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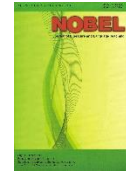
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## STRUCTURE AND WRITTEN EXPRESSIONS OF THE TOEFL: LINGUISTIC AND NON-LINGUISTIC CONSTRAINTS

Rolisda Yosintha<sup>1✉</sup>, Sukma Shinta Yunianti<sup>2</sup>, Boris Ramadhika<sup>3</sup>

Universitas Tidar, Jl. Kapten Suparman 39 Potrobangsari, Magelang Utara, Central Java, Indonesia<sup>1,2,3</sup>

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### Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the students' linguistic and non-linguistic constraints in doing the Structure and Written Expression section of the TOEFL. This was a qualitative study in the form of a case study and was carried out in two universities in Magelang, Central Java, Indonesia. The data comprised document analysis on 42 students' answer sheets on TOEFL and interviews with four students. The data were analyzed using the difficulty index (IF) formula proposed by Brown (2004) and the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman (1994) for quantitative and qualitative data, respectively. The findings revealed that the students encountered three linguistic constraints in terms of grammatical items as caused by both intra-lingual and inter-lingual interference: active-passive verbs, double comparatives, and pronoun-noun agreement. Besides, non-linguistic factors such as unpleasant past learning experiences and limited exposure to the L2 worsened their performance on the test.

✉ Correspondence:  
Email: rolisda@untidar.ac.id

## INTRODUCTION

The acceptance of TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) to gauge the English proficiency of non-native English speakers in terms of academic targets has interested many higher education institutions in Indonesia in making use of this test to prove the quality of their graduates (Iqbal & Zurriyati, 2020; Karjo & Ronaldo, 2019; Muliawati et al., 2020; Silviyanti et al., 2020). To do so, these universities enact a regulation concerning a minimum TOEFL score as one of the graduation conditions for all students, with no exception. Two universities in Magelang, Central Java, Indonesia, have implemented such regulations for quite some time. The students must reach a minimum of 425 TOEFL scores before they are allowed to take their final thesis examination. Undoubtedly, this regulation comes with ease and difficulties for all parties, particularly the students.

Out of 42 students from those two universities taking a TOEFL Preparation Course in the academic year of 2019/2020, only eight students reached a score of more than 425, while the rest scored lower than that (Yuniarti et al., 2020). After the results of the post-test were analyzed, it was found that the average score in the Structure and Written Expressions section was the lowest, i.e., 22.03. The second and first places were the Listening and Reading sections, with an average score of 29.18 and 36.23, respectively. This result shows that the Structure and Written Expressions section was the most challenging part of the TOEFL for these students.

It is somewhat surprising to find that the Structure and Written Expressions section that is all about grammar with fixed rules, was the most problematic one for the test takers. Unfortunately, there were few studies carried out to explore these constraints. Most studies investigated students' difficulties in answering the TOEFL test items in general (Cho & Blood, 2020; Ginther & Yan, 2018; Halim & Ardiningtyas, 2018; Staples et al., 2018; Syakur, 2019), or only in the Listening and Reading sections (Nazri et al., 2020; Samad et al., 2017; Silviyanti et al., 2020; Zalha et al., 2020). These studies confirmed that limited time, fewer basic skills, less practice, less motivation, and students' differences were the main factors affecting the difficulties in facing the TOEFL test. In a more specific case, Samad et al. (2017), Nazri et al. (2020), and Zalha et al. (2020) tried to figure out the students' difficulties in doing the Reading section of the TOEFL as well as the strategies they employed to tackle those difficulties. They found that identifying implied information, identifying stated detailed information, determining the meanings of difficult words using contexts, identifying main ideas, and determining meanings from word parts were some of the most challenging aspects in reading. To encounter those problems, most students employed skimming and scanning techniques, read the text with a purpose in mind, activated their background knowledge to guess the meaning of

difficult words, and doing literal translations to understand the text. Other than in the Reading Section, some researchers have also investigated students' difficulties in tackling the TOEFL Listening section (Afshar et al., 2020; Silviyanti et al., 2020). They found that pronunciation is the most common barrier for the students in understanding what the speakers are talking about.

