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A Study of Error Analysis from Students' Sentences in Writing

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Abstract

This study was to investigate the types of sentence errors and their frequency made by first grade students from a high school in Banda Aceh in their writing of English. The participants for this study were 44 first graders chosen by random sampling. The research method used was quantitative as the data was analyzed with a statistical procedure. The data was obtained from written tests for a descriptive text entitled "My school" of 120-140 word length. This study found that three out of four sentence errors in the students' writing were fragmented sentences whilst nearly a quarter of the errors were run-on or comma splice sentences. There were only a few choppy sentence errors and no stringy sentence errors. The data revealed five types of fragmented sentences: these were the absence of a subject, the absence of a verb, the absence of both a subject and a verb, the absence of a verb in a dependent clause, and the absence of an independent clause.

Keywords: Sentence errors, error analysis, written test.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Writing is the hardest of the integral skills for the teaching of English in an EFL context. Rozimela (2004, p. 83) contends that a good mastery of English writing skills is deemed pivotal and helpful due to the nature of the written form in mastering English language learning goals. Similarly, Leki (1998, p. 5) asserts that having adequate writing skills helps our readers comprehend our ideas very easily. From these vantage points, it can be perceived that writing skills are very useful to help students

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communicate their ideas clearly. Thereby, their readers can properly understand the information they intend to convey.

In the context of teaching English in Indonesia, writing skills have been included in the national curriculum for the last 20 years even though the Indonesia curriculum has been changed several times. The inclusion of writing skills in the curriculum is to fulfil several expectations. According to Rozimela (2004, p. 85), "in the 1994 curriculum, it was hoped that students would be able to master four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) to enable students to convey their ideas both in oral and written forms".

Rozimela (2004) further states that writing skills were deemed crucial for teaching English in Indonesia, and received similar attention to the other skills. In the next two curricula, the Competence Based Curriculum (*Kurikulum Berbasis Kompetensi* or KBK) which was officially implemented in 2001 and in the later KTSP, the students were still expected to be competent not only in spoken but also in written English.

To reach the learning outcomes in the curriculum, another important language component, grammar, is also taught as the lack of competency in grammar can hinder students in producing a good piece of writing. In terms of this, Fatemi (2008, p. 2) acknowledges, "some previous studies have demonstrated that low ability in grammar can inhibit writers from writing effectively". One of the schools that have long taught writing and grammar to their students is Senior High School 11, Banda Aceh. It is expected that students at this school will not have any problems with grammar when asked to write in English.

However, the reality contradicts what is expected, meaning that there is a discrepancy between expectations and reality. Based on a preliminary study undertaken from 20th March to 15th April 2013 by the writer in the first grade at SMAN 11, he found that almost all first graders at SMAN 11 made errors in their writing. Some errors were closely related to sentence problems, such as fragmented sentences and run-on or comma splice sentences.

What the writer found is congruent with the findings of studies done by Lin (2002, as cited in Chen, 2006, p. 79). Lin analysed 26 essays written by college students in Taiwan. The results showed that the most common errors were in sentence structures (30%), followed by wrong forms of verbs (21%), fragmented sentences (15 %), and wrong use/choice of words (15 %), respectively. Similarly, Hsin in his study, (Hsin, 2003, as cited in Chen, 2006, p. 78) also found some run-on sentences in Taiwanese students' writing. These two findings, together with the findings from preliminary studies by the writer, correlated with Oshima and Hogue's statement (1991, p. 179; 1999, p. 176). They stated that the four sentence problems that students often make are fragmented sentences, run-on or comma splice sentences, choppy sentences, and stringy sentences. To summarise, sentence errors are still a serious problem for students when they are asked to write a text.

Hence, this present study was undertaken to find out the main types of sentence errors made by students in their writing. It is expected that by knowing the main sentence errors students make, it will enable both the teachers and the students to find proper solutions for problems the students have in writing, in particular sentence problems. Thus, in the future, teachers will know what to focus on when teaching writing to their students in order to help them avoid sentence problems and thereby produce a good piece of writing.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the background of the problem above, two questions stand out for this study:

1. What types of sentence errors do the first grade students of SMAN 11 Banda Aceh mostly make in their writing in English (EFL)?
2. What is the most frequent sentence error made by first grade students of SMA 11 Banda Aceh in their writing in English (EFL)?

