

# **ERRORS MADE BY THE SECOND YEAR STUDENTS OF SMP SRIJAYA NEGARA PALEMBANG IN USING THE ENGLISH COMPARISONS OF ADJECTIVES<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:** This paper describes the errors in using English comparisons of adjectives made by the second year students of SMP Srijaya Negara Palembang, Indonesia. It covers randomly selected 30 students. The students' errors were analysed through identifying, classifying, stating the relative frequency of, and explaining the students' errors. The conclusions are (a) the students made errors in the forms of omission, addition, and misformation, (b) the errors are more on syntactic level than the morphological level, (c) the errors are in comparative and superlative degrees, and (d) no error in misordering type was made the students.

**Key words:** Mistakes, Errors, and Comparisons

## **1. Background**

The teaching of language components--spelling/sounds, vocabulary, and structure--can be presented in the teaching any of the four language skills--speaking listening, reading or writing. The mastery of these language components is to support the mastery of these language skills.

In relation to the teaching of language structure, one of the problems or difficulties faced by the Indonesian students learning English is the use of comparison. These difficulties are possibly caused by the differences of the English and the Indonesian systems in expressing comparison. In the English language, for example, we have the sentences such as:

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1. *Ani is 12 years old and Ina is 14 years old.*
2. *Ani is younger than Ina.*

Whereas in Indonesian, the sentence 2 is expressed as

*"Ani lebih muda dari Ina."*

In English, the comparison is indicated by using the morpheme *-er*; whereas in the Indonesian language, it is indicated by a word, that is the word *lebih*. In other words, in English, it is on morphological level, whereas in Indonesian, it is on syntactical level. Lado (1974: 1) states that the differences are the main source of difficulties in learning a language. However, Dullay, et al. (1982:5) oppose this claim. They claim that "the first language has a far smaller effect on second language syntax than previously thought." Furthermore, Dullay, et al. (1982:6) state that the errors are the transitional constructions of the learners' second language no matter what their first language is. The following examples illustrate the errors made by some of students of SMP Srijaya Negara Palembang in expressing comparisons in English.

- \* *This ruler is more short from that ruler.*
- \* *My house is more big than your house.*
- \* *This ruler is more shorter than that ruler.*

From those examples, it is clear that comparison seems to be very difficult for the students to learn. Consequently, they may cause error. The first error will cause misinterpretation to the listeners, so it should be corrected first. Hanzeli (in Hendrickson, 1979:8) claims that " Errors that might stigmatize the learner in the eyes and ears of the native speakers should be corrected and overcome first " While the second and the third errors, even though they do not cause misinterpretation to the listeners and readers, they occur frequently. Dresdner (in Hendrickson, 1979:7) consider that " High frequency of errors should have top priority in error correction.

## **2. The Study of Learners' Errors**

In the study of second and foreign language learning, errors have been studied to discover the process learners make use of in learning and using language. Language learning is like any other human learning. The learners of foreign language cannot avoid making errors. Brown (1987:170) adds that the learner will make errors in the process of learning.

The study of learners' errors is very important because some errors have little effect. Some causes irritation while others may cause communication difficulties. The study and analysis of the errors made by second and foreign language learners are carried out in order to find out how well someone knows a language, how a person learns a language, and obtains information or common difficulties in language learning as an aid in teaching or in the preparation of teaching materials (Richards at al, 1985:95).

Knowing the students' errors may help the teachers of English to arrange the materials to be remedied--which ones should be remedied first and which one should be postponed. Errors can be caused by some factors. One of them is representational memory. This representational memory causes the learners to make errors in perception (Ornstein, 1988:326). In Bahasa Indonesia, for example, to express comparative, we use the word "lebih" (more) before the adjective. We say "Buku ini lebih murah dari buku itu." Because of this construction, the students might say "This book is more cheap than that one."

Error analysis is an important support for the teachers of English in understanding and mastering the remedial teaching and regular teaching in the future. By using error analysis, the teacher will be able to know how far their students have come and what they must still learn (Corder, 1981:10). In other words, the teachers of English will be able to determine which parts of the teaching materials should be remedied and which parts should not. Therefore, the teachers of English have to

understand the concept of error analysis and how to apply it in his teaching. Another important concept that a teacher of English should know is the difference between mistake and error.

