrong or inappropriate uses of Nouns, Verbs, Adjectives (Parts of Speech) and Tenses. In addition, this study provides useful information as well as the analysis and discussion on various errors which are commonly found in narrative writing. The results of this small scale study may be useful for extended research in the field of Error Analysis especially on ESL learners of the Foundation and Degree programmes in the university or as collaborative effort with other higher learning institutions.*

Keywords---- contrastive analysis hypotheses (CAH),error analysis, intra-lingual transfer.
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1. INTRODUCTION

Grammar is regarded as the most fundamental element of language learning for second language learners. In Malaysia, possessing knowledge of grammar is important for learners in all schools for the fact that English is a subject taught in the curriculum. Previous studies have proposed that in written form especially, English as a Second Language (ESL) learners committed common grammatical errors that showed their incompetency in some grammar aspects. Specifically, this study highlighted the common errors in writing by ESL learners of a boarding school where the learners were expected to have higher English competency than daily schools' students. As achieving competency in second language is a progressive process, common grammatical errors are continuously dealt by both learners and teachers using various techniques to improve learners' competencies especially in producing the written form of the language. Besides focusing on the types of errors, this study highlighted the various forms of common grammatical errors in the use of tenses committed by ESL learners in narrative writing.

This study is conducted based on the following objectives:

1. To identify the grammatical errors committed by ESL learners in writing
2. To investigate the various forms of errors in the use of Tenses committed by ESL learners in writing

Based on the educational context in Malaysia, there is a need for ESL learners to be equipped with good grammar knowledge since the educational system relies very much on written examination as compared to other language skills. However, learners in secondary schools, especially, despite having learnt English language since their primary schools, tend to commit common grammatical errors in writing. Those errors are thus believed to be caused by several factors including first language interference, lack of grammar knowledge and ignorance of learners of the grammar rules. As for narrative writing, students are supposed to be aware of the appropriate tenses that they should use. Despite all that, there are still many students who are not concerned about the choice of tenses which suit the nature of narrative essay.

This study is conducted in reference to these two research questions:

1. What are the grammatical errors committed by ESL learners in writing?
2. What are the errors in the use of Tenses committed by ESL learners in writing?

This study is an attempt to provide an overview of most common grammatical errors committed by ESL learners in written form. ESL learners are taught grammar much more than any other language aspects, especially in formal

classroom context. However, there is the need for learners to be informed on the common errors they commit. In addition, it is worthwhile for teachers to know the causes of the same errors committed by students so that ways to minimize them could be figured out. Although this study is not focused on the need to give feedback on the errors, the researcher would still give the feedback for the sake of learning procedure in class (task is given, students complete the task then the marked task is returned to each student)

Thus, this study, even though in a small scale is hoped to be useful for teachers to find out the grammatical errors which are commonly committed by the students so that possible ways for learners to improve their grammar as well as language competency based on their writing might be later considered. In addition, the learners' performance in English examination paper is expected to be improved too. As for the university, it has always been a healthy competition between the universities that they compete to be in good positions in the universities' ranking. This implies that this study might also contribute to finding alternatives and remedial implementations in increasing students' language performance in the written examination and place the university in a good ranking especially for English subject.

For syllabus and curriculum designers, this study might be a useful additional reference since it is hoped to be able to extract the grammatical aspects which need to be emphasized on the students learning in universities. The same goes to educational book publishers who might want to revise their publications by publishing grammar books on certain grammatical aspects according to the students' needs. This is due to the finding which reveals that different students encounter different difficulties and problems in various grammatical aspects. Workbooks or references published with standardized quality could also be the additional materials for students to work out on their respective aspects of grammar problems.

2. METHODOLOGY

This is a case study utilizing error analysis of learners' writing performance, specifically on grammatical errors. The case study involved a group of people being observed in order to determine the outcomes. In this study, the common grammatical errors were the outcomes obtained from the students' writing. The number of errors committed was also taken into consideration.

