

# An Error Analysis on English Phrase Category Done by Students

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**Abstract**— This article aims at analyzing English phrase category done by the English students majoring in English Education Study Program. It discusses about the types of errors on English phrase category and the factors influencing the errors. Qualitative design was chosen in this study. The subject of this study was the English Language Education students who were enrolled in English Syntax course. The research object was the texts about English phrase category written by the students. The data were obtained through observation by giving a list of English phrases, accompanied by note-taking technique. The result showed that the students made errors on noun phrase, verb phrase, adverb phrase, and preposition phrase. The factors influencing the errors are overgeneralization and learning strategies.

**Keywords**—error; intralingua; phrase.

## I. INTRODUCTION

English Syntax subject is one of the compulsory subjects in the English Education Study Program. This subject appears in semester 4 with the prerequisite the students pass Introduction to Linguistics subject. The main material in this English Syntax subject is word class, phrase, clause, and sentence. When it is viewed from this material, English Syntax discusses the structure of a sentence from the lowest order of a word class to the highest level of a sentence. In teaching and learning process, of course, a lecturer introduces and explains these materials as well as possible so that students are expected to be able to master these materials. However, in this teaching and learning process, students have made deviations that they can correct themselves (mistakes) or even students have made deviations that they cannot fix themselves (errors). The problem is when the learning process is not as expected or in others words when the students make errors.

Related to the problem of errors, especially in the field of Syntax, a study has been done by [1] about syntactical errors in writing paragraph in English. The types errors were noun phrases, verb phrases, transformation, and miscellaneous. Other study has also been done by [2] about grammatical errors in writing. The results were about the types of errors in tenses, in the use of prepositions, in the use of articles, in the use of active and passive, and morphological errors. However, a writing that specifically observes errors in

categorizing phrase has not been done. In fact, there are deviations in forms of errors faced by the students of English Language Education Program in categorizing phrases categories. These errors occur time to time and from semester to semester. This is a problem in learning and teaching English syntax especially on phrase categories. As the solution to this matter, a research about this problem must be conducted.

Errors can occur to anyone and at any level of syntax. These errors occur in the teaching and learning process in English Language Education. In this case, the errors in phrases in particular categorizing phrases in English is discussed in detail. Related to errors in categorizing phrases, there are two interesting things to discuss namely: 1) in what types of phrases in which the errors occur, and 2) what factors influencing the errors. Such errors need to be further investigated so that lecturers in particular know the types of phrases the students make. Thus, in the next teaching, the lecturers can focus or give intensive attention to the types of phrases where the majority of errors occur.

The example of cases of syntactic errors in categorizing phrases that occur in the English Language Study Program as well as being used as preliminary data is as follows:

<u>I</u>	<u>live</u>	<u>in Bali.</u>
NP	VP	Adv. P *

The error above occurs at the level of phrase *in Bali* which is labeled with the adverb phrase (Adv. P). It is an error because after the sentence is labeled by the students, they cannot fix the sentence themselves. Thus, it is not mistake. Theoretically, the adverbial phrase is a phrase in which the core or head is an adverb. Meanwhile, the phrase *in Bali* are two words that have different word categories, namely *in* is the preposition and *Bali* is a noun. Thus, *in Bali* is a prepositional phrase (PP). The phrase category analysis of the above sentence is as follows:

<u>I</u>	<u>live</u>	<u>in Bali.</u>
NP	VP	PP

Besides the need to know the types of phrases where syntactic errors occur, in this case, it is also necessary to know the factors that influence these syntax errors. In fact, the factors influencing this error can be caused by the

overlegalization of the target language. In this case, the students are confused in comprehending the terms adverb phrase and adverbial. Adverb phrase is a name of phrase which is headed by an adverb word category. An adverbial is a semantic role in a sentence. By knowing these factors, we can minimize the occurrence of errors so that learning outcomes can be achieved optimally.

Based on the above problems, such as the types of phrases and factors of errors, this topic needs to be researched. In addition, to the best of our knowledge, there are no previous studies that have analyzed this problem in English Language Education Study Program in Ganesha University of Education (Undiksha). In accordance with the background above, the research questions in this study can be detailed as follows:

- 1) At what phrases does the English syntax error occur?
- 2) What are the factors that influence English syntax errors?