### **3. The Concept of Error Analysis**

Error analysis is the investigation of the students' errors (systematic errors) by using some techniques or procedures such as identification of errors, classification of errors and explanation, that is to find out the areas of difficulty that enable the students to make errors (Sridhar, cited in Croft, 1980:103). While Laurie (1978:16-17) defines error analysis as follows:

Error analysis is a theory of second language teaching which places the errors which are made by the second language learner into two categories: 1) systematic --similar mistakes are made by the first language learner and by the second language learner when learning the same language, and 2) interference--errors made by the second language learner because of interference from his first language.

Error analysis has some objectives in its action such as knowing the learning process of language two, investigating the errors, finding out a feedback, etc. Corder (1985:5) states that

They are; the theoretical objectives are to know the learning process of L2 and to investigate the errors that the students make, while the practical objectives are to find out a feedback for the needs of text-books' arrangement and overcome the errors.

While Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982:138) say that error analysis serves two major purposes: 1) it provides the data from which interferences about the nature of the language learning process can be made; and 2) it indicates the teachers and curriculum developers which part of the target language students have most difficulty producing correctly and which error types detract most from a learner's ability to communicate effectively.

#### **4. Mistakes Versus Errors**

In order to analyze the learner's errors in a proper perspective, it is important to make a distinction between errors and mistakes. Errors are systematic and consistent deviations caused by the lack of knowledge of the language rules, while mistakes are unsystematic and random deviations. They are caused by performance factors such as memory limitation, fatigue, etc. Corder (cited in Croft, 1980:105) states the distinction between mistakes and errors as follows:

Mistakes are deviations due to performance factors such as memory limitation (e.g., mistakes in the sequence of tenses and agreement in long sentences), fatigue, spelling pronunciation, emotional strain, etc. They are typically random and readily corrected by the learner when his attention is drawn to them. Errors, on the other hand, are systematic and consistent deviances characteristic of the learner's linguistic system at a given stage of learning.

But, Nicos (1990:28) distinguishes errors as errors of competence and errors of performance. He says that

Errors of performance are unsystematic and not very serious, because the students themselves can correct them when their attention is drawn to them. These errors are attributed to carelessness, lapse of memory, etc, and they should not worry us. Errors of competence, on the other hand, are systematic and inconsequently serious, and their treatment calls for careful analysis to discover their cause. These errors represent the learners' transitional competence.

According to Rinbond (1994:740), the term "error" is an artificial concept, which is, however, interesting to study, especially when beginners and intermediate learners are investigated. The term "error" has a negative connotation, implying, as it does, that it represents an undesirable and inevitable shortcoming in the learner's performance. Error should be regarded as normal and inevitable features of second language learning, and the developmental pattern of errors in an individual learner should be taken as evidence not of failure and shortcomings, but of success and achievement. Meanwhile, Petrie (1994:4181) says that "error" is the language

production processes occasionally malfunction and some-thing different is said from what was (apparently) intended."

On the other hand, mistake is a wrong opinion, idea or act as the result of carelessness, forgetfulness, etc. (Hornby, 1987:542). Therefore, "a mistake refers to a performance of error that is either a random guess or a "slip", in that it is a failure to analyze a known system correctly" (Brown, 1987:170). Native speakers of English make mistakes, too, but normally they are capable of recognizing and correcting the mistakes. The mistakes they make are not the result of a weakness in competence but the result of imperfection in the process of producing speech. Such mistakes must be differentiated carefully from errors of a second language and foreign language. Errors are results of incomplete knowledge. This statement is supported by Richards et al. (1985:95) who state that errors are resulted from incomplete knowledge and a mistake made by a learner in writing or speaking, which is caused by lack of attention, fatigue, carelessness, or some other aspects of performance.

## **6. Method and Procedures**

In this study, the writer used the descriptive method, that is, to describe the facts based on the data he got from a written test. The errors discussed were the errors in using the adjective comparisons in English made the second year students of SMP Srijaya Negara Palembang.

In this paper, there are some steps of error analysis used in analyzing the students' errors such as identification of errors, classification of errors, stating the relative frequency of error types, and explanation. Here the writer used the methodology of error analysis suggested by S.N. Sridhar (cited in Croft, 1980:103).

## 7. The Findings

In analyzing the data gained from test, the writer applied the procedures of analyzing the data of errors offered by Sridhar (cited in Croft, 1980:103). The procedures are (1) identifying the errors, (2) classifying the errors, (3) stating the relative frequency of error types, and (4) explaining the errors.

### A. Identification of Errors

In this stage, the writer identified the errors by studying the students' incorrect answers. He identified the errors from each item of the test.

