

SENTENCE STRUCTURE ON THE ENGLISH LITERATURE STUDENTS' THESIS ABSTRACT

Silvia Utami

English Letter Department, College of Foreign Language Persada Bunda Pekanbaru, Indonesia
csilviany@gmail.com

Abstract

The thesis abstract is the opening section of the thesis, and it serves to convey the research's substance in a concise manner. Even though it is less than 200 words long, it contains important information, and well-constructed sentences are required while writing thesis abstracts. The objective of this study was to categorize the sentence structure produced by English literature students' in the thesis abstracts into two categories: grammatical and ungrammatical sentences, and to present the ungrammatical sentence structure in a tree diagram by using Phrase Structure Rules (PSRs) by Carnie (2013). This study was descriptive qualitative research that is concerned with structures and patterns especially the sentence patterns. The findings showed that most sentences were constructed in ungrammatical structure with 61% of total sentences and 39% of grammatical structure. Ungrammatical sentences were mostly caused by issues with noun agreement, to-infinitive, prepositions, and articles. This study concluded that students need to improve their linguistic competence by learning linguistic concepts about the sentence structure, and its effect on the meaning.

Keywords: *Sentence Structure, Thesis Abstract, Phrase Structure Rules*

INTRODUCTION

Writing a thesis is a requirement for a college student to finish his or her study. A thesis has six sections that should be considered by the students before writing, they are abstract, introduction, review of the literature, research methodology, findings and discussion, and conclusion sections. The abstract is the first section of the thesis that has an important role. It establishes the brief conclusion of the entire process of the research. It also states the purpose of the work in the form of the research problem, the grand theory. The abstract is also a crucial component of the research work because it is one of the first things an examiner will see (Starfield & Paltridge, 2020). Writing a good abstract can be challenging for students since it is the first section to be examined. Some thesis abstracts have poor quality in terms of structure, level of accuracy, acceptability, and legibility (Nurhasanah, 2018). Most students encountered difficulties in writing

the thesis due to the linguistic factor which related to the correct use of grammar and paraphrasing the sentences (Puspita, 2019). Constructing a sentence has to follow some rules and these rules are called grammar. If a sentence has an ungrammatical structure or an ill-formed sentence, it will affect the meaning of the sentence (Carnie, 2013).

Furthermore, it is important to write in the right order by following some rules of sentence structure. A sentence can be considered grammatical when it is arranged in the right order. Every element should be placed correctly. For students who learning linguistics and literature, it is essential to have a good knowledge of how to arrange a well-structured sentence. To do that, students must know the rules of grammatical and ungrammatical sentences which discuss the structure or order of words in a sentence. Ungrammatical sentences contrast to poor writing, and it is one of the major reasons for manuscript rejections when publishing an article (Hollister, 2014). Therefore, grammar cannot be neglected by the students since it is equally important as the flow of ideas and also can influence the quality of writing.

In fact, English literature students at STBA Persada Bunda face some difficulties in writing thesis abstracts, especially in arranging the correct sentences. Students are often confused to put words in the right order especially in a complex sentence that causes a lack of subject or verb and subject-verb agreement errors in line with (Qamariah, 2015).

Some previous studies have been conducted to analyze thesis or research article abstracts and most of the studies were focused the genre analysis (Maher, 2017; Nasserri & Nematollahi, 2014) or rhetorical move in the thesis abstract (Arono, 2019; Suryani & Rismiyanto, 2019). However, few studies discussed the sentence structure of the thesis abstract. Thus, this study aimed at identifying the sentence structure constructed by the English literature students' thesis abstract in terms of two categories: grammatical and ungrammatical sentence and also presented the ungrammatical sentence structure using a tree diagram. To represent

the structure of the sentence, a tree diagram was used by a single labeled node in a category label like VP, V, or PRN (Radford, 2020).