If there are any studies carried out focusing on the Structure and Written Expressions section, they were limited to investigating the problems that the students faced in terms of linguistic factors (Akmal et al., 2020; Nasution, 2019; Putra, 2020; Syahrin, 2020; Tangkelangi, 2020). These previous studies tried to identify the grammatical items that posed the most challenging problems for the participants. The most problematic grammatical items that these students had included a subject-verb agreement, adjective clauses, and the reduced forms, inverted sentences, parallelism, and prepositional phrase. Even worse, basic grammatical skills such as parts of speech and articles were also the areas where these students had not understood yet (Putra, 2020; Syahrin, 2020). In general, they affirmed that inadequate grammatical competencies among their participants were the main factor affecting this problem.

Considering the fact that the Structure and Written Expressions section of the TOEFL has caused a lot of trouble for test-takers and the lack of studies on the non-linguistic factors affecting this matter, the researchers think that it is essential to carry out a thorough study on the constraints faced by students in answering the TOEFL test items in this section. The researchers speculate that these difficulties might be caused by some linguistic and non-linguistic factors. The linguistic factors are those influenced by the nature of the language itself. In contrast, the non-linguistic factors are related to the students themselves, such as past experience in learning the language, personal perspectives on the language, exposure to the language, interest in the language, etc. Based on the above assumptions, the present study is guided by the following research questions: 1) What are the linguistic factors affecting the students' difficulties in doing the Structure and Written Expression section of the TOEFL? And 2) What are the non-linguistic factors worsening the linguistic constraints?

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)**

The English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) Test has been widely used as a proficiency test (J. D. Brown, 2005). This test is to measure the English proficiency of non-native speakers. In some countries, students who want to go abroad must have TOEFL results with some

minimum scores (Sudrajat & Astuti, 2018). TOEFL was initiated firstly by an American Council in early 1962. It has three successive major formats: PBT (paper-and-pencil-based test), CBT (computer-based test), and IBT (internet-based test). There are two perspectives of its historical development. The first one is seen from the underlying concept of language ability, and the second perspective is to deal with the advancement of testing technology that characterizes TOEFL (Sulistyo, 2009).

TOEFL originally adopted the structural linguistic view, which believes that language is divisible in nature (Sulistyo, 2009). The PBT has three subtests: Listening Section, Structure and Written Expression Section, and Reading Comprehension Section. In the Listening Section, there are three linguistic layers: comprehension of fragmented sentences, comprehension of dialogues, and comprehension of texts larger than dialogues/monologues. In these layers, accuracy is tested frequently related to grammatical points. In addition to these, the Grammar and Written Expression Section clearly reflects grammatical complexities. Rather than communicativeness, this section typically is viewing for accuracy of form. The third section, Reading Section, also suggests the influence of the structural linguistic view. This part frequently begins with a short text, sentential context, and presumably a paragraph with questions following it (Burkett, 2018).

In every language testing, including TOEFL, there may be social consequences called the washback effect. Washback (Barnes, 2017) is the influence of testing on teaching and learning. This term has come to prominence in the literature of English language teaching (Thaidan, 2015). The impact on washback concerns the test assessments such as materials, teachers, and learners (McKinley & Thompson, 2018). For example, in the Structure and Written Expression Section in TOEFL, the multiple-choice questions have four options with a particular response type. One of them is acting as a stimulus that functions to which the TOEFL takers will respond among the three disasters to avoid. This multiple-choice type of question enables the language elements to be measured bit by bit. However, the presentations of the items in the test follow and order with an increase in the difficulty level. This makes the TOEFL takers have to complete the questions whether the difficulty level fits their ability or not. This is because, in nature, the format of PBT does not permit the level of difficulty of the items (Sulistyo, 2009).