- 1) The correct answer was "as sweet as". From 30 students, there were 27 students or 90% who gave correct answers and 3 students who made errors.

The students' errors were:

- sweet : 2                      - sweet as : 1

- 2) The correct answer was "the thickest". From 30 students, there were 20 students or 66.6% who gave correct answers and 10 students who made errors.

The students' errors were:

- the most thick : 5                      - thickest than : 1  
- more thick than : 1                      - thickest : 2  
- as thickest as : 1

- 3) The correct answer was "heavier than". From 30 students, there were 10 students or 33% who gave correct answers and 20 students who made errors.

The students' errors were:

- heavyer : 3                      - more heavy than : 8  
- the most heavy : 1                      - the more heavyer : 4  
- heaver than : 1                      - as heaver as : 2  
- the more heavy : 1

- 4) The correct answer was "more important than". From 30 students, there were 17 students or 56.7% who gave correct answers and 13 students who made errors.

The students' errors were:

- more important : 3                      - the important than : 1  
- the most important : 1                      - the more important : 7  
- as important as : 1

- 5) The correct answer was "as clever as". From 30 students, there were 24 students or 80% who gave correct answers and 6 students who made errors.

The students' errors were:

- clever : 4
- clever as : 1
- the clever : 1

6) The correct answer was "the prettiest". From 30 students, there were 7 students or 23.3% who gave correct answers and 3 students who made errors.

The students' errors were:

- pretties : 2
- the prettyes : 1
- the most pretty : 19
- more pretty : 1

7) The correct answer was "the hardest" From 30 students, there were 13 students or 43.3% who gave correct answers and 3 students who made errors.

The students' errors were:

- hardest : 4
- the hard : 1
- the most hardest : 4
- the most hard : 5
- hardest than : 3

8) The correct answer was "the biggest" From 30 students, there were 2 students or 6.6% who gave correct answers and 28 students who made errors.

The students' errors were:

- biggest : 3
- the bigger : 1
- the most bigger : 2
- the most big : 1
- bigger than : 2
- the biggest : 14
- biggest than : 2
- the more bigger : 2
- as biggest as : 1

9). The correct answer was "as difficult as" From 30 students, there were 21 students or 70% who gave correct answers and 9 students who made errors.

The students' errors were:

- difficult : 7
- more difficult that : 1
- as difficult : 1

10) The correct answer was "cleaner than". From 30 students, there were 21 students or 70% who gave correct answers and 9 students who made errors.

The students' errors were:

- more clean than : 2
- the cleaner than : 3
- the more cleaner : 4

11) The correct answer was "longer than". From 30 students, there were 20 students or 66.6% who gave correct answers and 10 students who made errors.

The students' errors were:

- longer : 2
- the longer than : 4
- the more longer : 2
- the most long : 2



12) The correct answer was "larger than". From 30 students, there were 12 students or 40% who gave correct answers and 18 students who made errors.

The students' errors were:

- |                   |     |                   |     |
|-------------------|-----|-------------------|-----|
| - as largest as   | : 1 | - the more larger | : 1 |
| - more large      | : 2 | - the most large  | : 2 |
| - more large than | : 6 | - the larger than | : 2 |
| - largeer than    | : 4 |                   |     |

13) The correct answer was "more intelligent than". From 30 students, there were 18 students or 60% who gave correct answers and 12 students who made errors.

The students' errors were:

- |                        |     |                        |     |
|------------------------|-----|------------------------|-----|
| - intelligenter        | : 2 | - the most intelligent | : 1 |
| - more intelligent     | : 4 | - the intelligent than | : 1 |
| - the more intelligent | : 4 |                        |     |

14) The correct answer was "the most interesting". From 30 students, there were 21 students or 70% who gave correct answers and 9 students who made errors.

The students' errors were:

- |                         |     |                        |     |
|-------------------------|-----|------------------------|-----|
| - most interesting      | : 3 | - the more interesting | : 1 |
| - more interesting than | : 4 | - more interesting     | : 1 |

15) The correct answer was "as cold as". From 30 students, there were 19 students or 63.3% who gave correct answers and 11 students who made errors.

The students' errors were:

- |        |      |           |     |
|--------|------|-----------|-----|
| - cold | : 10 | - as cold | : 1 |
|--------|------|-----------|-----|

16) The correct answer was "more foolish than". From 30 students, there were 11 students or 36.7% who gave correct answers and 19 students who made errors.