Thesis Abstract

An abstract is a concise description of the primary parts of a study or article, prepared using specific components that describe the study and delivered in a concise manner (typically no more than 350 words for this purpose). The elements are research problem, research questions or hypotheses, data collection procedure, and results of the study (Creswell, 2012). Abstracts enable researchers to identify and evaluate a wide range of relevant material, allowing them to stay up to date on the vast amount of literature in their field. In effect, they assist the wider academic community to work together on common problems or areas of interest. When searching for information, researchers use keywords to find relevant information. An abstract should therefore contain keywords relating to the article or paper, for ease of retrieval (McCormack & Slaght, 2012). In short, an abstract has an important part in the research since it displays the brief information related to the studies and plays an important role in assisting the reader before reading further information about the research.

Sentence Structure

The concept of syntactic structure refers to how words are merged to produce phrases and sentences, which are constructed through a sequence of merger operations, each of which merges two constituents to form a bigger constituent. A tree diagram can be used to represent the resulting structure (Radford, 2020). While, Fasold, R., & Connor-Linton (2014) proposed the sentence structure principle that is compositionality, which states that sentences are made up of clauses and phrases, and clauses and phrases are made up of smaller clauses and phrases or words. They contended that while grammars are finite, it can produce an unlimited number of sentences. Grammatical rules in syntax are different from the accustomed grammar the researchers learned, instead it talks about the order in

which to put the words (Carnie, 2013). Regarding this study, the categories of sentence structure were classified into grammatical and ungrammatical sentences.

Grammatical

Every word has its class, so to make a grammatical sentence each word should be put in the right form. According to Carnie (2013), nouns must agree in gender and number with their antecedent. The anaphor must be plural if more than one person or object is mentioned in the antecedent. From the statement above, it clears that when the sentences can be said to be grammatical. A sentence can be said grammatical when the sentence conforms to the structure of the sentence. According to Miller (2011), the conformity to language usage as derived from the grammar of a given speech variety determines grammaticality. The concept of grammaticality developed alongside the theory of generative grammar, the goal of which is to formulate rules that define well-formed, grammatical, sentences. These rules of grammaticality also provide explanations of ill-formed, ungrammatical, sentences. In writing, grammatical sentences are very important for students to be more understandable.

Related to sentence structure, Wiseman (1999) proposes ten effective sentence structures which the writer considers in writing a research. They are (1) coordination and subordination, (2) mixed construction, (3) parallelism, (4) modifiers, (5) sentence variety, (6) subject-verb agreement, (7) pronoun agreement, (8) pronoun clarity, (9) pronoun case, and (10) adjectives and adverbs. Then, he adds some elements that the writer should consider in writing a research. They are person, voice, and tense. To support this, Wallwork (2011) asserts that the present simple is generally used to begin the introduction to describe the general background context and when the authors state what they will do in the rest of their paper.

To sum up, the language used in research needs to be considered in writing a good thesis. The writer should use the correct sentence structure, tenses, and even appropriate style in writing a thesis. One of the important aspects is the

grammatical aspect which deals with the structure of the language used in an abstract. The writers should be careful about the tenses they use in their research. It will be challenging for readers to understand their thesis if they do not use the tenses correctly.

Ungrammatical

When the word arrangement in a sentence is not placed correctly, it becomes ungrammatical according to syntax rules. Burton-Roberts (2016) explained when a sequence of words fails to constitute a good expression in English, it is described as being ungrammatical or ill-formed. It is also confirmed by Wekker & Haegeman (1985) that word order in English is fixed to a large extent, and if the given word order is disrupted the sentence may become less acceptable or even ungrammatical. Therefore, it is important for students to write his/her thesis accurately, not only in putting the right data and information but also in arranging the words to make grammatical sentences.

While writing a thesis, the writer needs full concentrate or there will be some mistakes like ungrammatical. Ungrammatical is the opposite of grammatical such as lack of agreement between a subject and a verb and so on. For example, like *Accountant was sitting at her desk. It shows that Accountant is a different type of noun. According to Miller (2011) "if it is singular, it requires a word such as the or a". This statement has a clear explanation about ungrammatical. In writing a sentence, when the use or placement of a word in a sentence is imprecise, it becomes a garbled sentence or could be called an ungrammatical sentence. A sentence is considered ungrammatical if all its words are valid in the language, but it still contains grammatical or usage errors (Foster, 2007).