## II. RESEARCH METHOD

This study aimed at revealing linguistic phenomena in the field of applied linguistics. The problem in this study lies in the analysis of English Syntax error analysis focusing on the types of phrases where syntax errors occur and the factors that influence the errors. The method used in this research was qualitative method. According to [3] qualitative method is a method of research procedures that produce descriptive data in the form of words written or spoken from humans as speakers or speech partners and their observable behavior. These errors are explained from two problems namely the types of phrases where the errors occur and the factors that influence the errors. The types of phrases where errors occur are answered through Radford's theory, and the factors of the errors are answered through Richard's theory. From the analysis using the guideline of this theory, an outcome or finding can be drawn. Through this analysis it is expected to get new findings or results.

The data sources in this study were the students of the English Language Education Study Program, who take English Syntax Subject. The students sat in semester 4. There were 7 classes in English Language Education Study Program. Because there were several classes that take English Syntax subject, one class was chosen as research participant of the existing classes. These students numbered 30 people. The subjects of this study were students of the English Language Education in the 2018/2019 academic year who took English Syntax Subject. While the object of this research was written data in the form of analysis made by students. The location of this research was the Faculty of Language and Arts of Ganesha University of Education (Undiksha), located at Ahmad Yani Street, No. 67 Singaraja.

There were two types of data collection methods chosen in this study, namely the reading and observation methods. The reading method was done through reading the analysis of English Syntax errors. This reading method was assisted with note taking techniques. The researcher noted as soon as he got the data from the syntactic error analysis, and was recorded in a researcher note. The second method was an

observation method. This observation method was used by holding conversations with informants. This observation method was used to determine the factors that influenced the analysis of English syntax errors. Data analysis steps in this study were initiated by identifying data, namely reading the analysis of English Syntax errors in categorizing English phrases, once identified in the analysis there was an error, the error was written into a sheet of paper and then it was inserted into the data. The data which contained the English Syntax error analysis were first categorized based on the types of phrases, such as noun phrases, verb phrases, adjective phrases, adverb phrases, and adverbial phrases. Furthermore, after confirming the types of the errors, the errors were analyzed and the well structures were shown after the analysis. The theory used to analyze errors of those phrases is transformational grammar by [1]. There are four evidences to categorize a word which is the head of a phrase, namely phonological evidence, semantic evidence, morphological, and syntactic evidence. The syntactical evidence was used in analyzing the first problem in this writing. After completing the first problem, the next analysis was to formulate the factors that influenced the errors. The theory used to analyze this second problem was error analysis theory.

Two types of data presentation methods were used in this research, namely formal and informal methods. Formal method is a method presenting the results of analysis by using signs and symbols. The informal method is a method presenting the results of analysis by using ordinary words [4]. Signs used in this formal method include: table and underline ( \_ ). Whereas the informal method is used to explain the description of ill form syntactical analysis and correct syntactical analysis of English and the factors that influence errors in the analysis of English Syntax errors.

## III. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Finding

The types of phrases where errors occurred were noun phrases, verb phrases, adverb phrases, and preposition phrases. Some types were the same as found by [1]. They were noun phrases and verb phrases. In this study, here are the findings of the types of phrases where the errors occurred.

Table 1. Phrases where the errors occur

No	Types of Phrases
1	Noun Phrase
2	Verb Phrase
3	Adverb Phrase
4	Preposition Phrase

The factors that influence errors in categorizing English phrases are as follows:

Table 2 Factors influencing the errors

No	Factors
1	Overgeneralization
2	Learning Strategy

3.2 Discussion

This section presents the types of phrases where the errors occur and the factors that influence the errors. The finding of the types of errors made by the students is taken from the students' text analysis in categorizing phrases category in English. The students as informants have been interviewed before to make sure whether the analysis made by them is a mistake or error. And the data presented below are classified as errors because the students cannot fix the analysis themselves. To find the result about the factors influencing the errors, the students have also been interviewed to give the reasons why they make the errors. The answers or data taken from the students concerning about the types of phrases where the errors occurs and the factors influencing the errors are related to the theories, so the findings can be discussed as follows.