1.3 Research Objectives

On the basis of the two research questions above, the purpose of this study is to find out the types of sentence errors that the students of SMAN 11 Banda Aceh make in their writing in English and also what is the most common sentence error that the students of SMAN 11 Banda Aceh make in their writing in English.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Writing

Writing is a process constituting planning, drafting, revising and editing. Thus to write well, people need to go through several stages to produce a well-developed piece of writing. In terms of this, Robinson and Modrey (1986, p. xi) say, “writing is a process. Writing is not an activity accomplished in one setting”. From this vantage point, it can be concluded that writing is not an easy task as it involves several processes every writer should take to write the many and various forms of writing.

2.2 A Basic Sentence

Oshima and Hogue (1991, p. 156) explain that “a sentence is a group of words that you use to communicate your ideas. Every sentence is formed from one or more clauses and expresses a complete thought.” Here are some examples of sentences:

A number of questions in that interview were taken from Cliff’s book.

S

V

A car parked over there is mine.

S

V

Looking at the examples above, we can understand that every Standard English sentence, except commands, must comprise at least one subject and one verb; otherwise the sentence will be a fragment of a sentence. Sentence one, for instance, has a subject “A number of questions” and a verb “were taken”. The other sentence also has one subject, “a car” and one verb, “is”.

A sentence comprises both independent and dependent clauses. Azar (1981, p. 209) contends, “an independent clause is a complete sentence. It contains the main subject and a verb in a sentence. A dependent clause is an incomplete sentence. It must be connected to an independent clause”. Most often, a dependent clause begins with a

subordinator such as while, when, what, whatever, whether, if, as soon as, once etc. It can be concluded that a sentence which consists of only a dependent clause not attached to an independent clause is unacceptable in Standard English writing. For examples of independent and dependent clauses, see Oshima and Hogue (1999, pp. 154-155).

There are four types of sentences: (1) simple sentences, (2) compound sentences, (3) complex sentences, and (4) compound complex sentences. A simple sentence consists of one independent clause. This independent clause might possibly be formed with one subject and one verb or a compound subject and one verb, or one subject and a compound verb, or a compound subject and a compound verb. A compound sentence is two or more independent clauses joined together. There are three ways to join clauses: (1) with a coordinator, (2) with a conjunctive adverb, and (3) with a semicolon. Complex sentences are made up of one independent clause and one (or more) dependent clause(s); there are three sorts of dependent clauses: (1) adverbial clauses, (2) adjectival clauses, and (3) noun clauses. Finally, a compound-complex sentence is a combination of two or more independent clauses and one or more dependent clauses. For examples of each type of sentence, see Oshima and Hogue (1991, 1999).

2.4 Error Analysis (EA)

EA is the development of Contrastive Analysis (CA) created in an attempt to understand the nature of students' errors. It was found that CA was unable to predict students' errors and this shortcoming led to the birth of EA. In terms of this, Rustipa (2011) comments that EA proves the inability of CA in predicting vast number of errors as in CA errors are only viewed as a result of language interference.

EA is a worth-while issue in the EFL and ESL context because it is deemed fruitful for many stakeholders in language learning. Corder (1967, as cited in Ellis, 1986) acknowledges that errors might be useful in several ways: (1) they provide the teacher with information about how much the learners have learnt (2) they provide the teacher/researcher with the evidence of how the language was learnt, and (3) they serve as devices by which the learners can discover and/or learn the rules of the target language. From the above vantage points, it can be understood that EA is significant for teachers to find out the progress of their students and for researchers to learn the nature of language learning as well as for the students to better know the correct usage of the target language.

2.3 Types of Sentence Errors

Oshima and Hogue (1991, p. 179; 1999, p. 176), contend that major sentence problems, namely, fragmented sentences, run-on or comma splice sentences, choppy sentences, and stringy sentences frequently appear in students' writing. Likewise, Feigenbaum (1985, p. 206) says that comma splice and run-on sentences commonly occur in one's own writing.

To make this clear, the writer will use the definitions together with examples of sentence error types according to Oshima and Hogue (1991, p. 179; 1999, p. 176) in the following sub-sections. However, for further examples of errors and their corrections, refer to Oshima and Hogue (1991, p. 179; 1999, p. 176).