The researcher applied the procedures of convenience sampling in which the samples were selected simply because they were easily accessible to the researcher (Fook, Sidhu, & Singh, 2006). Specifically, the study was conducted on Diploma ESL students who were selected at random of the English subject course. Those 28 students represented 27.7 percent of the total 101 students who took the course.

The researcher has conducted a pre-test to gauge the level of the students in the beginning of the 14 weeks course which commenced in the month of August 2014. According to the researcher, the aims of the test were to identify students' proficiency levels and skills besides to identify students' maturity of thoughts. The duration of the test is one hour. Although they were from a mixed capability group, their level of proficiency is classified as intermediate based on their performance in class. The marks that they scored in the test were way too low to classify them as advanced students. There was only an instrument used in this study which was the students' writing on a given topic. The title of the essay which was chosen 'It had been raining all day' is apt because rain has been a cause of worry for Malaysians these past 2 years be it drought or flood. The rationale of choosing the essay question from an everyday event or situation which the students were familiar is because the question was undoubtedly valid for students in terms of the context, theme as well as syllabus. Narrative essay was preferred since it does not restrict the students' use of language as well as creativity upon performing the language. For research purpose, the students were given 50 minutes to write an essay of 250 words. The writing took place during lecture session, specifically in the two hours period English class. The question for essay writing was given as follow:

Write a composition of **about 250 words** on the following topic.
Write a story beginning with:
"It had been raining all day……."
Narrative Writing Question

Since the research was on students' common grammatical errors in writing, the data was collected in written form; the students' writing of narrative essay collected after the two hours period English lesson. The rationale of having written data was the fact that it was easier to be analyzed since it provided clear evidence of the expected findings which were the grammatical errors. Not only was the written data easy to obtain but also the fact that the data was easy to be presented on paper. Meanwhile, numerical data was also collected when it came to counting the errors and converting them into percentage.

All the 28 transcripts of the essays were collected right after the class ended and they were marked later. Proofreading technique was sometimes used whenever appropriate to point the errors besides written comments at the end of the transcripts. Specific grammatical errors marked were extracted to be classified into several categories including Parts of Speech and Tenses which were most commonly found based on the essays written. The analyzing stage considered counting the number of errors according to the respective categories before the comparison was made on the frequency of the types of error committed.

As the types of errors were identified and tabulated, the analysis continued on investigating the various forms of grammatical errors based on the most common ones. For instance, the most common grammatical errors were classified under the use of Tenses. The forms of errors on Tenses were later divided into several sub categories such as Past Simple, Past Progressive and Past Perfect.

The major limitation is the issue of generalizability of the findings that might not apply to the larger scale of the universities context in Malaysia. To be precise, this study encompassed the common grammatical errors committed by only 28 Diploma ESL students, a number which do not represent the performance of the whole student population of the University. This is due to the limited abilities and time of the researcher to be really focused and aware of every single grammatical error made by learners and to record all the errors.

Grammatical Errors Committed by ESL Learners in Writing

Types of Grammatical Errors

Student	Types of Grammatical Error (Frequency)						
	Tenses	Gerund	Adjective	Noun	Verb	SVA	Preposition
1.	7	4	-	4	2	3	-
2.	15	2	2	2	4	4	-
3.	22	-	2	4	3	4	3
4.	8	2	2	2	2	3	2
5.	11	2	-	-	2	3	2
6.	21	-	2	3	2	5	2
7.	2	3	2	2	4	3	2
8.	28	2	2	3	9	6	-
9.	2	2	2	-	6	7	-
10.	5	-	3	-	2	10	-
11.	18	2	3	2	4	4	3
12.	10	-	2	3	2	4	3
13.	17	2	3	7	4	5	4
14.	12	-	2	3	2	2	-
15.	11	2	-	2	2	11	2
16.	9	2	3	6	8	6	2
17.	5	2	2	5	5	7	4
18.	4	2	2	4	8	16	2
19.	21	1	2	2	3	9	2
20.	13	1	-	3	5	8	-
21.	17	3	3	-	9	5	-
22.	19	4	2	3	11	12	-
23.	6	-	2	4	2	7	2
24.	8	1	-	5	6	8	3
25.	16	-	3	-	4	9	3
26.	3	2	-	2	8	10	-
27.	7	5	2	2	2	16	-
28.	11	-	2	3	2	4	2
Total	328	46	50	76	123	191	43
Total %	38.3	5.4	5.8	8.9	14.4	22.3	5.0