The students' errors were:

- |                      |     |                    |     |
|----------------------|-----|--------------------|-----|
| - foolish            | : 1 | - more foolish     | : 1 |
| - foolisher than     | : 9 | - the more foolish | : 5 |
| - the foolisher than | : 2 | - the most foolish | : 1 |

17) The correct answer was "the dirtiest". From 30 students, there were 6 students or 20% who gave correct answers and 24 students who made errors.

The students' errors were:

- |                   |      |                |     |
|-------------------|------|----------------|-----|
| - the most dirty  | : 19 | - most dirty   | : 1 |
| - dirtiest        | : 2  | - the dirtiest | : 1 |
| - more dirty than | : 1  |                |     |

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8) The correct answer was "more expensive than". From 30 students, there were 22 students or 73.3% who gave correct answers and 8 students who made errors.

The students' errors were:

- the more expensive : 5
- the most expensive : 1
- the more expensive than : 1
- more expensiver than : 1

19) The correct answer was "the most crowded". From 30 students, there were 23 students or 76.7% who gave correct answers and 7 students who made errors.

The students' errors were:

- most crowded : 3
- more crowded : 2
- the crowdedest : 2

20) The correct answer was "quicker than". From 30 students, there were 12 students or 40% who gave correct answers and 18 students who made errors.

The students' errors were:

- the more quick : 2
- more quick than : 10
- the most quick : 1
- the quicker : 1
- as quicker as : 1
- the quicker than : 1
- quickest : 2

## B. Classification of Errors

Based on the findings above, the writer classified the errors into two kinds of classification--morphological level and syntactic level.

### *Classification of Errors at Morphological Level*

In this classification, the errors were classified into omission, addition, misformation (selection), and misordering (sequence). This classification can be seen in the following table.

Table 1: The Classification of Errors at Morphological Level

Classification		Errors	
		Error types	Examples
Omission	a. Positive degree	-	-
	b. Comparative degree	the omission of "-er" after the adjective	A cigar is large than a cigarette
	c. Superlative degree	the omission of "-e" after the adjective	A diamond is the hard stone that I know
Addition	a. Positive degree	-	-
	b. Comparative degree	the addition of "-er" after the adjective	Silk is more expensiver than any other natural textile
	c. Superlative degree	-	-
Misformation	a. Positive degree	-	-

	b. Comparative degree	- the addition of -er to two syllable word ending in -y - the addition of -er to one syllable word ending in -e	An elephant is heavier than a horse  A cigar is larger than a cigarette.
	c. Superlative degree	- the addition of -er to two syllable word ending in -y	Who is the prettiyes girl in this class?
Misordering	a. Positive degree	-	-
	b. Comparative degree	-	-
	c. Superlative degree	-	-

### ***Classification of Errors at Syntactic Level***

In this classification, the errors were also classified into omission, addition, misformation (selection), and misordering (sequence), but they were grouped into a certain linguistic level, syntactic level. This classification can be seen in the following table.

Table 2: The Classification of Errors at Syntactic Level

Classification		Errors	
		Error types	Examples
Omission	a. Positive degree	- the omission of "as .." - the omission of "... as" - the omission of as ... as"	- These oranges are sweet as those. - The weather is as cold it was yesterday - Aziz is blever any other boy I know
	b. Comparative degree	- the omission of "than" after the adjective - the omission of "more" before the adjective	A mile is longer a kilometer. Mr. Santiko looks intelligent than his brother
	c. Superlative degree	- the omission of "the"	. I think this is most interesting story I've ever read.
Addition	a. Positive degree	- the addition of "the"	- Aziz is the clever any other boy I know.
	b. Comparative degree	- the addition of "the"	- Mr. Smith is the more important than any other man in this town
	c. Superlative degree	- the addition of "than" after the adjective	- Jakarta is 7 biggest than city in Indonesia
Misformation	a. Positive degree	- the use of "the ... er" instead of "as ... as" - the use of "more... than" instead of "as ... as"	- Aziz is the clever any other boy I know. - This exercise is more difficult than that one.

	b. Comparative degree	- the use of "the most" instead of "... -er than" - the use of "more" instead of "-er"	- A bus is the most quick a tram  - An elephant is more heavy than a horse
	c. Superlative degree	- the use of "most" instead of "-est" - the use of "more" instead of "most"	- This is the most thick book I have ever read - I think this is the more interesting story I've ever read.
Misordering	a. Positive degree	-	-
	b. Comparative degree	-	-
	c. Superlative degree	-	-

