The Effectiveness of Grammarly to Promote Student's English Grammar Competence: A Case Study

Jonathan Tanihardjo [1],
Jovianto [2]
Bunda Mulia University,
Indonesia
jtanihardjo@bundamulia.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Feedback is of importance in language for language learners, since it is useful to evaluate the learners' ability and performance when using the target language. Nowadays, with the development of technology, learners have begun to make use of educational applications, like Grammarly to help them review the grammar, spelling, punctuation, and suggest replacement for the identified errors in the English texts. The primary data collected for this study are the results of the student's grammar test, which test items were taken from the feedback generated by Grammarly. Nugroho (2021) states that feedback on students' errors is crucial in the learning process, so that students can learn from their mistakes and avoid repeating the same mistakes in the future. The results in this study show that the student managed to correctly identify most of the grammatical errors he previously made in his thesis. The findings show the number of incorrect numbers decreased quite significantly to 11 out of 35 which fell into 6 subcategories with the determiner as the most problematic grammatical error.

Keywords: *effectiveness, Grammarly, feedback, grammatical errors, competence*

INTRODUCTION

Grammar is one of the language elements that are often perceived challenging and relatively unimportant in language learning, and thus language learners often unwillingly learn the rule of a language inside and

out. They are certain that vocabulary plays a larger role in language learning than grammar does.

Errors or blunders are expected to happen when learning a foreign language, since it is a process that must be done step by step. According to Corder (1967), errors are anticipated to demonstrate that learning process is taking place. He also said that in-depth study of errors will undoubtedly reveal important information about how a language is actually learned. Additionally, he stated that errors serve as feedback and let teachers know how effective their lessons are. Similar to this, Olasehinde (2002) asserts that mistakes are inevitable and an essential component in the learning process.

When writing, there are several crucial considerations to make, accuracy being one of them. Feedback is crucial for improving learners' accuracy since it helps them recognize their errors and advance their knowledge and abilities. As supported by Nugroho (2021), in order to deal with problems when producing the language, teachers must actively participate in providing feedback on students' errors in order for students to learn from their mistakes and avoid repeating them in the future.

In the modern day, technology has advanced quickly in many areas, including education. Technology integration into the learning process is regarded as an effective way for instructors and students to support teaching-learning activities. Several automated feedback tools, such as Grammarly, Hemingway, NounPlus, Ginger, etc are available to help students improve the grammar of their writing. According to Shang (2019), automated feedback enables students to immediately rectify their own mistakes through self-correction.

This research is aimed to find out (1) how effective such programs help the student spot his mistakes and improve his understanding of the English grammar, and (2) which grammar rules are still problematic to the student. To put it differently, this research is expected to see how automated written corrective feedback from Grammarly is effective and advantageous to improve their understanding, and also to see which grammatical errors kept taking place.

METHOD

In this study, one student of the English department who finished writing the thesis and passed the thesis defense was involved. The researcher then utilized the Grammarly to spot the grammatical errors the student committed in his thesis, and get the feedback from it. Later, he had the student revise the grammatical errors based on the feedback generated by the Grammarly. The researcher then made a grammar test, which test items were taken from his thesis.

The primary data collected for this study are the results of the student's grammar test, which was in the form of multiple choices questions similar to those in Paper Based TOEFL test, where the student was expected

to be able to identify the grammatical errors. However, in order to find out whether the student had learnt something and understood the feedback from the Grammarly, the researcher also had him to opt for the suitable revision. There were 35 test items, all of which were randomly taken from the student's grammatical errors suggested by the Grammarly. The options provided for each test item suggested the revision necessary.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The writing issues were 1,069 errors in total with 570 critical issues related to correctness, which fell into 14 subcategories, such as: (1) Determiner use, (2) incorrect noun number, (3) wrong or missing prepositions, (4) pronoun use, (5) misspelled words, (5) conjunction use, (6) comma misuse within clauses, (7) confused words, (8) incorrect verb forms, (9) faulty subject-verb agreement, (10) punctions in compound/complex sentences, (11) mixed dialects of English, (12) misused of modifier, (13) unknown words, modal verbs and (14) closing punctuation, and issues related to clarity: wordy sentences.

However, among those subcategories, the most errors took place in only 7 subcategories, namely: (1) determiner with 181 errors (31.75%), (2) noun number with 90 errors (15.79%), (3) prepositions with 82 (15.38%), (4) verb forms with 38 errors (6.67%), (5) pronouns with 14 errors (2.46%), (6) subject-verb agreement with 40 errors (7.01%), and (7) conjunctions with 10 errors (1.75%).

The findings show that the number of correct answers was 24 out of 35, which means there were 11 incorrect answers within 6 subcategories.