The problems in constructing acceptable sentence structure are unavoidable for students', especially in writing. This problem occurs because the students' understanding of using correct grammar is limited. Swales & Feak (2012) state that the grammatical problem is a complicated one since many instructors do not appreciate how difficult it is to master some aspects of English such as articles (a,

an, and the), verb tenses, subject-verb agreements, and prepositions. They believe that if the flow of ideas is good, small errors may not be noticed; when the flow of ideas is not strong—i.e., does not follow the old-to-new principle—grammar errors may be more pronounced. Hollister (2014) adds that grammatical mistakes equate to poor writing, and it is one of the primary reasons for manuscript rejections when publishing an article. Thus, grammar cannot be neglected by the students since it is equally important as the flow of ideas and also can influence the quality of writing.

Regarding this study, an ungrammatical sentence was described when a sentence in the abstract was constructed in ill-formed which is unacceptable in English rules. All the sentences that did not meet the rules of English structure were categorized as ungrammatical. An ungrammatical sentence is marked with an asterisk (*). This study only focused on the sentence structure of the abstract without categorizing the types of problems.

Tree Diagram

Identifying the syntactic structures that composed by the combination of words and phrases needs “a tool”. This tool called as tree diagram which is used in breaking down the grammatical categories of the sentence. Tree diagrams help the reader visualize the structure of sentences (Burton-Roberts, 2016). Tree diagram provides a visual representation of the constituent structure of a phrase and a sentence by using a node (a category label like N, V, PP, CP, etc.)(Radford, 2020). In drawing the tree diagram, a rule is needed to generate the tree and Carnie (2013) proposed a rule called as Phrase Structure Rules (PSRs) because they generate the phrase structure tree of a sentence. The sentence constituent (labelled as TP) in tree diagram consist of two constituents: a subject Noun Phrase (NP) and a predicate phrase or verb phrase (VP). Other constituents used in PSRs are Determiner (D), Adjective Phrase (AdjP), Noun (N), Prepositional Phrase (PP), Complementizer Phrase (CP), Determiner Phrase (DP), Adverb Phrase (AdvP), Tense (T) and X (variables to stand for any category, such as NP, VP, etc.).

The Phrase Structure Rules (PSRs) are:

- a. CP → (C) TP
- b. TP → {NP/CP/DP} (T) VP
- c. VP → (AdvP+) V (NP) ({NP/CP/DP}) (AdvP+) (PP+) (AdvP+)
- d. NP → (D/NPs) (AdjP+) N (PP+) (CP)
- e. PP → P (NP)
- f. DP → D (NP)
- g. AdjP → (AdvP) Adj
- h. AdvP → (AdvP) Adv
- i. XP → XP conj XP (X means variables to stand for any category, such as NP, VP, etc.)
- j. X → X conj X

In this study, PSRs were used to analyze the ungrammatical sentence structure in the thesis abstract after identifying the number of grammatical and ungrammatical sentence occurred.

METHODOLOGY

This study was a descriptive research which determines and describes the way things are; involves collecting numerical data to test the hypothesis or answer questions about the current subject of study (Gay et al., 2011). The method used in this study was qualitative which is concerned with structures and patterns especially the sentence patterns (Litosseliti, 2010). The analysis was divided into two parts: *first*, analyzing the category of sentences structure (grammatical and ungrammatical) in terms of number of sentences, and second, presenting the tree diagram of the ungrammatical sentence structure that occurred. The data in this study was ten selected abstracts that were taken from the campus library with the corpus was the sentences on the thesis abstract. The instrument used was coding sheet by giving number for each sentence and asterisk (*) for ungrammatical sentence. The tree diagram was drawn by using syntax tree generator developed by

Miles Shang (<http://mshang.ca/syntax/>). In order to quantify the number of grammatical and ungrammatical sentences, the following formula was used:

$$\frac{\text{Number of sentences in each category}}{\text{Total number of sentences}} \times 100\% = \text{Percentage}$$

RESULT/FINDINGS

This study found 101 sentences were occurred in the students' thesis abstract. The most dominant sentence structure was ungrammatical sentences with 61% and grammatical sentences with 39%. Some students' abstracts had more ungrammatical sentence structure than grammatical structure. The frequency based on the categories of sentence structure is depicted in the following table.