The table shows seven types of grammatical errors identified based on the students' narrative writing which includes errors in Tenses, Gerund, Adjective, Noun, Verb and Subject-Verb Agreement (SVA) and Preposition. It is discovered that the most frequent types of error being committed are errors in the use of Tenses, followed by errors in the uses of Verb and Noun which make up the three most common grammatical errors as a whole. Meanwhile, the least number of errors are those of the use of Gerund.

The table also indicates the presence of errors in students' writing as individuals. This finding reveals that every student commits at least one error in the use of Tenses. A total of 18 students commit errors in the uses of Adjective, Noun, Verb and SVA respectively. Besides that, there are 17 students with errors on Preposition and 20 students with errors in the use of Gerund. It is also discovered that each student has committed at least three types of grammatical error with four students are recorded to have committed a maximum of seven types of grammatical errors respectively. An average of five types of errors is identified from each student's writing based on the calculation made by finding the approximated mean.

In the same table, the last row portrays the data on the presence of grammatical errors in percentage form. Based on the data, the difference of percentage recorded is rather obvious with the highest percentage is 38.3. This is to clarify that

38.3 percent of all the errors committed by the students fall under the category of Tenses. The second highest percentage recorded is the errors committed in the use of SVA which is 22.3 percent, followed closely by the errors in the uses of Verbs and Nouns which cover 14.4 and 8.9 percent respectively, of the total percentage. 5.8 percent of errors committed in the use of Adjectives while the two lowest percentages of errors are those committed in the uses of Gerunds (5.4%) and Preposition (5.0%).

3. FINDINGS

Based on the findings, it is summarized that there are three most common types of grammatical errors identified from the students' writing which are errors in Tenses, SVA and Verb. These three types of errors can be further divided into several categories in detail; considering the examples of errors extracted from the writing.

As presented in the statistics, the most common grammatical errors committed fall under the category of Tenses. Since the genre of the essay given to the students is narrative, it could somehow be predicted that they tend to commit errors on the application of Past Tense. Most errors of this type portray that the students did not change the Verbs into Past Tense form. In cases where there were more than three errors of the same type, the Verbs were repeatedly used in Present Tense from the beginning until the end of the writing. For example:

> *Then, Jacky, my only brother **bring** it to me and **show** me the album. He also*
> ***ask** me to tell him a story about a picture of me and the guy beside me at a*
> *river holding a big, huge catfish. Suddenly, an unrank sad feeling **attack** my*
> *heart and soul…*

Excerpt 3 (a): Errors in the Inappropriate Use of Present Tense

Referring to the excerpt above, the bold words are Verbs which the student did not change into Past Tense form. Since it had been made compulsory for the essay to begin with the sentence 'It had been raining all day', the student should have understood that all the Verbs used to describe things happening in the past should be in the form of Past Tense. Thus, the bold Verbs in Excerpt 3(a) should be written as 'brought', 'showed', 'asked' and 'attacked'.

Besides the Simple Past Tense, there are two types of Tenses which have not been correctly applied in the students' writing. For example:

(a) *"Chong, I am sorry. **I has try** my best but God's plan is flawless"*
(b) *She **was try** start a piggy bank for them so they could go to college.*

Excerpt 3(b): Errors in the Inappropriate Use of Tenses

Both sentences in the above excerpt contain errors on the application of two types of Tenses. Sentence *(a)* shows the error represented by the phrase 'has try'. For this example, the student should have applied the rule of Present Perfect Tense which takes the form of 'verb to have + a past participle' which should make up the correct phrase of 'has tried'. Putting Sentence *(a)* into the context of the whole essay, the Past Perfect is not applied to correct the bold phrase because the sentence is a dialogue; spoken directly at that particular moment.