2.3.1 Fragmented Sentences or Sentence Fragments

A fragmented sentence is a structurally incomplete sentence or part of a sentence (Oshima & Hogue, 1991, p. 179; 1999, p. 176). Sentences which do not have a subject or verb are called incomplete sentences. Furthermore, a sentence is considered incomplete if there is a dependent clause which is not attached to an independent clause, making the sentence unable to convey a complete thought. In order to make a complete thought, a dependent clause must be converted to or connected to an independent clause. It can be concluded that a grammatically correct sentence must comprise at least one subject and one verb and should be a complete thought.

2.3.2 Run-On or Comma Splice Sentences

Run-on sentences are sentences consisting of two independent clauses that are not linked by a semicolon (;) or by a coordinating conjunction (and, as, but, etc.) (Oshima & Hogue, 1991, p. 179; 1999, p. 176). A similar error occurs when two independent clauses are erroneously connected by a comma without a coordinating conjunction. This kind of error is called a comma splice.

2.3.3 Choppy Sentences

According to Oshima and Hogue, (1991, p. 179), “choppy sentences are sentences that are too short. They are the result of using too many simple sentences”. Indeed, the use of simple sentences is good but repetitive overuse of them is, however, considered a poor writing style.

2.3.4 Stringy Sentences

The use of too many clauses in one sentence usually joined by “and”, “so”, “or”, “because”, “since”, “while” and so forth can cause another sentence problem called a stringy sentence. As a result, the sentence looks endless.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

3.1.1 Method

The research method used in this study is a form of quantitative research. The main rationale for using this method was that the data were analyzed by using statistics and therefore the data yielded was statistical data. As Borg, Gall and Gall (1981, p. 199) say “quantitative research yields primarily numerical data, which is susceptible to analysis by statistical procedures”.

3.1.2 The Theoretical Framework

This study employed the framework proposed by Oshima and Hogue (1991, p. 179; 1999, p. 176). They classified sentence errors into four categories: (1) fragmented sentences, comma splice or run-on sentences, choppy sentences and stringy sentences.

3.1.2 The Choice of Participant

The participants in this study were 44 first graders at SMAN 11 Banda Aceh chosen by random sampling. The writer based his choice of this sampling procedure on Creswell's recommendation (2003, p. 156) since the result of this study was intended to be generalizable. Creswell (2003, p. 156) mentions, "with randomization, a representative sample from a population provides the ability to generalize to a larger population."

3.2 Data Collection

3.2.1 Research Instrument

There were several stages in the collection of data for the study. First, the students were asked to write a 120-140 word descriptive text entitled "*My School*". While the students wrote the researcher monitored them to make sure that they did not copy each other's work so that the students' errors and ideas were solely the product of each one of them. Students were given 60 minutes to finish their writing. Once the students finished, their writer work was collected

3.3 Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, the writer employed techniques used by other experts (Ellis, 1997, pp. 15-20; Gass & Selinger, 2001, p. 67; Hubbard, et al., 1996, pp. 135-141; Huang, 2002, as cited by Mungungu, 2010, p. 49). There were four steps in analyzing the data. The first step was the selection of the student writings for analysis. At this stage, the writer selected 20% [44 out of 220 students' writings] through random sampling. Having selected the students' writings, the researcher came to the second stage, identification of errors in the students' writing. The third stage was to classify the errors. The last stage was to count the most frequent errors that the students made by using the formula given by Sudijono (2010, p. 43):

$$P = f/N \times 100\%$$

In which:

P = Percentage of the presence of a certain type of error

f = The frequency of the presence of a certain type of error

N = Total number of all errors

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1 Analysis of the Students' Writing

Following this is the raw data from the written tests used as the instrument of the study. The data is presented in the form of charts. The first chart presents the number of fragmented sentence errors made by each student. The second chart shows the number of run-on and comma splice sentence errors made by each student and the third chart shows the number of choppy sentences. Finally, the last chart shows a summary of the test results.