Table.1. The categories of Sentence Structure

Data	Category	
	Grammatical	Ungrammatical
Abstract 1	4 sentences	5 sentences
Abstract 2	3 sentences	8 sentences
Abstract 3	8 sentences	5 sentences
Abstract 4	2 sentences	10 sentences
Abstract 5	3 sentences	5 sentences
Abstract 6	5 sentences	6 sentences
Abstract 7	5 sentences	3 sentences
Abstract 8	3 sentences	5 sentences
Abstract 9	5 sentences	6 sentences
Abstract 10	1 sentence	9 sentences
Sub Total	39 sentences	62 sentences
Total	101 Sentences	
Percentage	39%	61%

The sentences were categorized as a grammatical structure since the words and phrases were combined in a well-formed structure. It meant no writing mistakes found in the sentence and the meaning of the sentence was acceptable. The grammatical sentences from the abstracts were:

- (1) a. In this research, the researcher used qualitative and descriptive methods that describe Jean's ambition and obsession in creating a perfume (*Abstract 1*).
- b. The researcher analyzed the data by using Ulmann's theory (*Abstract 2*).
- c. This study aims to find affixes in the Malay Petalangan language and identify affixes in Malay Petalangan (*Abstract 3*).
- d. In a drama, the ideas would be accepted easily by the people (*Abstract 4*).
- e. The most dominant function was referential which was used to provide information to other people (*Abstract 5*).
- f. The purpose of this study was to present a semiotic analysis of the symbols found in J. R. R. Tolkien's novel *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (*Abstract 6*).
- g. This research is supported by using a psychoanalysis approach (*Abstract 7*).
- h. The data collection of this research was carried out by analyzing and dissecting the novel *The Jungle Book* which was directly written by Rudyard Kipling in 1894 (*Abstract 8*).
- i. The impact of hedonism in this novel included addiction, selfishness, and irresponsibility (*Abstract 9*).
- j. The result of this study showed 51 data of slang words were found (*Abstract 10*).

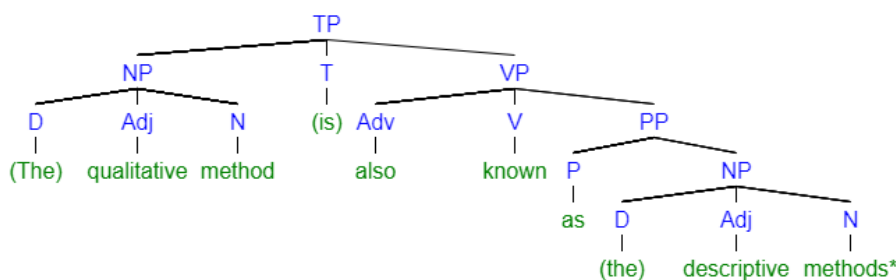
All the sentences in example (1a-j) were well-constructed and it had followed the Phrase Structure Rules in syntax. The sentences were mostly built in simple sentence forms which had one subject and one predicate. These forms of sentence helped the students to avoid the ungrammatical structure.

Furthermore, more than half sentences in the students' thesis abstract were written in ungrammatical structure. The sentences were constructed in ill-formed manner which did not obey the rule of standard English and some of them were semantically odd (unacceptable in terms of meaning). The ungrammatical

sentences were explained by using Phrase Structure Rules (PSRs) proposed by (Carnie, 2013) and the syntax generator from (Shang, 2011). The following three diagram used bracket () to explain the missing grammatical category and asterisk (*) to explain the incorrect form of words. The examples can be seen below:

- (2) a. *Qualitative method also known as descriptive methods (*Abstract 2*).