With an increasing level of difficulty, TOEFL takers tend to have a very high chance of making errors (Hale et al., 1988). This is also similar to when L1 interference is related to mistakes and errors (Watcharapunyawong & Usaha, 2013). Mistakes are described as unsuccessful use of grammatical rules; that means learners study the language structures comprehensively but fail to use them. Failure is what it says to be a mistake. For error, it refers

to a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker (H. D. Brown, 2007). It is reasonable to say that when TOEFL takers answer the questions, they make errors because they do not know the syntactic as well as lexical structures. As one of the psychological stages of error orientation, error competence is the active knowledge to recover from errors-making immediately and reduce the consequences (Yaghoubi, 2009). Common errors made by TOEFL takers are violating the rules of syntax (such as subject-verb agreement), ill-formed modal verbs, determiner-noun agreements, verbs with their nominal form, pronoun uses, missing commas, and apostrophes (Gamon et al., 2013).

### **Sources of Errors**

Many experts have worked on this issue: what causes errors. Broughton et al. (1980), as cited in Kaçani (2014), list three main sources of errors: a) Poor teaching – The syllabus design is usually not within the control of most ordinary teachers, causing them to have difficulties in teaching; b) Inappropriate use of materials - The teachers may select the inappropriate materials in teaching due to the too many choices of materials to teach available; c) Faulty teaching – Teachers may make mistakes in presenting the materials and mislead the students.

Norrish (1983) in Yousuf and Elyyan (2020) classifies the causes of errors into three: a) Carelessness, which is related to the lack of motivation, being in a hurry or boredom; b) First language interference in which in the learning of L2, the L1 will interfere L2; c) Translation in which the students translate their L1's sentence or idiomatic expression into L2 word by word.

Another expert, Brown (2007), as cited in Terzioğlu and Bostanci (2020), mentions four sources of errors: a) Interlingual transfer – The students' L1 influences the production of their L2; b) Intralingual transfer – The faulty or partial learning of the L2 causes the errors; c) Context of learning – The teachers or the materials cause the students to make faulty hypotheses about the L2; d) Communication strategy – The students' learning styles cause errors in their language production.

Grounded on those experts' classifications, the researchers could conclude that the occurrence of errors could be traced back to two main sources, namely linguistic and non-linguistic factors. Linguistic factors are those caused by the first or the target language being learned by the students, such as first language interference or interlanguage transfer and intralingual transfer. Meanwhile, the non-linguistic factors are those coming from other than the language, for instance, the students, teachers, materials, context of learning, etc.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This research aimed at investigating the difficulties encountered by students in passing the TOEFL, particularly in the Structure and Written Expressions section. This study was qualitative in the form of a case study. A case study is preferred for this research for some rationales. First, this qualitative study intends to explore and describe the phenomenon in the actual context. The phenomenon refers to the constraints, both linguistic and non-linguistic, encountered by students in completing the Structure and Written Expression section of the TOEFL. The linguistic constraints are those linked to grammatical items that are problematic for the students to solve. Meanwhile, the non-linguistic constraints are the non-grammatical issues, such as those triggered by the nature of the test or the students themselves. Second, doing a case study allows the researchers to find out cause and effect. In fact, one of the strong points of a case study is that it perceives impacts in actual contexts, knowing that context is a strong determining factor of both causes and effects (Cohen et al., 2007).

### **Subjects**

The research subjects were 42 students joining a TOEFL Preparation Course in the academic year of 2020/2021. These students were from two different universities in Magelang, Central Java, Indonesia. A convenience sampling technique was employed to select the research subjects in which anyone conveniently available and willing to participate in the study could join. These students were from various majors such as Informatics, Management, Accounting, Law, Mechanical Engineering, Indonesian Language Education, etc. Most of them were students of upper semesters. Only a few of them have ever taken a TOEFL test before; thus, the tests provided in this course were their first TOEFL test.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

In this study, the researchers collected both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data were collected through a document analysis technique in which the researchers analyzed a TOEFL-Like test paper and the answer sheets of 42 students participating in this study. These documents were the documentation of the course organizers. Meanwhile, in gaining the qualitative data, the researchers carried out an in-depth interview with four students whose average scores were the lowest. The interview was carried out online using Google Meet for about 45 minutes for each participant. They were separately interviewed so that the confidentiality of the data they provided could be ensured. The questions asked

during the interview covered open-ended items focusing on the reasons why the students made such errors in both the linguistic and non-linguistic aspects. Creswell (2018) mentioned that open-ended questions in an interview could facilitate the participants to express rich and thick ideas and responses.