4.1.1 The Number of Fragmented Sentences

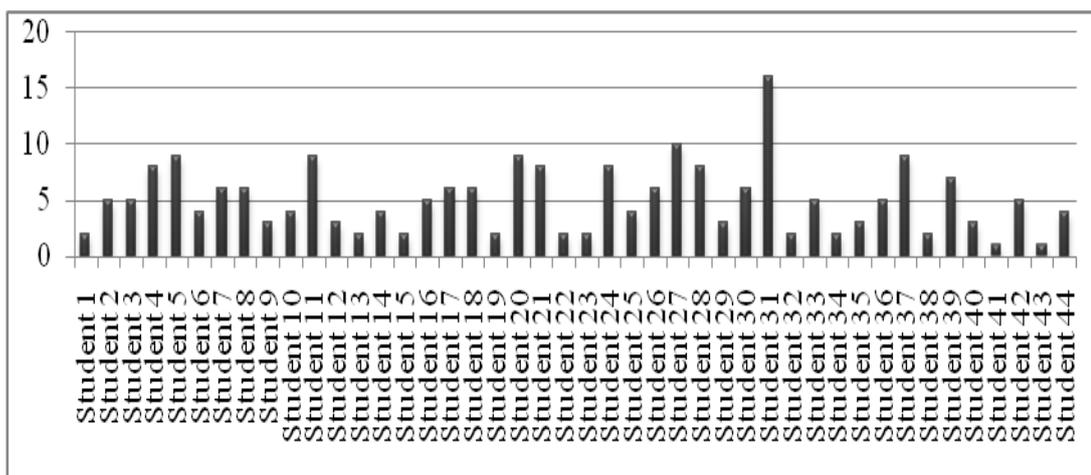


Figure 1. The number of fragmented sentence errors made by each student.

A closer look at Figure 1 above reveals that all of the students made fragmented sentence errors in their writing. The total number of fragmented sentences was 222 or 74% of all sentence errors. Nine students [20% of the sample], (no. 1, 13, 15, 19, 22, 23, 32, 34, and 38) made two fragmented sentence errors. One error only was made by two students 41 and 43, whilst three errors were made by five students 9, 12, 29, 35, 40. Four fragmented sentence errors were made by five students: no. 6, 10, 14, 25, and 44, and similarly, five fragmented sentence errors were made by five students: no. 2, 3, 16, 33, 36, and 42. Six fragmented sentences were written by six students: no. 7, 8, 17, 18, 26, 30, whilst only one student, no. 37, wrote seven fragmented sentences. Eight such errors were written by four students, no. 4, 21, 24, and 28; likewise, there were four students, too, who made 9 fragmented sentence errors: no. 5, 11, 20 and 37. A number of 10 fragmented sentence errors were made by one student no 27 and similarly, only one student, no 31, wrote 16 fragmented sentences. It seems that student no. 16 and also all those students that made more than four fragmented sentence errors should be given more attention by the teacher in order to help them avoid more fragmented sentence errors in the future.

4.1.2 The Number of Run-On and Comma Splice Sentence Errors

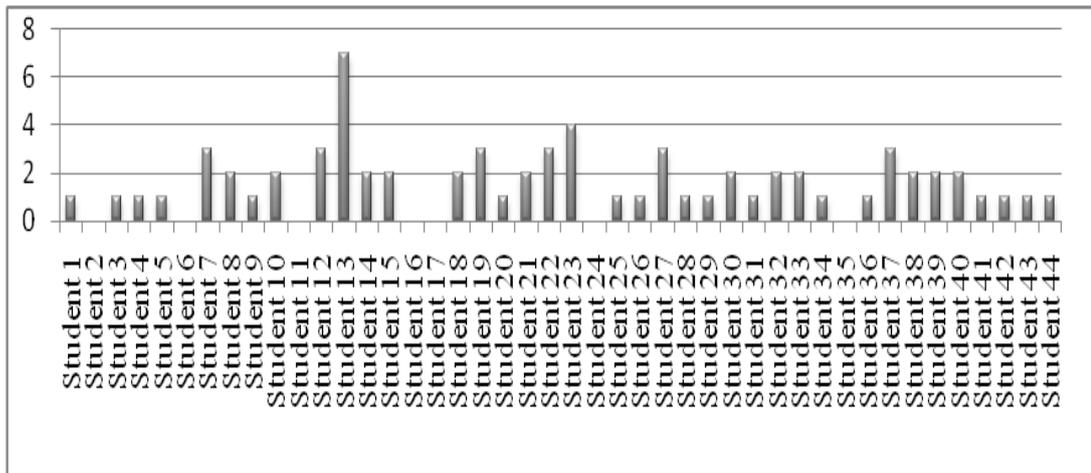


Figure 2. The number of run-on or comma splice sentences made by each student.