3.2.1 The Types of Phrases Where Errors Occur

The errors in categorizing or analyzing English phrases lie in noun phrases (NP), Verb Phrases (VP), Adverb Phrases (Adv. P) and Prepositional Phrases (PP). Three data were taken as samples of every phrase type in this discussion. Here are the data from each phrase.

a) Noun Phrase

1) I            have            slept.  
 NP            VP            NP\*

Should be:

I            have slept.  
 NP            VP

In data no.1 above the student made an error in the verb phrase. This sentence has a predicate consisting of two linked verbs. The two verbs are *have* and *slept*, each word were labeled VP for *have* and NP for *slept* by the student. Actually, these two phrases are one phrase VP where the word *slept* is the core of the phrase. Thus, *have slept* is one VP unit. The student failed in categorizing a verb phrase by a noun phrase.

2) The young man            helps            his            nephew.  
 NP            VP            NP\*            NP\*

Should be:

The young man            helps            his nephew.  
 NP            VP            NP

An error on the level of noun phrase (NP) was made by the student in the above data, namely students labeled *his nephew* phrase into two phrases, NP was labeled for the word

*his* and another NP was labeled for the word *nephew*. Actually, *his nephew* is an NP that has phrase core or head *nephew*.

3) He    can    speak            English            clearly.  
 NP    NP\*    NP\*            NP            Adj. P\*

Should be:

He    can speak            English            clearly.  
 NP            VP            NP            Adv. P

In English, every sentence must have VP. However, in the above sentence, the student made an error in labeling the VP *can speak* into two phrases, namely *can* which was labeled NP and the word *speak* which was also labeled NP.

b) Verb Phrase

4) John    is    making            the cake            at the moment.  
 NP            VP\*            VP\*            NP            PP

Should be:

John    is making            the cake            at the moment.  
 NP            VP            NP            PP

The two words *is making* in the sentence above are actually VP which has the phrase core namely the word *making*. In this case the student made an error by dividing these two words. The word *is* was labeled as VP and the word *making* labeled as VP as well.

5) I            have            slept.  
 NP            VP\*            VP\*

Should be:

I            have slept.  
 NP            VP

Similarly, in the data no. 5 the two words *have* and *slept* are actually a VP in which the core phrase is the word *slept*. However, the student made an error by labeling each word, in which *have* was labeled as VP and *slept* was labeled as VP as well.

6) John    is    making            the cake            at the moment.  
 NP    VP\*            Adj.P\*            NP            Adj.P\*

Should be:

John    is making            the cake            at the moment.  
 NP            VP            NP            PP

In the data no. 6, the student made an error in analyzing the phrase *is making*, *is* is an auxiliary verb, while *making* is a lexical verb. These two sentences are unit of VP in which the phrase core is the word *making*. However, the student

apparently labeled that *is* was VP and the word *making* was an adjective.

c) Adverb Phrase

7) My brother plays ball very fast.  
NP VP NP Adj. P\*

Should be:

My brother plays ball very fast.  
NP VP NP Adv. P

In the data no. 7 the student has made an error in categorizing the adverb phrase (Adv. P). The phrase *very fast* in the above context is adverb phrase but the student labeled it with adjective phrase. The core of the phrase *very fast* is *fast*. The class of *fast* in context is an adverb.

8) She is eating banana quickly.  
NP VP NP Adj. P\*

Should be:

She is eating banana quickly.  
NP VP NP Adv. P

In the data no. 8 the student made an error in categorizing the adverb phrase. *Quickly* in this sentence is an adverb phrase and not the adjective phrase. Indeed, the word *quickly* is a word formed from the adjective *quick* with the suffix -ly.

