

# GRAMMATICAL MISTAKES IN RELATION TO ENGLISH COMPETENCY TEST

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## Abstract

The research aims at finding out the freshmen's ability on English grammar. This is very important activity so that the English department knows their level of ability so that the teaching materials can be determined. The test is about structure, taken from TOEFL. The theory used is the theory English Language Teaching, especially Testing by Harmer (2001), in which the test is used as diagnostic test. The result of the test will provide the information about three crucial points on grammar that must be developed. This will help the related teacher to decide what items should be taught so that by the end of the semester, at least most of the students can reach the level of Intermediate, that is the level in which the students are capable of doing conversations on routines, understanding lectures, understanding English TV programs (<http://www.embassyenglish.com/student-life/your-level-of-english> cited on 19 January 2015).

**Keywords:** *testing; grammatical; intermediate*

## I INTRODUCTION

The study program of English is one of the study programs in the faculty of Arts, Udayana University. This study program, according to the regulation of the government, conducts lectures both in English and Indonesian language. The students of the study program have to fulfil 144 credits in which 122 credits are taken from English subjects. This composition shows that the English ability of the students is very important to enable them to follow and understand the lectures properly. This study program is not provided for those who would like to have an English course, instead it is provided for those who would like to improve their skills on language and literature. For this reason, it is a must for new students in our program to have possessed the English language ability at least at the level of intermediate. Intermediate level is the level in which the students have had the ability of conducting conversation of routines, writing and understanding simple texts, taking notes and understanding lectures, and TV programs

(<http://www.embassyenglish.com/student-life/your-level-of-english>, cited on 19 January 2015). The existing fact actually shows that all the new students have passed the selection however their mark is the compilation of the mark of Bahasa Indonesia, social sciences, and mathematics. Their marks are not the real reflection of their English ability. Usually when they start the lectures they found a lot of difficulties in following the lectures due to the fact that they lack of English ability. To find out their real English ability,

preliminary test must be conducted and the test used is TOEFL test. After finding their ability, a special English program can be conducted.

Masduki (2004) has done the research entitled “The Study of English Language Ability of the Students of Non-English Department through the Program of Model B Intensive Course). He suspects that the reason why tertiary education students have a low English language ability is the lack of time in giving them sufficient opportunity to use the language while they were in Senior High School. In the Model B Intensive Course program the teaching was conducted by using communicative-integrative approach, 22 hours/week/class for 15 weeks. The result of the program showed improvement in the students’ ability in the skills of listening (pre-test 429 - post test 445), structure (pre-test 378 – post-test 442), reading (pre-test 402 – post-test 433), writing (pre-test 3.15 – post-test 4.14), and speaking (pre-test 2.68 – post-test 3.46). The research conducted by Masduki strengthens the opinion that the ability of students accepted in universities is not yet sufficient.

English is very important in supporting working performance and that is the reason why English is learned all over the world. <http://news.okezone.com/read/2015/01/30/65/1099246/kemampuan-bahasa-inggris-di-ri-pada-tingkat-menengah>) says that among 63 countries, the English ability of the young people in Indonesia is in the middle, with the score of 52.7 while the highest ability is dominated by the countries like Denmark, Netherland and Sweden with the score of 69.30. It said that in Indonesia the ability of English of adults is increasing. In the Asian region, out of 14 countries, the English ability of the Indonesian young people is number six with the high ability is found in the places like Jakarta, Bali, Yogyakarta, West Sumatra , West Jawa and so on.

The results of the researches mentioned above show that the English ability of the students or young people is both sufficient and insufficient. This is very much different from the real situation in the English Department, Faculty of Arts, Udayana University. The government has decided the kinds of tests that must be taken by the graduates’ senior high schools to enter universities, then the English Department must accept them and do the hard work to make them capable graduates. The insufficient ability must be improved so that they are able to follow and understand the lectures. However, before improving or preparing the teaching model for the students, their exact level of the English language must be found out. To do that, at the beginning of the semester, the new students are given a test that is TOEFL test. Harmer (2001:321) states that the purposes of the test are (1) Placement test, that is the test that is used to group the students based on the level of their language ability, (2) Diagnostic test, the test that is used to find out the problems faced by the students and after the problems can be identified, the teaching materials and procedures can be decided, (3) Progress or Achievement test that is the test used to find out the improvement of the students in relation to their ability in absorbing the teaching materials, and (4) Proficiency test, that is the test to find out the general ability of the language. Since this research has the purpose

to find out the problems faced by the students, the kind of test used is Diagnostic test. To be able to achieve the goal of the test, according to Harmer (2001) the test must be (a) valid, which means that the test should test what to be tested, (b) reliable which means that the result of the test must be consistent. It has been said that the students pass the entry test but their English language ability is not sufficient. The reason for this is that because the purpose of the entrance test is not to find the language ability of the language students, in this case English, instead, the test is conducted to select the students who can pass the passing grade despite of the low mark in English. The passing grade is the mark set based on the compiled marks of other subjects.