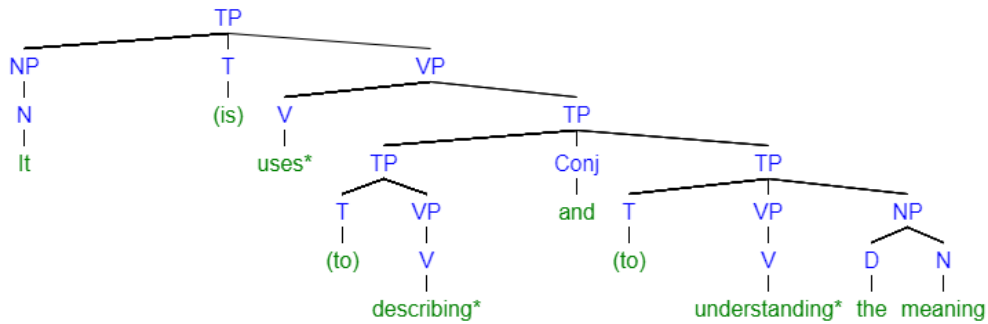
The example (2a) showed an ungrammatical sentence which had missing verb 'is' before the main verb 'known', and missing article 'the' before the subject and lack of agreement of the object 'methods'. This sentence was depicted in the following tree diagram.



The correction for the example (2a) is 'the qualitative method is also known as the descriptive method'. The article 'the' for 'the qualitative' and 'the descriptive' was put in the bracket to show that the sentence left the article which was needed to refer a particular method mentioned in the sentence. The sentence also missed the verb 'is' (as Tense marker/auxiliary) before the main verb 'known' to denote the passive sentence, and it was put before the adverb 'also'. Last, the inflectional suffix -s in 'methods*' was omitted because the noun must agree with the singular verb.

- b. * It uses describing and understanding the meaning (*Abstract 3*).

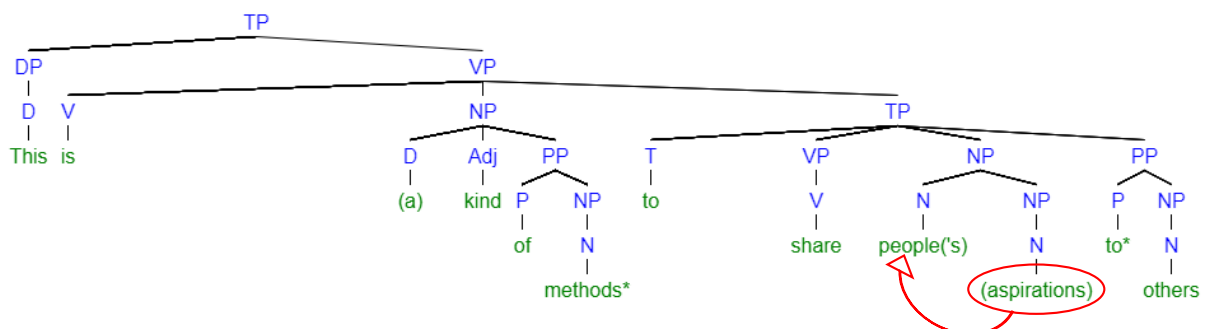
The example (2b) showed the sentence had problem in the missing verb (tense marker/auxiliary) and incorrect verb 'uses'. The sentence also used wrong verb form 'describing' and 'understanding' instead of to infinitive to state the purpose. The sentence embedded a non-finite clause after the verb. The tree diagram presented below:



Example (2b) illustrated the missing verb ‘is’ in the bracket with the categories as T (Tense marker/auxiliary) to show the passive sentence. The main verb ‘*uses’ had incorrect tense that was supposed to verb 3 ‘used’, and to infinitive for ‘to describe’ and ‘to understand’. An infinitive is also called as non-finite clauses, in which the form of the verbs ‘describe’ and ‘understand’ had the head non-finite T (to) and it became TP (Tense Phrase). Because TP is connected with conjunctions, the phrase is classified as TP, which is an embedded clause in a sentence. The correct sentence for example (2b) was ‘It is used to describe and to understand the meaning’.

c. * This is kind of methods to share people aspiration to others (Abstract 4).