The data obtained from the students' test scores in the Structure and Written Expressions section were analyzed quantitatively to identify their difficulties in doing the test. The level of difficulties for each test item was calculated by employing the difficulty index (IF) formula proposed by Brown (2004) as follows:

$$IF = \frac{\text{Number of students answering the item correctly}}{\text{Total of students responding to that item}}$$

Having found the difficulty index for each number, the researchers identified the level of difficulty of each item and categorized them into difficult, medium, or easy. The categorization of the difficulty level was based on Brown's rule (2004) as follows:

**Table 1. Categories of Difficulty Level (Brown, 2004)**

Levels of Difficulty	IF Ranges
Easy	> 0.85
Medium	0.15 – 0.85
Difficult	< 0.15

Once the quantitative data were collected and analyzed, the researcher could check the results by taking some qualitative data through interviews. The results were analyzed qualitatively using the Interactive Model suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) in Punch and Oancea (2014). This procedure included three stages, namely data reduction, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions. In the data reduction phase, the researchers reduced the raw data by selecting those that could answer the research questions only and organized them into themes. These data were then displayed in a chart format to make it easier for the researchers to seek meaning. At last, these data were verified to ensure the validity of the conclusions drawn.

### **Ethical Consideration**

For this study required participants' scores and personal opinions, the researchers asked their consent before the study began. The researchers did not only guarantee the confidentiality

of their data but also ensured that the information they gave would not be linked to them. In that case, pseudonyms were used in both data collection techniques.

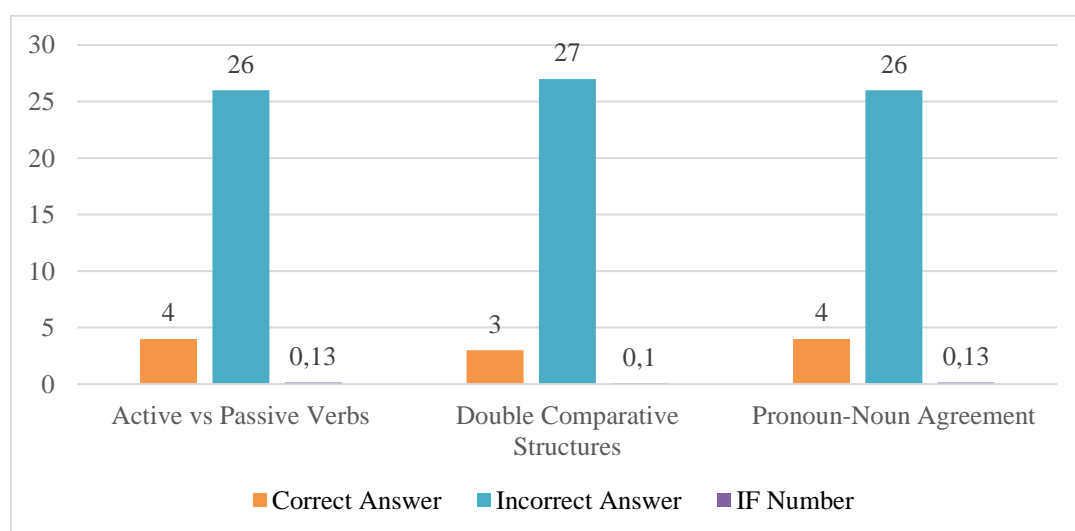
## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

To answer the research questions, the researchers divide this section into two issues related to the Structure and Written Expression section of the TOEFL, namely 1) the linguistic and non-linguistics factors affecting the constraints, and 2) strategies employed to overcome the constraints.