For sentence *(b)*, the error represented by the bold phrase is categorized under the application of the Past Continuous Tense. This type of tense is used to talk about something happening around a past time. It takes the form of 'verb to be + (verb+ing), resulting in the correct form of the phrase 'was trying' which is supposed to be used in sentence *(b)*.

Errors in the use of Verbs vary from those related to tenses with the applications of certain types of verb including Modal Verbs, Verb versus Noun, verbs in passive form and also Verb to be. For these findings to be clarified, the excerpts below are further analyzed.

(a) *While I was **sawing** her, I remember to my cousin…*
(b) *We saw her leg was **blooding** seriously.*
(c) ***I cannot accepted** the fate but I tried to be calm.*
(d) *Her parents **dead** in an accident.*
(e) *Shah **found** with a pale face and Shah **was declare** dead.*
(f) *I hoped **she at home**. I tried to find her at her favourite bookstore but **she not there**. I just wanted to confess my feeling toward her before **it too late**. **I still happy** because she was the last image that I saw.*
(g) *She**stoped** and started to run.*

Excerpt 3(c): Errors in the Use of Verbs

The first two sentences show errors on the use of Verbs in relation to Past Continuous Tense. However, the obvious problem is that the form 'verb + ing' is not applied appropriately since the student should not have used Past Tense form of the Verb added with the continuous form '–ing' which creates the word 'sawing' instead of 'seeing'. On the other hand, the second sentence shows the incorrect form of the Verb which should be 'bleed + ing' and not the noun 'blood' plus the continuous form of '–ing'.

Based on the students' writing, there are quite a number of errors in the use of Modal Verbs just like the one committed in sentence *(c)*. Although the whole idea is that verbs describing past events in the essay should be in the Past Tense, it is restricted that the use of Modal Verb should be followed by the root word of a Verb resulting in the correct phrase of 'cannot accept' substituting the wrong one, 'cannot accepted'.

Next, sentence *(d)* is one of those sentences in the students' writing which portrays the interchanging of choices between Verb and Noun, while in other situation it is between Verb and Adjective. For sentence *(d)* in the excerpt, the student might have wanted to use the word 'dead' as a Verb but it should be corrected to form the sentence as 'Her parents died in an accident'. Alternatively, the students could still use the word 'dead' functioning as Adjective; resulting in the new sentence of 'Her parents were dead because of the accident'.

Another common error in the use of Verbs is regarding the Passive Verb forms such as those highlighted in sentence *(e)*. The restricted form of a Passive Verb is 'be + a participle'. Therefore, the grammatical sentence to correct those errors in sentence *(e)* would be 'Shah was found with a pale face and he was declared dead'. This is the grammatically correct sentence with the application of passive form, concordant with the tense used for the whole essay which is Past Tense.

The next grammatical errors in the use of Verbs might not be considered as the wrong use of Verbs. It is actually the omission of Verbs, which in this case in sentence *(f)*, the omission of Verb to be before a Preposition or Adjective. Obeying the grammatical rules, the corrections would change those phrases into 'she was at home', 'she was not there', 'it was too late' and 'I was still happy'. Besides, a minor error in the use of Verbs is identified when the Simple Past form of the word 'stop' is spelled wrongly as 'stoped'. The correct spelling should be 'stopped'; another 'p' is added before the word is added with the morpheme '-ed' to mark the use of Simple Past.

3.1.1 Nouns

As presented in the statistics, errors in the use of Nouns are included in the three most common types of grammatical errors committed by students in their writing. This type of error is further divided into several categories or forms represented by the sentences in the following excerpt.

