

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter covers the background of the study which motivated the researcher to conduct this study. This chapter also presents the problems of the study, the purposes of the study, the significance of the study, research method, operational definition and organization of the paper.

1.1. Background of the Study

For students of higher level like undergraduate students, especially English education students, being proficient in producing English skills is one of main goals of learning English as foreign language. However, learning English as a foreign language is not as easy as imagined. It requires great efforts for the students to learn the elements of the language, such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and spelling. There are also four skills that students have to master; speaking, reading, listening, and writing. One of important but most difficult skill to master is writing skills. For higher students, there are some kinds of writing subject, such as writing for academic purposes. In producing this kind of writing, students often face problems such as problem in finding ideas, organizations, the structures and even grammatical aspects. In the case of grammatical aspects, since it is the basic in mastering writing skills, students continuously fail to apply the target language rules completely. Thus, when they produce the target language, spoken or written, their productions contain errors although they have learned it for a long time.

Students' grammatical errors are considered as sign of 'human fallibility' (Fauziati, 2011: 23), so that they potentially occur in their language. According to second language acquisition, there are some sources of errors that students make when they produce spoken or written target language. One of them is interlanguage (IL). Ellis (1996:44) defines the term interlanguage as "the special mental grammars that learners constructed during the course of their development". It also refers to "the separateness of a second language learners'

system, a system that has a structurally intermediate status between the native and target languages” (Ellis, 1999: 201). IL is also used to refer to both the internal system which a learner has constructed at a single point in time and to the series of interconnected systems that characterize the learners’ progress over time (Ellis, 1996). Further, IL is a unique and dynamic linguistic system, which is different from the native language and from the target language (Sheng, 2007). Therefore, Ellis affirms that IL theory is an appropriate starting point to investigate learners’ competence because it was the first major attempt to provide an explanation of L2 acquisition (Ellis, 1996).

There are many studies that investigate interlanguage as the main point of the research. Some have investigated interlanguage development, both spoken and written production, through a longitudinal study in regard to morphological features e.g. morpheme (Hobson, 1999), article (Stehle, 2009), irregular past tense formation (Plag & Schneider, 2000), and determiner (Goad & White, 2009). Moreover, some have focused on syntactical features e.g. marked word order (Callies, 2002), and descriptive adjectives (Santoro, 2012). Also, interlanguage subjectivity e.g. semantic verb types (Azad & Azad, 2005) has been investigated. In addition, some researchers have investigated the learners’ interlanguage development by analysing their errors e.g. word order, co-occurring articles, and overgeneralization (Kill, 2003), grammatical errors (Luna, 2010; Fauziati, 2011; Abbasi & Karimnia, 2011; and Ning, 2012).

Based on aforementioned explanation, this study wants to conduct a research on interlanguage (IL) although it has become research subjects several years ago. The study would like to investigate grammatical behaviour which is shared by students when they acquire English. It is worth studying because Indonesian learners, especially undergraduate students of English education are still confronted with a lot of grammatical problems in their attempt to express the intended meaning in target language system correctly. The students make a big amount of errors, both in terms of linguistic items and grammatical elements (e.g. Mardijono, 2003; Pardede, 2006; Fauziati, 2011).

Structurally, there are two basis of grammatical behavior; their shape i.e. morphological behaviour and their position in the clause or sentence i.e. syntactic behaviour (Borjars and Burridge, 2001). However, by the reason of time limitation, the study focuses only on the use of verb phrases that occurs in students’ writings. Another consideration also arises due to some arguments that verbs are considered as the central part of the clause or the head of the sentence (Borjars & Burridge, 2001). Unfortunately, the use of verb still becomes

a big problem for the students. Practically, they produce big amount of errors in regard to the use of verbs as reported by, for example, Mardijono (2003), Pardede (2006), and Kanshir (2008). Therefore, based on this issue, the study is driven to investigate students' interlanguage due to the use of verb by using Error Analysis. The study uses Politzer and Romirez's (1973) and Burt and Kiparsky's (1972) Linguistic Category Taxonomy (see Dulay et. al, 1982, p. 146) in analysing the students' writings. In addition, this study also investigates what factors or processes that contribute to their interlanguage according to Selinker's (1972) five central processes of interlanguage and Richards' (1971 & 1971b) causes of errors. To some extent, this study wants to reveal how far students' learn English by indicating their target language regarding the use of verbs.