9) I drive the car very fast.  
NP VP NP Adj. P\*

Should be:

I drive the car very fast.  
NP VP NP Adv. P\*

In the above construction, the phrase *very fast* is adverb phrase whose core lies in the word *fast*. In this sentence the student made an error in categorizing adverb phrase. *Very fast* in this context is not adjective phrase but adverb phrase.

d) Preposition Phrase

10) John is making the cake at the moment.  
NP VP NP Adv. P\*

Should be:

John is making the cake at the moment.  
NP VP NP PP

The student also made an error in the prepositional phrase as in the above sentence. The phrase *at the moment* is categorized as prepositional phrase (PP) but students

categorized it into adverb phrase. The core of the phrase *at the moment* is preposition *at*. Thus, *at the moment* is preposition phrase.

11) I came to campus with you.  
NP VP Adv.P\* Adv. P\*

Should be:

I came to campus with you.  
NP VP PP PP

There are two wrong-labelled phrases in the data no. 11 above. The first is the phrase *to campus* which was labelled adverb phrase, and the second is the phrase *with you* which was labelled adverb phrase too. Both phrases *to campus* and *with you* are preposition phrases. The phrase *to campus* is headed by preposition *to*, and the phrase *with you* is headed by preposition *with*. No one phrase from the simple sentence above has a constituent as an adverb phrase as it was labelled by the student.

12) The man spent the days on the island.  
NP VP NP NP\*

Should be:

The man spent the days on the island.  
NP VP NP PP

The error in categorizing preposition phrase also occurred in the sentence no. 12 above. Here the student failed to categorize preposition phrase *on the island*. The phrase *on the island* is a phrase which is headed by the preposition *on*. The student seemed categorizing the phrase *on the island* from the core word *island*, so he judged it as a noun phrase. Actually, there are some verbs which need two noun phrases as the complementation. The verbs include give, send, show, etc. However, the verb *spent* does not need two noun phrases. It just needs one noun phrase and one preposition phrase which semantically may function as adverbial but not adverb phrase.

The types of phrases where errors occurred in this study were similar to the study conducted by [5]. The categories of phrases included noun phrase, verb phrase, adverb phrase, and prepositional phrase.

3.2.2 The Factors Influencing the Syntax Errors

The factors that influence the errors in categorizing phrases in English are overgeneralization and learning strategies. Three data were taken as samples of every factor influencing the errors in this discussion.

a) Overgeneralization

According to [6], one of the factors that influence errors in learning the second language is overgeneralization. Overgeneralization occurs due to the semantic rules and features of the target language. The overgeneralization cases in this study are:

Data:

13) I drive the car very fast.  
NP VP NP Adj. P\*

Should be:

I drive the car very fast.  
NP VP NP Adv. P

The error in the sentence no.13 is caused by the overgeneralization of the phrase *very fast*. The phrase *very fast* is headed by the word *fast*. When the category of the word *fast* is adjective, the phrase *very fast* is adjective phrase. When the category of the word *fast* is adverb, *very fast* is adverb phrase. Whether its category of the word *fast* is adjective or adverb is determined by the structural context in a sentence. The example of the word *fast* which can be classified as an adjective in the context: *it is fast* or *it is so fast*. However, in the sentence above the word *fast* modifies the word *drive* so the category of the word *fast* is adverb. The word *very* modifies the word *fast*. In here student feel confused in categorizing the phrase *very fast* because of the complexity of usage of the word *fast*.

14) I have slept.  
NP VP NP\*

Should be:

I have slept.  
NP VP

A verb phrase is a phrase which is headed by a verb. Two linked verbs in a simple sentence function one as modifier and one as a head. They are not separated unit in a sentence as it is done in the sentence no. 14 above. This is caused by two verbs *have* and *slept*. Both verbs *have* and *slept* are verbs, but they are one unit verb phrase. The word *have* modifies the core verb *slept*. *Have* in this context is auxiliary and *slept* is lexical verb. Auxiliary and lexical verb in simple sentence does not separate to make different phrase unit. It is true that in certain contexts the words *have* and *slept* are the core phrases as in the example: *I have a book* and *I slept yesterday*.

15) John is making the cake at the moment.  
NP VP\* VP\* NP PP

Should be:

John is making the cake at the moment.  
NP VP NP PP

The sentence no. 15 above has two verbs. They are the words *is* and *making*. The word *is* is auxiliary verb and *making* is lexical verb. This error is rather similar to the error no. 14. The error is caused by the overgeneralization of the same word category. The student in this error separated the two verbs having different phrase unit.