(a) *We took all the three **point**.*
(b) *With 10 **game** remaining, we had won six matches, drawn three and lost one.*
(c) *Almost every weekend, Shah and **me** went swimming in the river.*
(d) *After a few **minute**, my mother, me and rescue team arrived at the river bank.*
(e) *As fast as my **foots** could bring me, I hoped she was at home.*

Excerpt 3(d): Errors in the Use of Nouns

In sentence *(a)* and sentence *(b),* the uses of both nouns are incorrect since the nouns are not concordant with the numbers before them. As the rule of grammar has stated, Nouns which are more than one are classified as plural Nouns and the regular form of plural Nouns is 'noun + s'. Thus, the grammatically correct use of Nouns should modify 'point' and 'game' into 'points' and 'games' respectively.

The second category of errors on the use of Nouns is identified in sentence *(c),* with the Noun 'me' in bold. This is a very common error found in the students' writing where it involves the structure of those sentences with the Pronoun 'me' being used instead of the correct form; 'Shah and I'. The same goes to the errors in 'me and my family' in another situation where it is supposedly written as 'my family and I'.

3.1.2 Errors Committed in the Use of Tenses by ESL Learners in Writing

Based on the findings presented in the previous section, it is clear that the students committed the most number of errors in the use of Tenses. The following calculation may give an idea on the data collected on the errors:

Mean = Total Errors in Tenses / Total Number of Students
= 328/857
= 38.3~28

Figure 3(a): Average Errors Committed by Each Student

The mean calculated indicates that an average of 12 errors in the use of Tenses were committed by each student. These errors are divided into several categories of Tenses as what have been presented in the previous section. It is found that the various forms of errors in the use of Tenses constitute most errors in the following categories:

Tenses	No. of Errors	Percentage of Errors (%)
Simple Past	151	80.75
Past Progressive	19	10.16
Past Perfect	17	9.09
Total	187	100

Table 3.1.2: Grammatical Errors in the Uses of Tenses

It is discovered that most of the errors in the use of Tenses are those under the main category of Simple Past Tense which cover 80.75 percent of the total errors. This is followed by the errors in the use of Past Progressive represented by an amount of 10.16 percent. The remaining 9.09 percent constitute the errors in the use of Past Perfect Tense. For the Simple Past, this type of errors can be identified in the following examples.

> When *I enjoy* watching movie 'Hantu Kak Limah Balik Rumah' with all my children, suddenly *I see* one of my children *is* search thoroughly for no reason and he *find* an old album with black and white photo.

Excerpt 3(a): Errors in the Inappropriate Use of Present Tense

From the example in Excerpt 3(a), there are four errors which show the inappropriate use of the Simple Present Tense. The words 'enjoy', 'see' and 'find' should be in the Simple Past Tense form since the events stated in the essay took place in the past. Thus, the correct form of Simple Past Tense should be applied to modify the words into 'enjoyed', 'saw' and 'found'. The word 'is' is inappropriate because it is followed by a verb,'search'. For that reason, the grammatical form should be in Past Tense. When a continuous action happens in the past, the appropriate tense to be used is the Past Progressive. As a correction, the phrase 'is search' in the example should take the form of the Past Progressive Tense 'was searching'.

The next example of errors in Tenses can be identified based on the following excerpt.

> I saw a little girl crying at the bus stop. I asked myself "Where *was* her heir? What *was* she doing there alone?" After a moment, I realised that there was no use to ask those questions…

Excerpt 3(b): Errors in the Inappropriate Use of Past Tense

From the above example, the words in bold are already in the Simple Past form. The use of the form is considered ungrammatical and it is inappropriate for words in bold to take the form of the Simple Past in dialogues. Therefore, the Simple Present form should be applied to correct the errors to change the word 'was' with the word 'is'.

Next, there are also several examples taken from the students' essays to show the occurences of errors in Tenses including the Simple Past, Past Progressive and Past Perfect.