1.2. Problem of the Study

The problem in this study says "what interlanguage realization grouped according to the students' level and proficiency occur in their English writings". To answer this question, two subsidiary research questions are raised and formularized as follows:

- 1) What verb phrases do undergraduate students produce in their writings?
- 2) What processes contribute to the students' use of verb phrases in their writings?

1.3. Purpose of the Study

Fluency and correctness of learners' language expression can be fully detected in a written production, which represents one's English ability. In order to detect and describe partial knowledge of English that students of English education have, this study seeks to investigate their language output by analysing their interlanguage through errors analysis.

In this regard, the purpose of the study can be formulated as follows:

- 1) To gain the data about the use of verb phrases that occurs in writing assignment made by the students.
- 2) To investigate some processes contribute to the use of verb phrases that learners have produce as part of interlanguage process.

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study is very significant as it can give teachers vivid pictures of the common phenomenon usually occur in L2 learning. By investigating the learners' interlanguage, namely verb phrase acquisition this study could be significant in some ways:

- 1) It will provide teacher with the information about how much the learner had learnt

and provide the researcher with evidence of how language was learnt, specifically verb phrase acquisition.

- 2) It will serve as devices by which the learners discover the rules of the target language in regard to the grammatical rules, namely verb phrase.
- 3) The insights derived from this study can contribute to the development of the theory of applied linguistics, especially to the existing theorization of interlanguage in SLA.
- 4) In general, it can give insights into several aspects of adult L2 learning regarding the case of interlanguage development (i.e. the resources on adult L2 learning).

1.5. Research Method

This study was cross sectional since the data were collected in a single point of time but covering different levels of proficiency. The study used students' writings as the main data. The nature of the analysis merely focused on verb phrases grouped according to students' levels and frequency. The participants of this study were 12 students from the second year of undergraduate students who were majoring in English Education at a Private Higher Education Institution in Bandung. An error analysis was carried out on their writings to identify linguistic behaviour shared by the students. Both accurate and inaccurate versions related to the use of verb phrases were analysed and presented.

The study used instrument of students' final test conducted in the previous semester. Since the study employed cross sectional, students were divided into three groups representing lower, middle, and higher achievers according to their score from subjects related to writing skills such as Writing for Academic Purposes, Writing for General Communication and Writing in Professional Context. In the case of errors and interlanguage analysis, students' writings were analysed through identification, description or categorization, and explanation using 'Linguistic Category Taxonomy' (Dulay, et al., 1982: 148-154). Afterwards, the causes errors that contribute to students' interlanguage were also investigated according to Selinker's (1972) five central processes of interlanguage and Richards' (1971 & 1971b) cause of errors.

1.6. Operational Definition

1. Second Language Acquisition is the process in which people learn a language other than their native language either inside or outside the classroom (Ellis, 2008).
2. An error is noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, reflecting the interlanguage competence of the learner (Brown, 1994:205).

3. Error analysis is a procedure used by both researchers and teachers which involves collecting samples of learner language, identifying the errors in the sample, describing these errors, classifying them according to their nature and causes, and evaluating their seriousness (Corder, 1967).
4. Linguistic Category Taxonomy is taxonomy that classifies errors according to the language component or linguistic constituent (or both of them) which is affected by the error. It comprises phonology, syntax and morphology, semantics and lexicon, and discourse (Dulay et al. 1982: 146).
5. Interlanguage is the separateness of a second language learners' system, a system that has a structurally intermediate status between the native and target languages (Ellis, 1999: 201).
6. Process of interlanguage development means five principal cognitive processes that are responsible for L2 acquisition (Selinker, 1972 in Ellis, 1996) and causes of errors proposed by Richards (1971 & 1971b in Ellis, 1996).

1.7. Thesis Organization

This paper consists of five chapters. The first chapter presents the background of the study, the reasons motivated the researcher to conduct the study. This chapter also discusses about problems of the study, purposes of the study, significances, research method, operational definition and thesis organization. The second chapter presents the theoretical foundation of the study. It discusses about theories supporting the study. The third chapter explores the methodology used in the study: the design, participants, data collection and data analysis. The fourth chapter presents the study findings and its discussion. Finally, the fifth chapter talks about conclusions and recommendations. The conclusions section concludes the study findings. The recommendations section provides some recommendations for the readers and other researchers, and also for English teacher in higher education.