Figure 2 above shows the number of run-on and comma splice sentences made by each student. The total number of these types of sentence errors was 70% or 23% of all sentence errors. Seventeen students (no. 1, 3, 4, 5, 9, 20, 25, 26, 28, 29, 31, 34, 36, 41, 42, 43, and 44) made only one run-on or comma splice sentence, whereas there were 12 students (8, 10, 14, 15, 18, 21, 30, 32, 33, 38, 39, and 40) who wrote 2 run-on or comma splice error sentences. Three run-on or comma splice sentences were made by six students (7, 12, 19, 22, 27, and 37). Four such errors were written by student no. 23; similarly, 7 such errors were made by student no. 13. More attention should be given by the teacher to eight students no. 7, 12, 13, 19, 22, 23, 27 and 37 who made three or more run-on or comma splice sentence errors. The figure also shows that there were seven [7] students (no. 2, 6, 11, 16, 17, 24, and 35) who made no run-on or comma splice sentences.

4.1.3 The Number of Choppy Sentence Errors

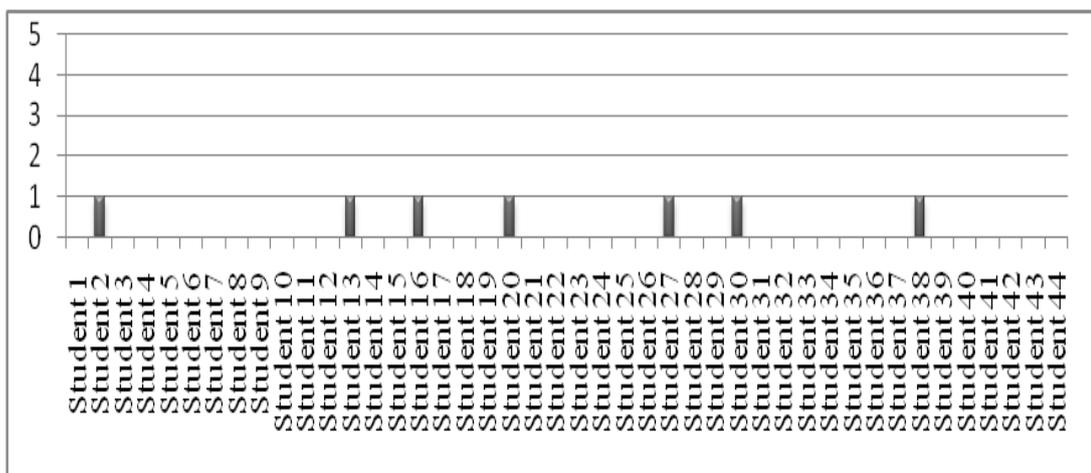


Figure 3. The number of choppy sentences made by each student.

Figure 3 shows the number of choppy sentence errors made by each student in their writing. We can see that only seven students (2, 13, 16, 20, 27, 30, and 38) made this error in their writing and they each made only one such error.

Overall, none of the students made all 4 kinds of sentence errors on their writing. Most, 37 in all, of the students made both fragmented and run-on or comma splice sentence errors and 2 made fragmented sentence and choppy sentence errors. Five students (no. 6, 11, 17, 24 and 35) made only 1 type of error (i.e. fragmented sentence error) and also only five students made 3 kinds of sentence errors in their writing (no. 13, 20, 27, 30 and 38) Moreover, no student made the fourth type of error, a stringy sentence, in their writing. It can be seen that Student 31 wrote the most fragmented sentences and Student 13 wrote the most run-on or comma splice sentence errors.

Figure 4 below illustrates the percentage of each type of error so that it can clearly be seen which type of error was the most dominant in the students' writing.

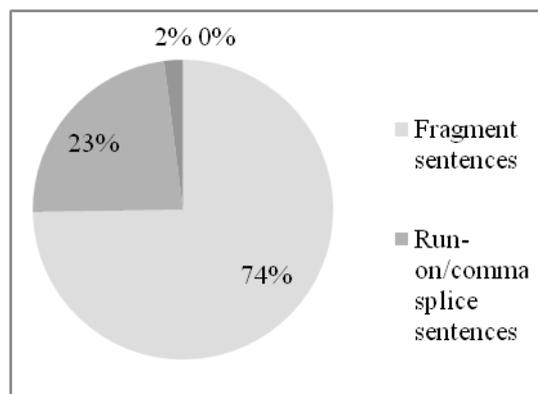


Figure 4. The frequency of the students' errors.