> (a) The reason why *I am* not coming with them was *I want* to do the revision. My PMR exam trial was around the corner. My dad always *remind* me to study.
> (b) Sara was *protect* the money for our daughters in a jar. She was *try* to start a piggy bank for them so they could go to college.
> (c) Unfortunately, she did not know where her father *gone*.
> (d) We noticed that Shah *had disappear* from our sight.

Excerpt 3(c): Errors in the Application of Tenses

In sentence *(a)*, the words in bold indicate the errors where they should take the form of the Simple Past Tense since the actions happen in the past. They should be written as 'was', 'wanted' and 'reminded', respectively to make the sentences grammatically correct. For sentence *(b)*, the words in bold are ungrammatical and they are supposedly written as 'protecting' and 'trying' as to apply the correct form of Past Progressive Tense.

The last two examples are the errors in the use of Past Perfect Tense. Instead of using the words in bold which are grammatically incorrect, the form of Past Perfect Tense should be applied so that the words are written as 'had gone' and 'had disappeared', respectively.

4. CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1.1What are the grammatical errors committed by ESL learners in writing?

As presented in the data, there are seven types of grammatical errors committed by the selected ESL learners which include errors in the uses of Tenses, Verbs, Nouns, Adjectives, Prepositions, Gerunds and Subject-Verb Agreement (SVA). These errors are committed due to some possible causes.

In most cases, the errors emerged from what Richard (1973) proposed as overgeneralization. He explains the concept of overgeneralization as involving an unusual structure in place of two regular structures; for examples, '*He can sings*', '*We are hope*', '*It is occurs*'. In other words, overgeneralization takes place when the learners apply the same grammatical rule for all events. For instance, learners have been taught that Verbs written in Past Tense form should take the form of 'verb + (-ed)' while they might care less about irregular verb forms.

Sentence *(e)* in Excerpt 3(d) portrays an error due to the overgeneralization of the plural form of the Noun "foots". The error committed shows the occurance of overgeneralization of the plural Noun form which usually takes the form of 'noun + (-s)'. The students applied the regular form of plural Noun while the correct form should be 'feet'. Meanwhile, in sentence *(g)* taken from Excerpt 3(c), the overgeneralization is identified in the word 'stoped' which applies the regular form of Past Tense 'verb + (-ed)' when the correct one should be 'stopped'. As the general rule of Past Tense form of Verbs is overgeneralized, this particular learner might not be aware of the irregular forms.

Discussing the common errors based on Brown's (2007) view on errors, he claims errors as reflecting the learners' competence which cannot be self-corrected. Thus, the students continuously apply the same rules of grammar in the way that they understand that they tend to overgeneralize them until the errors are highlighted by others who have the competence. Besides, the errors may be due to ignorance of rule restriction which Richard (1973) states as closely related to the generalization of deviant structures.

Referring to Excerpt 3(b), there might be no errors of grammar detected. However, as the context is taken into consideration, the use of Past Tense in dialogue is actually referred to as error committed possibly because of the ignorance of rule restriction by Richard (1973). Referring to his claim, this occasion is the error which shows that the learner fails to observe the restriction of rule to context where it does not apply. Supposedly, sentences in dialogues are to be written in Present Tense form because the nature of dialogue which is spoken or voiced at present.

As to compare with previous studies on Error Analysis, there are several mutual aspects that can be referred to such as the contexts of the studies and also the finding. For example, Zanariah (2002) has conducted a research to find errors in writing composition. The technique used to collect the data was the same which is the students' writing but the genre was not narrative in nature. While this study involved 28 Diploma ESL students, a number which do not represent the performance of the whole student population of the University. However, the finding was almost the same that the common grammatical errors found includes those in Tenses, Subject-Verb Agreement, and Verbs.