After being accepted, the students are already the responsibility of the English Department, the teaching process must be planned and conducted. Since the main purpose of the students is that they know how to communicate in English, the skills taught must focuss to reach the goal. In relation to this, Richards (2006) suggested that teachers must understand that they should provide time for the students to do the activities in which they can use the language to communicate, using various skills, applying various language functions and negotiating meaning.

In relation to the level of English language ability which is not yet sufficient, this research has the purpose of finding out the level of the language ability of the freshmen.

## **II MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The research was conducted in both qualitative and quantitative methods. The quantitative method was used to count the mistakes the students made and the score they have, while qualitative method was used in describing why they made mistakes in particular areas of English.

Mahsun (2007) states that data can be obtained from samples that are taken from population when the number is too big and the area is too wide. However, for this research, the data was taken from the whole population, to be more precise. The other reason to use the whole population as sample because they were from various Senior High Schools, both inside and out side Bali, thus, they were considered as heterogenous population. The higher numbers of samples used the more accurate the result of the research will be.

The data of this research were the TOEFL test score of the students which showed the students English ability.

In using the TOEFL test, only the parts of structure and written expression were used considering that those parts are the best parts to show their grammar ability which is very important to support their other skills. This is in line with Sutisna's idea that teaching grammar is important because it supports the other four skills, and the teaching which is mainly focussed on meaning and communication is not sufficient to make the students obtain language proficiency. Sutisna's idea of the importance of grammar is agreeable since ignoring grammar means that students will be able to speak

fluently but often with many grammatical mistakes even the very basic ones which is in fact very disturbing.

The number of questions that the students had to do were 40 questions as described below.

### Structure

**Directions:** Questions 1-15 are incomplete sentences. Beneath each sentence you will see four words or phrases, marked (A), (B), (C), and (D). Choose the one word or phrase that best completes the sentence. Then, on your answer sheet, find the number of the question and fill in the space that corresponds to the letter of the answer you have chosen. Fill in the space so that the letter inside the oval cannot be seen.

Look at the following examples.

#### Example I

The president \_\_\_\_\_ the election by a landslide.

(A) won (B) he won (C) yesterday (D) fortunately

The sentence should read, "The president won the election by a landslide."

Therefore, you should choose (A).

#### Example II

When \_\_\_\_\_ the conference?

(A) the doctor attended (B) did the doctor attend

(C) the doctor will attend (D) the doctor's attendance

The sentence should read, "When did the doctor attend the conference?"

Therefore, you should choose (B).

Now begin work on the questions.

1. Different hormones \_\_\_\_\_ at the

same time on a particular target issue.

(A) usually act (B) usually acting (C) they usual act (D) the usual action

2. The tidal forces on the Earth due to \_\_\_\_\_ only 0.46 of those due to the Moon.

(A) the Sun is (B) the Sun they are (C) the Sun it is (D) the Sun are

3. Most radioactive elements occur in igneous and metamorphic \_\_\_\_\_ fossils occur in sedimentary rocks.

(A) rocks, nearly all (C) rocks, nearly all are

(B) rocks, but nearly all (D) rocks, which nearly all are

4. \_\_\_\_\_ radioisotope is encountered, the first step in its identification is the determination of its half-life.

(A) An unknown (C) When an unknown

(B) Afterwards, an unknown (D) During an unknown

5. The Missouri \_\_\_\_\_ longest river in the United States, flows through seven states from its source in Montana to its confluence with the Mississippi.

(A) River, the (B) River is the (C) River is one of the (D) River, one of the

6. Coral islands such as the Maldives are the tips of reefs built during periods of warm climate, when \_\_\_\_\_ higher.