As can be seen in the above chart, fragmented sentence errors were the most frequent errors made by the students in their writings with 74% or 222 cases, followed by run-on and comma splice sentences, accounting for 23% or 70 cases out of the total and choppy sentences with only 2% or 7 cases. It seems therefore that teachers should pay special attention to teaching students how to avoid writing fragmented sentences.

4.2 The Examples of Students' Errors

Some examples of sentence errors taken from the students' work are presented below together with possible corrections for each example.

4.2.1 Fragmented Sentences

There were five causes of fragmented sentences in the students' writings

1. The absence of a subject

Table 1. Students' fragmented sentences caused by the absence of a subject.

No.	Students' fragmented sentence	Suggested correction for each sentence
1.	At SMAN 11 has sixty teachers	SMAN 11 has sixty teachers.
2.	In my school has laboratory	My school has a laboratory.
3.	Have a parking lot	SMA 11 has a parking lot.

Table 1 are some examples of fragmented sentences where the subject is absent. Each sentence above misses one important element: a subject. If we observe the first two sentences fleetingly, we could assume that these two sentences are grammatically correct since they appear to have subjects: “SMA 11” and “my school”, respectively. These however are not the subjects. The presence of the prepositions “at” and “in” preceding the words “SMA 11” and “my school” changes them to be objects of a preposition. Objects of a preposition can never be a subject. Phillips (2001, p. 202) says, “a preposition that is followed by a noun, pronoun, gerund or noun clause is called an object of a preposition. If the words are an object of a preposition, they are not the subject”. To correct these sentences, simply omit the prepositions preceding the words “SMA 11” and “my school”.

In addition, example 3 obviously does not have a subject. To correct it, simply add a subject: “SMA 11”.

2. *The absence of a verb*

Some fragmented sentences were caused by the absence of a verb. Some examples of sentences without a verb taken from the students' writings are shown in the following table.

Table 2. Students' fragmented sentences caused by the absence of a verb.

No.	<i>Students' errors</i>	<i>Correction of the errors</i>
1	SMA 11 Banda Aceh one of senior high school.	<i>SMA 11 Banda Aceh is one of the senior high schools in Banda Aceh...</i>
2	Head master of SMAN 11 named Mr. Muhibbul Khibri.	<i>The name of the head master of SMAN 11 is Mr. Muhibbul Khibri.</i>
3	My school on street Paya Umet	<i>My school is on Paya Umet Street.</i>
4	SMAN 11 established in 2003	<i>SMAN 11 was established in 2003.</i>
5	My school situated in 2003	<i>My school is situated on Paya Umet Street.in Blang Cut, or My School was established in 2003.</i>

The first three sentences above have a subject, but do not have any verb to make a complete sentence. Therefore, to correct these sentences, they simply need to add a verb or an auxiliary “is” since the subjects are all in singular format. Furthermore, the fourth and fifth fragmented sentences do not have any verb, either. Although “situated” and “established” look like verbs, they are not verbs. This is because “situated” and “established” are in the form of a past participle. If a past participle is not preceded by any auxiliary (e.g. am, is, are, have, has, etc.), it cannot act as a verb. In terms of this, Phillips (2001, p. 206) acknowledges that a past participle is confusing as it can serve as either a verb or an adjective. It acts as a verb if it is accompanied by an auxiliary or otherwise, it cannot. Accordingly, both “situated and established” in the fourth and fifth fragmented sentences above are not verbs, but verb-derived adjectives, causing the sentences to be incomplete. To fix these two sentences, they just need to add an auxiliary as shown in the corrections in the right hand column. Example no. 5 above also has an error where there is a mismatch between the past participle and the qualifying phrase that follows. As a result, there are two possible corrected sentences.

3. *The absence of both a subject and a verb*

Some fragmented sentences were due to the absence of both a subject and a verb. Below are two examples of students' sentences without both a subject and a verb.

Table 3. Students' fragmented sentences due to the absence of both a subject and a verb

No.	Students' errors	Correction of the errors
1.	SMA 11 is located at PayaUmet. Blang cut Lueng Bata	SMA 11 is located at Paya Umet street, Blang Cut in Lueng Bata.
2.	In this description of my school.	This is a description of my school.

In example 1, the phrase “Blang Cut Lueng Bata” neither has a subject nor a verb and it is actually a part of the preceding sentence. To correct it, the period (Am E.) or full stop (Br. E.) in the middle must be changed to a comma. Example 2 is also written without both a subject and a verb. A noun preceded by a preposition cannot function as a subject and therefore the phrase “in this description” cannot be a subject. To correct this sentence, simply rewrite this phrase to make it a subject by deleting the preposition “in” and then also add an auxiliary verb and an “a” or equivalent.