In conclusion, there are seven types of grammatical errors committed by ESL learners in this study which involve the uses of Tenses, Gerunds, Adjectives, Nouns, Verbs, SVA and Prepositions. The errors are analyzed and interpreted as emerging from several causes proposed by Richard (1973) which includes overgeneralization and ignorance of rule restrictions.

4.1.2What are the errors in the use of Tenses committed by ESL learners in writing?

In this section, the discussion is also based on the finding of the study which discovers that grammatical errors committed by ESL learners involved are classified in the use of Tenses. Various forms of errors are identified to be discussed in relation to some theoretical framework as well as findings from previous studies.

The rule of Tenses is an important element in English grammar and L2 or ESL learners have difficulties in understanding and applying the use of various Tenses in English grammar system. This issue is closely related to the strong version of Contrastive Analysis Hypotheses (CAH) proposed by Lado (1957) which states that L2 learners will face difficulties in language aspects which differ from those they have in their L1. Those aspects comprise Tenses as well since there is no application of such rule in Malay language.

As basic as the Simple Past Tense, students also committed errors on the other types of Tenses such as the Past Perfect and Past Progressive as shown in Excerpt 3(c). From the examples, all the sentences contain errors in Tenses, specifically, Past Tense. As the rule has stated, the element which can represent a Tense is the Verb used. Sentences in *(a)* show the bolded words which are supposed to be written in Simple Past Tense forms of 'was', 'wanted' and 'reminded' respectively. This is to apply the rule of Past Tense in a concordant manner. This rule of concordance whereby all the Verbs should take the same form of the same Tenses used in sentence or contexts do not apply in the learners' L1 or the Malay Language.

Tenses in English can somehow specify the time an action or event is happening by modifying the forms of the Verbs but again, there is no such system in Malay language. Referring to sentence *(b),* the learner modified the verb 'go' into its participle form 'gone' but it is still considered as an error since the form of Past Perfect Tense is not appropriately applied in the sentence. The form of the Past Perfect Tense should be 'had + past participle' resulting the correct form of 'had gone', supposedly applied in sentence *(b).* If the sentence was to be written in Malay, it would be 'Malangnya, dia (telah) tidak tahu kemana ayahnya (telah) pergi'. Therefore, it is obvious that there is no time marker in the Malay sentence unless the word 'telah' is included.

For sentences in *(c),* the errors highlighted in the bold words are mutual; concerning the incomplete application of the Past Progressive or Past Continuous form. As Past Progressive marks the action happening continuously in the past time, it takes the form of 'be (Past Tense) + (verb –ing)' which should correct the errors into 'was protecting' and 'was trying'. Based on what has been proposed by Richard (1973), this form of error is thus classified under incomplete application of rules where in contrast with the learners' L1, the form of Past Progressive might be just too complicated to be fully understood and applied.

The next form of error is looking into the one involving the use of another element of Past Tense which is the Past Perfect. The Past Perfect Tense is used together with Past Simple; when a past action happened after another such as in sentence *(d).* According to the context, Shah must have been there before he "had disappeared" from their sight. In other words, 'Shah was there before. (but) We noticed that Shah had disappeared from our sight (after a few seconds).'

Based on the discussion on the various forms of errors in those three Tenses, it can be deduced that Tenses are the elements which are difficult for L2 learners because of the fact that such elements do not exist in their L1. This condition is referred to what Lado (1957) claims as negative transfer. In other words, the errors in various forms of Tenses are committed due to the difference between the grammatical structures of their L1 and that of their L2. In contrast with negative transfer, positive transfer allows learners to apply the rules which are familiar in their L1 in the structures of their L2. In cases of the use of Tenses in English, negative transfer occurs very frequently as discussed earlier.