### The Linguistic Factors Causing Difficulties in Doing the Structure and Written Expression Section of the TOEFL

To find the students' constraints in doing the Structure and Written Expressions section of the TOEFL and to answer the first research problem, the researchers analyzed 30 students' answers for each test item by calculating the IF number. Based on the calculation, it was found that there were only 3 out of 40 test items that were considered "difficult" for the students ( $IF < 0.15$ ). Meanwhile, the others were in the "medium" category ( $0.15 < IF < 0.85$ ) with 37 items, and not a single item belonged to the "easy" category ( $IF > 0.85$ ).

The three most complicated items were those related to using double comparative structures, differentiating active and passive verbs, and matching pronoun-noun agreement, respectively. Figure 1 shows the number of students answering these questions correctly and incorrectly and the IF number for each question.



**Figure 1. The Three Major Linguistic Constraints in the Structure and Written Expressions section of the TOEFL**



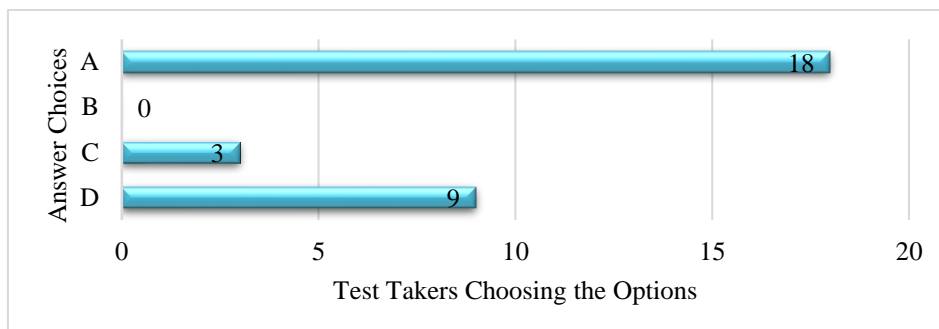
As seen in Figure 1, fewer than five students could answer those three questions correctly, resulting in an IF number of less than 0.15. Therefore, the use of active and passive verbs, double comparative structures, and pronoun-noun agreement were the linguistic factors affecting the students' failure in doing well on the Structure and Written Expressions section of the TOEFL.

First, the most difficult test item was related to double comparatives (question number 13). In this item, the test takers should construct a sentence using the correct double comparative structure. Double comparatives require test takers to construct phrases that express increasing or decreasing returns. This structure implies a cause-effect relationship; when something increases or decreases, it will cause something else to change as a result.

According to Bernoulli's principle, the higher the speed of a fluid gas, -  
----- the pressure.

A. it will be lower  
B. lower than the  
C. the lower  
D. lower it is

The correct answer to this question is (C) the lower; however, most of the test takers chose (A) it will be lower (18 students) and (D) lower it is (9 students). Constructing double comparative structures posed the test takers some problems as there were only three students correctly answered this question. Thus, this question was categorized as "difficult" with an IF score of 0.1.

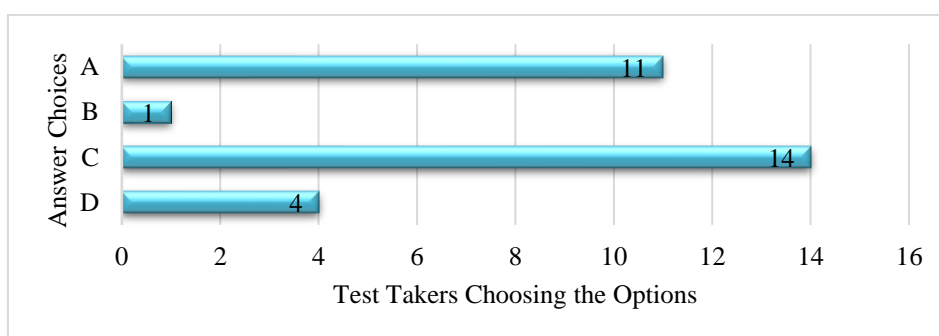


**Figure 2. Students' Answers for Double Comparative Structures**

The second most difficult item was about distinguishing between active and passive verbs. In this item, the test takers should complete the sentence using the most appropriate verb form. When analyzed from the structure of the verb only, all options may be correct. However, when meaning is taken into account, there would be only one correct answer, i.e., (D) generally trapped.