### C. Statement of Relative Frequency of Error Types

From all of the error types in morphological level, the students made more errors of misformation in comparative and superlative degrees of adjectives, that is 29 in comparative degree, and 27 in superlative degree. Therefore, the relative frequency of errors in this type in comparative degree was 29 times and in superlative degree was 27 times. The students made no errors of addition and misformation types of errors in positive degree, omission in comparative degree, and addition in superlative degree. However, the students still made errors omission in both comparative and superlative degrees of adjectives--two times in comparative degree and 2 times in superlative degree. There was also one error of addition in comparative degree of adjective. The following table shows the relative frequency of errors in morphological level. The students made no error of misordering type.

Table 3: The Relative Frequency of Errors in Morphological Level

Degrees of comparison	Types of Errors				
	Omission	Addition	Misformation	Misordering	Total
Positive	-	-	-	-	-
Comparative	2	1	29	-	32
Superlative	2	-	27	-	29

From all of the error types in syntactic level, the students made more errors in the comparative degree of adjective than in positive and superlative degrees of

adjectives. The relative frequency of errors in comparative degree of adjective was 166 times, whereas that in superlative degree of adjective was 107 times, and that in positive degree of adjective was only 27 times.

In positive degree, the students made errors of omission 25 times, only 1 time in addition and 1 time in misformation. In comparative degree, the students made errors of omission 62 times, addition 52 times, misformation 52 times, and no error in misordering. In superlative degree, the students made errors of omission 27 times, addition 13 times, misformation 67 times, and no error in misordering.

Table 4: The Relative Frequency of Errors in Syntactic Level

Degrees of comparison	Types of Errors				
	Omission	Addition	Misformation	Misordering	Total
Positive	25	1	1	-	27
Comparative	62	52	52	-	166
Superlative	27	13	67	-	107

Comparing the relative frequencies of errors in the morphological and syntactic levels, the errors in syntactic level was much more than in the morphological errors--295 times in syntactic level and only 61 times in morphological level.

#### D. Explanation

Based on the explanations made in the previous steps of analyzing the data, it was found out that the students had difficulties in using the English comparisons of adjectives in certain areas (cases). In this step, the last step of analyzing the data of errors, the writer would like to explain those areas of difficulties that enabled the students to make errors. Here, there were at least seven areas of difficulties (cases) faced by the sample students:

- 1). Morphologically, the students had difficulties in using comparative degree of adjective:
  - a. when the adjectives consisted of one syllable
    - e.g. - A cigar is large than a cigarette.
    - A cigar is largeer than a cigarette.
  - b. when the adjectives consisted of two syllables

ending in "-y".

- e.g.     - An elephant is heavyyer than a horse.  
          - An elephant is more heavy than a horse.

## 2. Syntactically, the students had difficulties in using

### a. positive degree of adjective:

The errors were the omissions, additions, and misformations of some parts of the constructions.

The examples of omissions:

- These oranges are  $\neg$  sweet as $\neg$  those.
- The weather is  $\neg$  as cold $\neg$  it was yesterday.
- Aziz is **clever** any other boy I know.

The example of addition:

- Aziz is **the clever** any other boy I know.

The examples of misformations:

- Aziz is **the clever** any other boy I know.
- This exercise is **more difficult than** that one.

### b. comparative degree of adjective:

The errors were the omissions, additions, and misformations of some parts of the constructions.

The examples of omissions:

- A mile is **longer** a kilometre.
- Mr. Santiko looks **intelligent than** his brother.

The example of addition:

- Mr. Smith is **the more important than** any other man in this town.

The examples of misformations:

- A bus is **the quick** a tram.
- An elephant is **more heavy than** a horse.

### c. superlative degree of adjective:

The errors were the omissions, additions, and misformations of some parts of the constructions.

The example of omission:

- I think this is **most interesting** story I've ever read.

The example of addition:

- Jakarta is **biggest than** city in Indonesia.

The examples of misformations:

- This is the **most thick** book I have ever read.
- I think this is the **more interesting** story I've ever read.

## 8. Conclusions

Based on the results of the study, the writer draws four conclusions as follows:

- a) The students made errors in three types of errors, that is omission, addition, and misformation.
- b) The errors made by the students were more on syntactic level than on morphological level.
- c) Based on the degrees of the adjectives, the students made more errors in comparative and superlative degrees.
- d) No error in misordering type was made by the students.

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