The sentence in (2c) had an ungrammatical structure due to miss of an article ‘a’, lack of agreement ‘method’, use a wrong noun form ‘people’, and use incorrect preposition ‘to’. The sentence embedded a non-finite clause (TP) after the Noun Phrase (NP) that is depicted in the tree diagram as follow:

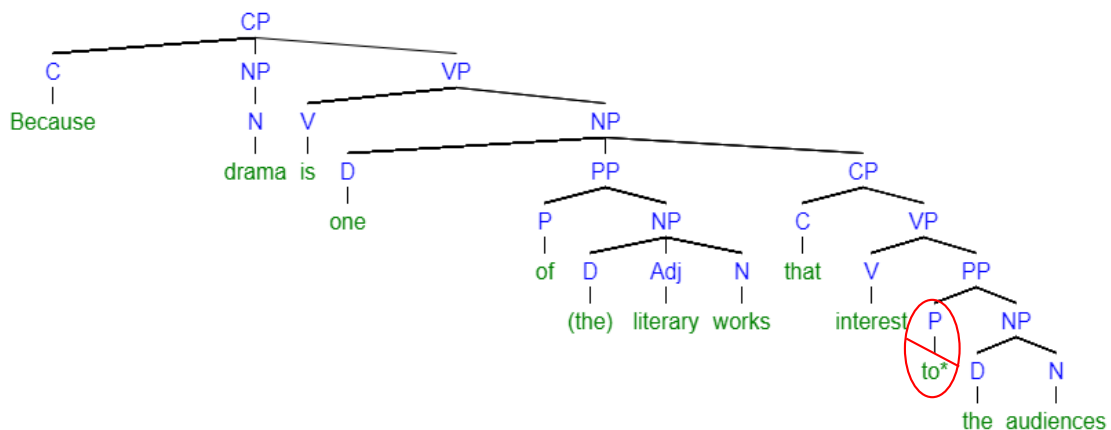


The sentence above showed the Determiner Phrase (DP) as the object with the Verb (V), Noun Phrase (NP) and Tense Phrase (TP) as the part of the Verb

Phrase (VP). In NP, the sentence missed the indefinite article ‘*a*’ that was needed to refer to a particular kind of method. The noun ‘*methods*’ had a lack of agreement with the indefinite article in which the noun had to be in singular form. Then, in the embedded non-clause, the possessive suffix ‘*s*’ was needed to put after the noun to show the possession of the aspiration. The sentence also had the incorrect preposition by using ‘*to*’ instead of ‘*with*’ (the appropriate collocation for the verb ‘*share*’). Thus, the correct sentence for example (2c) was ‘*this is a kind of method to share people's aspirations with others.*’

d. *Because drama is one of literary works that interest to the audiences.

Example (2d) was categorized as ungrammatical sentence since it missed the independent clause of the sentence and only consisted a dependent clause (a cause and effect adverb clause) and a relative clause. The sentence missed the article before the adjective ‘*literary*’ and used the incorrect preposition after the verb ‘*interest*’. The tree diagram can be seen below:



The sentence in (2d) can be said as incomplete sentence because it left the independent clause or the main clause. An adverb clause cannot stand alone without the clause that is modified. The meaning of the sentence was also unclear since it did not mention the effect of that cause statement. Structurally, it also had problems in the use of ‘*one of the*’ to explain one of many things where the sentence omitted the article ‘*the*’ before after the preposition ‘*of*’. Then the

preposition ‘*to**’ had to be removed since the verb ‘*interest*’ needed direct object instead of the preposition. The relative clause (CP) also embedded to modify NP ‘*the literary works*’. The correct sentence for example (2d) was ‘*because drama is one of the literary works that interest the audiences.*’

DISCUSSION

Constructing a grammatical sentence especially for non-native speakers needs a lot of practice and drills by reading and writing English texts. Due to the limited linguistic competence, the writer or the student had some problems that caused to produce ill-formed sentences or unacceptable in standard English. This limitation also constrained the students in building a grammatical complex sentence in line with (Qamariah, 2015).