In comparisons with previous studies, the studies on Error Analysis presented rather the same findings on the various forms of errors on Tenses. For example, Rahayu (2001) conducted a study pertaining to analysis of errors under the title The Students' Performance of Error in The Use of Past Tense: An Analysis in a Selected School. In this study, 30 students of Sekolah Menengah Convent Ipoh, Perak were taken as subjects. In terms of students and university background, they are quite at the same level of proficiency with those Diploma ESL students, a number which do not represent the performance of the whole student population of the University ESL learners involved in this which occupy of the intermediate level. The technique of data collection is also the same; a writing composition but Rahayu (2001) also included the fill in the blanks task to assess the errors. The finding of her study matches those in this study with the three forms of Past Tense (Simple Past, Past Perfect and Past Progressive) are detected from the learners' writing.

Since the field of Error Analysis continues to attract the researchers' interest, there is another researcher who conducted a study involving 30 Malay students as the subjects. The study by Zahiah (2003) entitled A Study of the Error Analysis (Past Tense) in English written composition of Form Four Students at Sekolah Menengah Kampung Laut, Tumpat Kelantan. As most studies have applied, she also used the technique of assessing students' composition to find the errors. The result presented indicates that the most frequently committed errors are those classified under the use of the very basic Simple Past Tense. Comparing the finding by Zahiah (2003) with those gathered from this study, Form Four ESL learners of SEMSAS, despite having slightly higher lever of proficiency in English than Zahiah's subjects, they still committed the errors in the use and forms of Simple Past Tense in their respective narrative essays.

As the study has presented the findings and discussions on the errors committed by ESL learners in writing, it is obvious that the learners, specifically ESL learners do commit grammatical errors classified under various forms as discussed. Upon assessing learners' errors in writing, there are some issues pertaining to the influence of errors committed towards learning of L2. While the nature of errors is indicated as negative one, those committed errors are actually worth to be carefully analyzed in order to understand that committing errors is included in the process of constructing a new language system (Brown, 2007).

Selinker (1992) as cited in Ho (2003) has also come out with the idea that errors are undoubtedly vital for learners as a device the use in order to learn. For that reason, the errors on all grammatical aspects discussed in this study might also be regarded as the process in which the ESL learners is constructing the L2 system as well as allowing the errors to be functioning as the device for them to keep on learning. Provided the conducive learning environment in which the language is learnt, those errors might be an effective medium for learners to make a review and correct their misunderstanding on the related grammar items. Moreover, it is exactly a human nature to make mistakes in life while to learn from the mistakes is the individuals' choice.

4.2 Recommendations

There are several recommendations proposed based on this study for further consideration. The recommendations are proposed to those related in the educational field, those involved in the process of language learning and teaching as well as researchers.

The current syllabus and curriculum might need to be revised and improvised according to the needs of the language learners in school. Based on this study, there is the need for students to be given emphasis on Tenses. Therefore, the syllabus and curriculum designers for English might be able to consider focusing more on that part of grammar item to be implemented in English classrooms in schools.

Specifically for teachers teaching English language subject in schools, it is highly recommended that the teaching of grammar be made as interesting as possible for students or learners. Conventionally, the teaching and

learning of grammar involve the practice of drilling where students sit and routinely complete the written grammar exercises. As alternatives, it would be good that if drilling is to be practiced the materials for drilling should be improvised. Rather than paper and pen kind of drilling, teachers may consider using materials such as newspapers and magazines as well as online versions of drilling exercises. Or else, teachers might want to consider variety of teaching approach in grammar lesson such as learning grammar through games, songs and videos.

Lastly, if further research is to be conducted, there are many considerations recommended for improvements especially in terms of the scale, methodology and also data analysis strategy. To have a larger scale of sample would increase the reliability of the finding. For instance, this study is only highlighting on common grammatical errors committed by 28 Diploma ESL students, a number which do not represent the performance of the whole student population of the University ESL learners in narrative writing. For further research, it is worth to consider having the sample of the same school background (boarding school) with more number of students. Instead of collecting students' essays, researchers can consider to have several discrete tests on particular grammar items to ensure thorough finding on the errors. Subsequently, the data analysis would also be more detailed for further presentation and discussion.

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