(A) were sea levels (B) sea had levels (C) having sea level (D) sea levels were

7. Hail forms within large, dense cumulonimbus \_\_\_\_\_ develop on hot, humid summer days.  
 (A) clouds (B) clouds that (C) clouds that are (D) clouds that they
8. Measles is a highly contagious viral disease \_\_\_\_\_ by a characteristic skin rash.  
 (A) accompany (B) is accompanied (C) accompanied (D) it is accompanied
9. Charles Darwin's first scientific book, published in 1842, \_\_\_\_\_ a since substantiated theory on the origin of coral reefs and atolls.  
 (A) to present (B) presented (C) presenting (D) it presents
10. Phytoplanktons thrive where \_\_\_\_\_ phosphorus into the upper layers of a body of water.  
 (A) upwelling currents circulate (C) are upwelling currents  
 (B) the circulation of upwelling currents (D) circulates upwelling currents
11. By the end of 1609, Galileo had a 20-power telescope that enabled him to see \_\_\_\_\_ planets revolving around Jupiter.  
 (A) the call (B) he called (C) to call him (D) what he called
12. On every continent except Antarctica \_\_\_\_\_ more than 30,000 species of spiders.  
 (A) some are (B) some of the (C) are some of the (D) is some
13. Many bugs possess defensive scent Glands and emit disagreeable odors when \_\_\_\_\_.  
 (A) disturbed (B) are disturbed (C) they disturbed (D) are they disturbed
14. Hurricanes move with the large- scale wind currents \_\_\_\_\_ are imbedded.  
 (A) that they (B) which they (C) in that they (D) in which they
15. \_\_\_\_\_ the Earth's ice to melt, the Earth's oceans would rise by about two hundred feet.  
 (A) If all (B) Were all (C) If all were (D) All was

### Written Expression

**Directions:** In questions 16-40, each sentence has four underlined words or phrases. The four underlined parts of the sentence are marked (A), (B), (C), and (D). Identify the one underlined word or phrase that must be changed in order for the sentence to be correct. Then, on your answer sheet, find the number of the question and fill in the space that corresponds to the letter of the answer you have chosen.

Look at the following examples.

#### Example I

The four string on a violin are tuned in fifths.

A            B                            C            D

The sentence should read, "The four strings on a violin are tuned in fifths." Therefore, you should choose (B).

Now, begin work on the questions.

16. The brilliantly colored rhinoceros viper has two or three horns above each nostrils.  
 A B C  
 D

17. Most of the outer planets has large swarms of satellites surrounding them.  
 A B C D

18. Historical records show that Halley's comet has return about every seventy-six years for the past 2,000 years.  
 A B C  
 D

19. Robert Heinlein was instrumental in popularizing science fiction with series of stories that is first published in the Saturday Evening Post.  
 A B C  
 D

20. Each number on the Richter scale represent a tenfold increase in the amplitude of waves of ground motion recorded during an earthquake.  
 A B  
 C D

21. Lake Tahoe, located on the eastern edge of the Sierra Nevada range, is feed by more than thirty mountain streams.  
 A B C  
 D

22. Established in 1789 and operated by the Jesuits, Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. is the older Roman Catholic institution of higher learning in The United States.  
 A B C D

23. The surface of the planet Venus is Almost completely hid by the thick clouds that shroud it.  
 A B C  
 D

24. Present in rocks of all types, hematite is particular abundant in the sedimentary rocks known as red beds  
 A B C  
 D

25. Tropical cyclones, alike extratropical cyclones, which derive much of their

Energy from the jet stream, originate far from the polar front.

D

26. Elizabeth Cady Stanton organized the first U.S. women's rights convention in 1848 and was instrumentally in the struggle to win voting and property rights for women.

A B

C

D

27. Jaguarundis are sleek, long-tailed creatures colored either an uniform reddish brown or dark grey.

A

B

C

D

28. It is possible to get a sunburn on a cloudy day because eighty percent of the ultraviolet rays from the Sun would penetrate cloud cover.

A

B

C

D

29. In 1964, GATT established the International Trade Center in order to assist developing countries in the promotion of its exports.

A

B

C

D

30. Joseph Heller's novel Catch-22 satirizes both the horrors of war as well as the power of modern bureaucratic institutions

A

B

C

D

31. In Roots, Alex Haley uses fictional details to embellish a factual histories of seven generations of his family.

A

B

C

D

32. The carbon atoms of the diamond are so strongly bonded that a diamond can only be scratched with other diamond.

A

B

C

D

33. Viruses are extremely tiny parasites that are able to reproduce only within the cells of theirs hosts.

A

B

C

D

34. During the last Ice Age, which ended about 10,000 years ago, there was about three times more ice than is today.

A

B

C

D



Advanced	575 - 760
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### III RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The result of the test given to the students shows the following scores. The range of the score is 270 – 648. The result of the research shows that the range of the score of those students are 270 - 648

The numbers and the percentage of of the students for each level of language ability are as follows.