In this study, most sentences had problems in the agreement of nouns whether in number, article, parallelism with coordinating conjunction, and a quantifier. For example, (3a) ‘...Mobile Legends and the members often used a slang words while they were playing Mobile Legends’; (3b) ‘Each symbols had different definition if it was defined either denotatively or connotatively’. Example (3a) showed the article ‘*a*’ did not agree with the noun ‘*words*’ where it should be plural without the article. On the contrary, example (3b) showed singular quantifier ‘*each*’ did not agree in number with the noun ‘*symbols*’ where it should be in singular form without inflection -s. This problem also occurred in the introduction section of students’ thesis (Utami, 2018) and students’ writing (Handayani & Johan, 2018). However, in the introduction section, the major problem in students’ sentences was a lack of subject and verb agreement, while this study only found a few sentences had problems in that area. Subject-verb agreement is important since it helps to indicate which noun in a sentence is “doing” which verb and so does the inflectional categories of person or thing.(Fasold, R., & Connor-Linton, 2014). Thus, it can be said that the major problem of the sentence structure in each section of the thesis was different.

Furthermore, missing grammatical categories, the incorrect form of nouns, incorrect tense, lack of subject-verb agreement, and other problems had a significant impact in determining grammatical and ungrammatical categories because it will affect the position of the phrase in the sentence. For example, (3c) ‘Three things that caused Gemma to experience Stockholm Syndrome, *which are*, the kidnapper remains contact with the hostage, a crisis situation that lasted for several days...’ In example (3c), no main verb was found in the sentence which had an important function to state the action done by the subject. A sentence without having a verb as the predicate can be said as an incomplete or fragment sentence, or it can be said as a phrase. In syntactical structure, a Tense Phrase (TP) has at least a Noun Phrase (NP) or a Verb Phrase (VP) to make it into one complete sentence (Carnie, 2013)

Based on the research findings, the sentences were mostly constructed ungrammatically which can be caused by the strategies that students used in developing the sentences were similar in writing in Bahasa Indonesia (Budiharso, 2006). Other factors would be the interference from the students’ first language and the student’s competence in the target language (Utami, 2017). Since the thesis abstracts are written in two languages (Bahasa Indonesia and English), the translation method that students used might lead them to produce ungrammatical sentences, especially literal translation. This type of translation method will affect the sentence structure and cause the sentence less accurate (Muttaqin et al., 2021).

Some studies had suggested ways to help students in improving their linguistic competence especially in terms of grammar. Helping to build students’ insight and awareness on how to use the language and relate to curriculum needs, educators can try to teach grammar by implementing linguistic concepts that focused not only on the syntactic structure but also semantic (Van Rijt & Coppen, 2017). Those concepts are divided into three linguistic groups: 1) structural concepts (relate to word or sentence structure); 2) semantic concepts (relate to semantic cohesion); 3. Relational concepts (relate grammatical forms to meaning, relate

structural properties to a special overall meaning, and relate the heads in linguistic affect the form and meaning to other elements). Here, the students learn the grammar through the concept by listening to the explanation about the concept, creating a new example, explaining the concepts to others, and discussing the concepts in the front of the class

CONCLUSION

In this study, students find it difficult to construct grammatical sentences when writing thesis abstracts, especially when it comes to the agreement in noun numbers, the use of non-finite clauses, prepositions, articles, and other grammatical components. This study used Phrase Structure Rules (PSRs) and displayed that most sentences were built in ungrammatical structure and found some issues related to the agreement of nouns whether in number, article, parallelism with coordinating conjunction, or a quantifier. Some sentences were problematic in terms of the use of infinitive or non-finite clauses, articles, and prepositions. By knowing these issues, it is hoped that the lecturer can help the students in improving their linguistics competence by implementing the linguistic concept in the class that can aid students to get a better knowledge about English sentence structure.

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