Table 1:
Subcategories of errors

Subcategory	Number of correct answers	Number of incorrect answers
Determiner	2	3
Noun number	5	0
Preposition	4	1
Verb forms	3	2
Pronoun	3	2
Subject-verb agreement	3	2
Conjunction	4	1
	24	11

The results in the table show that the student was somewhat aware of the errors he previously committed in his thesis and able to spot the

grammatical errors in the test. As shown in the table, out of 35 test items, he still managed to correctly answer 24 questions, giving him an average score of 69. The results also display that the student made mistakes in most subcategories, but managed to identify each of the incorrect applications of noun numbers for all the questions related to its subcategory.

Determiner

In general, the determiners are one of the most problematic of all English structures. Determiners include articles, adjectives of quantity, demonstrative adjectives, possessive adjectives, etc. However, the errors the student made were entirely on articles, which are the definite and indefinite ones as suggested by the Grammarly.

Sentence:

1. ***English Language** has a status as **a second language** in almost **all the countries** where it is not **the first language.**
   Correction:
   THE English Language has a status as a second language in almost all the countries where it is not the first language.

2. ***A simple sentence** has **one** independent clause and **it consists** of **subject**.
   Correction:
   A simple sentence has one independent clause and it consist of **A** subject

3. *The definition of **a noun is** usually related to a person's name, **place**, or **a thing**.
   Correction:
   The definition of a noun is usually related to a person's name, place or ~~a~~ thing.

The results show that out of 5 test items, 3 errors came from omission and addition of the articles. Despite the fact that the student made revisions on the articles based on the results provided by the Grammarly, he still had the problem understanding the correct use of the articles. In sentence (1) and (2), for example, the student omitted the articles. One possible explanation is that articles carry no difference in meaning in Indonesian, and thus adding them will make no great impact in meaning. On the other hand, in sentence (3), student accidentally added an indefinite article, while it is not necessary to have it when it is already mentioned before (e.g. a person's name).

Noun Number

In the English grammar, noun number deals with the number of a noun or pronoun. In other words, it deals with countable and uncountable nouns, as well as singular and plural nouns. Not only does noun number

deal with them, it also needs parallel structure in a sentence, for example, plural nouns with plural nouns.

The results shows that the student successfully identified all the errors in his sentence and chose the correct revision, since he made no mistakes in the application of the noun number in the test. He was very much aware of how parallel structures were important to show that the nouns must be in accord (e.g. *The ability to translate will be very useful for students who would like to learn a new language from article**s**, book**s**, newspaper**s**, international website**s**, journal**s** or even video**s**.*)

Prepositions

Prepositions (e.g. in, on, at, of, to, buy, etc) are a word that is used to connect nouns, pronouns or phrases within a sentence. It is used to connect people, objects, time and location. Some adjectives and verbs are followed by certain prepositions. Verbs and adjectives can be followed by different prepositions, which give the phrase difference in meaning.

Sentence:

4. *In In the **discussions**, the researcher **finds the** answers **regarding** the research questions.

   Correction:

   In the discussions, the researcher finds the answers **TO** the research questions.

The results show that the student understand the function of prepositions in general. He only committed one mistake in this subcategory, as shown in sentence (4). The student was not aware that the verb "find" needs a certain preposition "to" to connect the noun. The preposition "regarding" may have taken place as a result from the influence of his first language.

Verb forms

All English verbs (except *to be*) have five forms: base, past tense, past participle, present participle, and third-person singular. First, the base form of a verb is a verb which does not change. Next, the simple past tense shows an action took place in the past. *Also,* the past participle is found in the passive voice or in perfect tenses. Moreover, the present participle is the form of a base verb with an –ing ending, and lastly, third-person singular verbs simply add "–s," "–es," or "–ies " to the base form.

Sentence:

5. *The name "word" <u>means</u> <u>show</u> a frame <u>smaller</u> than <u>an entire phase.</u>

   Correction:

   The name "word" means TO show a frame smaller than an entire phase.

6. *<u>An</u> adjective <u>is</u> a word <u>that used</u> to define, depict and limit a noun or <u>pronoun</u>

Correction:
An adjective is a word THAT IS USED to define, depict and limit a noun or pronoun.

The results exhibit that the number of errors in this subcategory is two; one is in the form of infinitive to plus base verb as in sentence (5), and the other is the passive form as in sentence (6). In sentence 5, the student failed to identify the main verbs, and thus had another main verb "show". On the other hand, in sentence (6), the student failed to recognize the passive form.