4. *The absence of a verb in a dependent clause*

The absence of a subject or a verb in a dependent clause can also lead to a fragmented sentence. Every clause, regardless of whether it is an independent or a dependent clause, must have a subject and a verb (Azar, 1981, p. 209). A couple of students' errors of this type are shown in the following table.

Table 4. Students' fragmented sentences caused by the absence of a verb in a dependent clause.

No.	Students' errors	Correction of the errors
1.	My school has all kinds facilities <u>that interesting.</u>	My school has all kinds of facilities <u>that are interesting.</u>
2.	In the break time, most students go to cafeteria <u>that located in the corner of the school.</u>	During break time, most students go to the cafeteria <u>that is located at the corner of the school.</u>

The two subordinate clauses (adjectival clauses) in the above examples are incomplete since neither of them has a verb. “Interesting” and “located”, are not verbs. The word “interesting” in sentence 1 is a present participle that functions as an adjective since it is not accompanied by an auxiliary. It can serve as a verb if it is accompanied by an auxiliary (e.g. are interesting) (Phillip, 2001, p. 206). In sentence 2, the word “located” can be mistaken for a verb, but since it is a past participle which is not preceded by any auxiliary it cannot be a verb. Since both “interesting and located” are not verbs, the adjectival clauses above do not have a verb, making these sentences fragmented. To correct the clauses above the auxiliaries, are and is, just need to be inserted. Notice that some other elements are also changed to improve each sentence.

5. *The absence of an independent clause*

Some students wrote some dependent clauses not connected to an independent clause. Such clauses are fragmented sentences. The following are some examples:

Table 5. Students' fragmented sentences caused by the absence of an independent clause.

No.	Students' errors	The correction of errors
1.	SMA 11 is different from other schools. Which exist in Banda Aceh.	SMA 11 is different from other schools which exist in Banda Aceh.

Table 5 continued...

2.	I am very happy. Because our teachers and students are very good and friendly.	I am very happy because our teachers and students are very good and friendly.
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The two above dependent clauses are not connected to an independent clause. Consequently, these sentences do not convey a complete thought. It is rather easy to fix these errors - just simply leave out the period (Am. E) or full stop (Br. E.) between the independent clause and the second, dependent, one.

4.2.2 Run-On or Comma Splice Sentences

Oshima and Hogue (1991, p. 175) contend, “a run-on sentence is a sentence in which two or more independent clauses are written one after another with no punctuation”. A comma splice sentence is similar to a run-on sentence in which a writer joins two independent clauses with only a comma without a conjunction (Oshima & Hogue, 1991, p. 175). The following table shows some of the students’ run-on and comma splice sentences as well as suggested corrections adopted from Oshima and Hogue (Ibid).

Table 6. Students’ run-on and comma splice sentences.

No.	Sentences with errors	Corrected sentences	Suggested methods
1	My school is painted in an orange color my school has five laboratories, one library, and three canteens. (run-on)	My school is painted in an orange color; it has five laboratories, one library, and three canteens.	Use a semicolon or use a period to make two sentences
2.	SMA 11 Banda Aceh was established in 2005 this school has 21 classes and 5 laboratories. (run-on)	SMA 11 Banda Aceh was established in 2005; it has 21 classrooms and 5 laboratories.	Use a semicolon or a period as above.
3.	This School Was Founded in 2005, The name of the head master is MuhibbulKibri.S.Pd. (comma splice)	This school was founded in 2005. The head master is Muhibbul Kibri.S.Pd.	Use a period/full stop instead of a comma.
4.	SMAN 11 is a high school located in the city of Banda Aceh, SMAN 11 possessed a school leader often called the head school. (comma splice)	SMAN 11 is a high school located in the city of Banda Aceh; the leader of the school is usually called the head master.	Use a semicolon
5.	My school is Senior high school 11, I like my school. (comma splice)	My school is SMA 11 and I like my school.	Use a coordinating conjunction
6.	When the gate opens, we can see the building of SMA 11, SMA 11 has 28 classes for students. (comma splice)	When the gate opens, we can see the buildings of SMA 11, which has 28 classrooms for students	Use a subordinating conjunction

4.2.3 Choppy Sentences

Oshima and Hogue (1991, p. 173) say, “choppy sentences are sentences that are too short”. They are the result of using too many simple sentences”. The use of too many simple sentences one after the other in one piece of writing is considered a flaw. For methods of correcting choppy sentence problems, see Oshima and Hogue (ibid).