Levels	Numbers	Percentage
Pre-Intermediate	28	29.2
Intermediate	66	68.8
Advanced	2	2

The result showed by the level scores indicates that more than half of the students should be able to join the lectures in the English Department. However 29,9% is considered to be a sufficient percentage to disturb the learning process if they are not taken care of.

Based on the analysis conducted on the mistakes produced by the students, the following is the list of the three top areas in which the students make mistakes.

No	Areas of mistakes	Percentage
1.	Conditional	92.8
2.	Linking words	75.3
3.	Noun Phrase	69.6

The percentage above was obtained from conducting the following procedures. The numbers of students making mistakes and the percentage in each of the question was calculated by using the formula below.

$$\text{NSMM} \times 100\% = \text{PoMQ}$$

96

NSMM = Numbers of Students Making Mistakes in one number of question.

PoQ = Percentage of Mistakes in one Question.

When the test presents more than one number of the similar area, the percentage of those similar numbers are accumulated and then divided into the

numbers of the questions of the similar area. The result is then used as the percentage representing several questions of the similar areas.

To find out why those students making mistakes in those 13 areas of language, explanation is presented below. It is expected by knowing the reasons why the mistakes occurred, the teaching model can be more easily presented.

1. Conditional. The result of the test shows that 92,8% students made mistake in this area. They do not understand that conditional sentences can have subject-operator inversion without conjunction (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973:326). Thus, when the students were facing such questions they looked for the options containing 'if'. The following question of the test illustrates the mistake.

\_\_\_\_\_ the Earth's ice to melt, the Earth's oceans would rise by about two hundred feet  
 (A) If all  
 (B) Were all  
 (C) If all were  
 (D) All was

Most of the students chose (C) because they thought that conditional cannot have the form of inversion. If they had known about it, they would have chosen (B) because that is the correct answer.

2. Linking Words. In the area of linking words, 75,3% of the students made mistakes. Based on the examination on the questions

Most radioactive elements occur in igneous and metamorphic \_\_\_\_\_ fossils occur in sedimentary rocks.  
 (A) rocks, nearly all  
 (B) rocks, but nearly all  
 (C) rocks, nearly all are  
 (D) rocks, which nearly all are

The mistake done by the students could be because they did not understand most of the words in the question leading to the situation that the clauses have contradictory connection. Most of them took (D), thinking that the second clause is the post modifier, while the correct answer is (B).

3. Noun Phrase. The percentage of the students making mistake in the area of nouns is 69,9%. The mistakes they made could be because they do not know that modifier can take the form of verb-ing (gerund) or merely adjective which means that the students have to understand the forms of adjective. By knowing it, eventhough the students do not understand the meaning of the word, they will know that the form is noun phrase. They will also know that when the noun phrase stands as the subject of a clause, it will be immediately followed with a verb functioning as predicate. The problems of not knowing the points mentioned above occur in answering the following question.

Phytoplanktons thrive where \_\_\_\_\_ phosphorus into the upper layers of a body of water.

- (A) upwelling currents circulate
- (B) the circulation of upwelling currents
- (C) are upwelling currents
- (D) circulates upwelling currents

The correct answer for the question above is (A) since ‘upwelling currents’ is a noun phrase consisting of pre-modifier in the form of gerund ‘upwelling’ and the head ‘current’, followed by verb which functions as a predicate. However, instead of choosing (A) as the correct answer, most of the students chose (B) without being aware that the choice will make the clause have no predicate.

Another example of mistake that the students made is caused by the fact that they did not know that a pronoun in front of a noun already carries the marker that the noun following it must be in the form of singular.

The brilliantly colored rhinoceros viper

A

has two or three horns above each

B

C

nostrils.

D

For the kind of test above, what is considered to be the correct answer is the one that does not fit in the sentence. The correct answer for the question above is (D) because the pronoun ‘each’ must be followed by noun in singular form. It must also be followed by countable noun. Most of the students chose (A), thinking that the adverb should be an adjective ‘brilliant’ modifying the word ‘colored’, which in that context. Also from the form, it is not functioning as a noun. A noun cannot take –ed form.

#### IV CONCLUSION

The analysis of the test provides the score of Grammar and at the same time present the areas of language in which they made mistakes. They have problems in almost all class words. This means that it will be hard for them to use the language properly and most likely it is going to disturb the learning process. Considering the time, place and financial constraints that must be faced by the English Study Program in Udayana university, there is only one way that can be done to produce competitive graduates that is doing integrated teaching in which the teacher collaborates to decide, the teaching materials, the teaching procedures and the testing. With solid cooperation, accompanied by the willingness of working hard, it is believed that the result will be satisfactory.

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