Pronoun
A pronoun is a word that is used instead of a noun or noun phrase. Pronouns refer to either a noun that has already mentioned or to a noun that does not need to be specifically named. There are many kinds of pronouns in English: Subject, object, possessive, demonstrative, relative, reflexive, indefinite pronouns. However, the student made errors in the subject (I, you, we, they, he, etc.) and relative pronouns (who, which, that, whose, etc.)
Sentence:
7. *Me and Grant are really happy to get involved in this special project,"
   Clooney told Variety.
   Correction:
   I and Grant are really happy to get involved in this special project,"
   Clooney told Variety.

8. *It can be summed up that the correlation is positive, that means if the variable X is increased, the variable Y will also increase.
   Correction:
   It can be summed up that the correlation is positive, WHICH means if the variable X is increased, the variable Y will also increase.

The results show that the areas that were still problematic to the student were the applications of subject and relative pronouns. In this subcategory, the student made 2 errors. In sentence (7), the lines were actually taken from a novel. However, since the student was often exposed to such use in verbal communication, he might have perceived that such application was acceptable in written communication. In sentence (8), the student might have believed that the relative pronouns "that" and "which" are equivalent.

Subject-verb agreement
Subject-verb agreement refers to the relationship between the subject and predicate in a sentence. A subject and verb must always agree in a sentence, meaning a subject and its verb must be both singular or both plural.
Sentence:
9. *Grammar is part of a language that need to be comprehended by students when learning English.

Correction:
Grammar is part of a language that NEEDS to be comprehended by students when learning English.

10. *Positive correlational research is a method involving 2 variables that <u>corresponds to</u> each other.
Correction:
Positive correlational research is a method involving 2 variables that CORRESPOND to each other.

The outcome manifests that the student committed 2 errors in this subcategory. What was so surprising was that he actually managed to identify the errors of the misapplication of the pronoun in other similar questions, in that a singular noun must agree with a singular verb as in sentence (9), and a plural noun agree with a plural verb as in sentence (10).

Conjunctions

Conjunctions are words that link other words, phrases or clauses together. They also allow us to form complex and avoid the choppiness of multiple short sentences. There are three types of conjunctions: coordinating (FANBOYS), correlative (either/or, neither/nor, and not only/but also) and subordinating conjunctions (although, when, since, etc.)
Sentence:
11. ***The** abstract noun refers **to** ideas, qualities, and conditions that **have** no physical reality such as truth, danger, happiness, anxiety, **humor**.
Correction:
The abstract noun refers to ideas, qualities, and conditions that have no physical reality such as truth, danger, happiness, anxiety **and** humor.

The outcome exhibits that the student did well on this subcategory, as he managed to only make one error out of 5 questions. The error he committed was only on the application of a coordinating conjunction. In fact, in other similar sentences, he succeeded identifying and chose the correct revision provided.

CONCLUSION

It is no secret that feedback is an important component of effective learning. Feedback indeed improves learner confidence, motivation to learn and ultimately, a learner's achievement. In the past, corrective feedback from teachers are the means to learn the errors in the students' writing. Nowadays, there have been programs, one of which is Grammarly, to help learners learn from the corrective feedback that is automatically generated by the program and correct their writing. There have been studies that

show how automated written corrective feedback is not so effective in improving learners' writing. However, Nugroho (2022) in his study showed the opposite results. The findings of his study revealed that automated written corrective feedback generated by Grammarly worked more effectively than that provided by the lecturers. Similarly, the results of this study also show that Grammarly indeed plays its role in improving the student's knowledge and skills in grammar, as shown in the results of the test, that was 69. Moreover, they also showed a decrease in number of errors in the each of the subcategories of the errors. Out of 35 test items related to 7 subcategories, the student managed to only commit 11 errors in the test. Even so, it appears that the determiner seems to have appeared the most among the rest of the subcategories.

REFERENCES

Corder, S. P. (1967). The significance of learners' errors. *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, 161-169.

Nugroho, A. (2021). EFL Teachers' and Learners' Perception of Written Corrective Feedback in Writing: A Case Study of Indonesian Male and Female Teachers and Learners. *KOLITA 19.* Jakarta: Atma Jaya Catholic University.

Nugroho, A. (2022). Investigating the Use of Automated Written Corrective Feedback to Improve Undergraduate EFL Students' Writing Performance. *KOLITA 20.* Jakarta: Atma Jaya Catholic University.

Olasehinde, M. O. (2002). Error Analysis and Remedial Pedagogy. In B. S. T., & D. Adeyanju, *Language, Meaning and Society.* Ilorin, Nigeria: Itaytee Press and Publishing Co.

Shang, H. F. (2019). Exploring Online Peer Feedback and Automated Corrective Feedback on EFL Writing Performance. *Interactive Learning Environments.*