This study recorded only 7 choppy sentences in the students' writing: The following table shows two examples of choppy sentences taken from the students' work as well as suggested methods for correction as proposed by Oshima and Hogue (1991).

Table 7. Students' writings choppy sentence problems.

No.	Sentence errors	Corrected sentences	Suggested methods
1.	My school position in Blang cut way PayaUmet, Banda Aceh. My school has one mosque and parking area. My school is very good. My school has several laboratorium.	<i>My school is in PayaUmet Street, Blang Cut, Banda Aceh. It, has a mosque, a parking area, and several laboratories and is a very good school or My school which has etc.....is a very</i>	Use a pronoun or a subordinating conjunction
2.	My school senior high school 11. I like my school now. SMA 11 located in Blang cut village, PayaUmet street.	<i>My school is SMA 11 which is located in Blang Cut on Paya Umet Street. I like my school now.</i>	Use a subordinating conjunction

5. DISCUSSION

This study revealed that nearly all the students still made some sentence errors in their writing. Fragmented sentences were the most common errors that appeared in the students' writing. There were 222 or 74 % of the total errors and this is considered too many because of the short length of the essay assigned to be done by the students. This study found 5 causes of fragmented sentences, namely the absence of (1) a subject, (2) a verb (3) both a subject and a verb or (4) a verb in a dependent clause and (5) the absence of an independent clause. This finding is congruent with a previous study undertaken by Lin (2002, as cited in Chen, 2006, p. 79) in Taiwan in which fragmented sentences were a serious problem in students' writings. From the findings of both studies, we can say that teachers should pay more attention to this problem by showing their students how to avoid fragmented sentences.

This study also found 70 run-on or comma splice sentences i.e. 23% of the students' errors. Hence this error is the second most dominant error made by the students. Similarly, a previous study conducted by Hsin (2003, as cited in Chen, 2006, p. 78) also revealed some run-on sentences in writing done by Taiwanese students. Thus students in both studies made run-on or comma splice sentence errors in their writings.

Only 7 Choppy sentences or 2% of all errors were found in the students' writing. This error occurs when many simple sentences are written one after the other and writing that contains choppy sentences is considered poor.

This study did not find any stringy sentences in the students' writing. Further study could be done to find out why the students could avoid making this kind of error in their writing.

This study yielded findings consistent with the statement made by Oshima and Hogue (1991, p. 179; 1999, p. 176) that students still make many sentence errors, especially fragmented sentences, run-on or comma splice sentences and choppy sentences but not stringy sentences.

This study was able to yield findings for the teaching of English in general and for the teaching of writing in particular. Knowing the types of sentence errors commonly made by students enables teachers to focus on what they should teach their students and

to know what to check to ensure that their students are putting into practice the lessons given them.

6. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrated that first grade students from SMAN 11 Banda Aceh made three types of sentence errors when writing. They were as follows: fragmented sentences, comma splice or run-on sentences, and choppy sentences. There was only one type of error that did not appear in the students' writing, that is, stringy sentences. There were several types of fragmented sentence errors: (1) the absence of a subject, (2) the absence of a verb, (3) the absence of both a subject and a verb, (4) the absence of a verb in a dependent clause, and (5) the absence of an independent clause. The total number of errors found was 299 and this was no small number due to the limited length of the essay (only 120-140 words). As regards the frequency of errors, the most frequent error was fragmented sentences (222 or 74%), followed by run-on or comma splice sentences (70 or 23%) and choppy sentence (7 or 2%).

Realizing the weaknesses of this study, the writers suggest that further studies on errors in students' sentence writing should be carried out for two reasons: Firstly, the next study should be conducted to seek to better understand the underlying causes of each type of sentence error by means of a questionnaire or interview with teachers and students. Secondly, a study should be undertaken to know why students in this study wrote so many fragmented sentences, e.g. teaching of correct punctuation and the use of inadequate conjunctions, and also why the students did not make any stringy sentence errors. Data can be gathered by using a questionnaire and conducting interviews with the teachers and the students so that the findings can be used to help teachers teach students how to avoid sentence errors, particularly fragmented sentences.

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