#### b) Learning Strategies

Learning strategies also determine how students are able to learn English syntax optimally. When it is viewed from the curriculum and syllabus, everything is expected to run well with respect to the learning process of teaching English Syntax. However, some students are also still unable to understand the basic syntactic concepts such as determining phrase categories. As an example;

16) John is making the cake at the moment.  
NP VP\* Adj.P\* NP Adj.P\*

Should be:

John is making the cake at the moment.  
NP VP NP PP

In the sentence number 16 above the students were not able to categorize preposition phrase. The preposition at the moment was labelled adjective phrase by the students. In fact, an adjective phrase is a phrase which is headed by an adjective. From the phrase *at the moment*, no word is adjective. In analyzing this sentence, the students did not have a clear concept about the head or core of a phrase.

17) She is eating banana quickly.  
NP VP NP Adj. P\*

Should be:

She is eating banana quickly.  
NP VP NP Adv. P

The student failed to categorize the phrase *quickly* in the sentence no. 17 above. He was confused by the similar word form of *quickly* that is the word *quick*. *Quickly* is an adverb, so the phrase headed by this word is an adverb phrase. *Quick* is an adjective and the phrase headed by this word is adjective phrase. The student did not have a clear concept in determining the phrase category for the phrases which have the similar word forms like *quickly* and *quick*.

18) The man spent the days on the island.  
NP VP NP NP\*

Should be:

The man spent the days on the island.  
NP VP NP PP

The student failed to categorize the *on the island*. He labeled it as a noun phrase. In fact, a noun phrase is a phrase headed by a noun. He thought that the noun *island* was the head of the phrase so *on the island* was considered noun phrase for him. In fact, the phrase *on the island* is preposition phrase because the phrase is headed by a preposition. The preposition *on* is the head of the phrase. Here the student did not have enough concept to find the word category of the head in a phrase.

Based on the three data above, no. 16-18, show that the students did not have a clear concept of a word category, a concept of head a modifier. Even the students had made misconception about them. This led to error in categorizing a phrase. These errors were caused by the learning strategies.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

##### 4.1 Conclusions

From the research findings, there are several things that can be concluded. First, syntactic errors have occurred in categorizing phrases. The errors occur at the level of noun phrase, verb phrase, adverb phrase, and preposition phrase. The example of error in categorizing noun phrase is in the phrase *his nephew* which is labelled by two phrases *his* as noun phrase and *nephew* as noun phrase too. The example of error in categorizing verb phrase is in the phrase *making* which labeled with adjective phrase. The example of error in categorizing adverb phrase is in the phrase *quickly* which is labelled with adjective phrase. The example of error in categorizing preposition phrase is in the phrase *at the moment* which is labeled with adverb phrase.

The second conclusion is about the factors influencing the errors in categorizing the phrase category. There two factors influencing them. They are overgeneralization of the target language linguistics, and learning strategies. Overgeneralization of the target language, English, is a factor of errors which is caused by the semantics rules and features of the target language. One example of this factor is in categorizing the phrase *very fast*. The phrase *very fast* is sometimes categorized as adjective phrase or adverb phrase. It depends on the context in a sentence. This phrase has a complex use in English so there is tendency for the students to make errors. And then, the second factor influencing these errors is learning strategies. Students fail to apply the learning strategies in categorizing phrases in English. The example of errors caused by this factor, for example, is in the phrase *at the moment* which is labeled adjective phrase. In this case, the students do not have clear concept of the adjective head. The students seem to guess the category.

##### 4.2 Suggestions

This study discusses about syntactic errors at the level of phrase categories and the factors that influence these errors. This study found that there are four phrases that are wrongly

categorized, namely noun phrases, verb phrase, adverb phrase, and preposition phrases. For the first conclusion, it is suggested for the lecturer to focus teaching on the wrong-labelled phrases so these types of errors can be minimized. For the second conclusion, it is suggested for the lecturers to find the proper learning strategies in learning and teaching phrase categories. By these new strategies the errors can be minimized. The researcher hopes that there will be other studies concerning about the different aspect of this error analysis, for example about the strategies solving the errors.

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