<p>Carnivorous plants _____ insects to obtain nitrogen.</p> <p>A. are generally trapped</p> <p>B. trap generally</p> <p>C. are trapped generally</p> <p>D. generally trapped</p>
--

While the correct answer for this question is (D) generally trapped (active verb), there were more than half of the students choosing (A) are generally trapped or (C) are trapped generally that is in the form of passive verbs. With only four test-takers correctly answered this question, differentiating active and passive verbs was categorized into a “difficult” skill with an IF score of 0.13.



**Figure 3. Students’ Answers for Active vs. Passive Verbs**

The third most complicated question was related to the pronoun-noun agreement. Every pronoun must agree with the noun it refers to. These two components must match in both number and gender. For example, when the noun is “Linda,” the pronoun must be “she”, while when the noun is “a dog and a cat,” the pronoun must be “they.” This concept has proved to be a constraint for test-takers since out of 30 answers, only four are correct answers.

The capital of the Confederacy was originally in Mobile, but they were moved to Richmond.

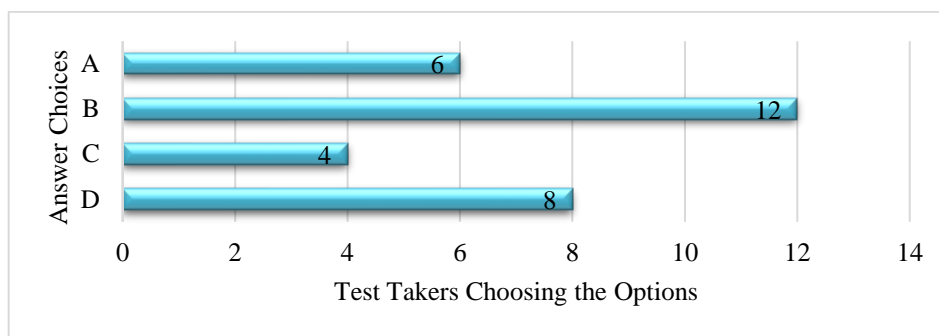
A

B

C

D

The correct answer to this question is (C) they were. The pronoun “they” must match the noun it refers to, i.e., capital. The noun “capital” is singular, and thus requiring a singular pronoun, i.e., it. When the subject is “it,” the verb following must be “was,” not “were.” Only four test-takers correctly answered this question, while the rest failed to identify the noun-pronoun agreement. Therefore, the noun-pronoun agreement is labeled as “difficult” with an IF score of 0.13.



**Figure 4. Students’ Answers for Noun-Pronoun Agreement**

With an IF score of lower than 0.15, three skills in the Structure and Written Expression section of the TOEFL, namely active-passive verbs, double comparatives, and noun-pronoun agreement, proved to be the linguistic constraints faced by test takers in doing the test. To shed light on the factors causing these linguistic difficulties, the researchers compared these findings with that of other researchers and interviewed four students whose scores in this section were the lowest to crosscheck the results. It was found that these linguistic constraints were mainly caused by two factors: 1) differences between the students’ L1 and L2, and 2) inadequate learning.

The researchers were positive that these linguistic constraints might stem from the differences between the students’ first language/L1 (Bahasa Indonesia) and the target language/L2 (English). Both interlingual and intralingual interference affect their performance in English. Interlingual interference occurs when the students’ understanding of L1 affects their understanding of L2. In contrast, intralingual interference occurs when the students’ errors result from faulty or partial learning of the L2 (Brown, 1994, as cited in Fauziati, (2017)).

In Bahasa Indonesia, there are no active-passive verbs, double comparatives, and noun-pronoun agreement, which are as rich as those in English. It is in line with what El-Dakhs et

al. (2020), Romano (2018), and Fauziati (2017) have found that any structure may pose many troubles for non-native speakers of English, especially when they do not have an equivalent structure in their L1. Consequently, the students found it difficult to adopt and use the system in their language production.

Both Bahasa Indonesia and English have double comparative forms. However, that of Bahasa Indonesia is not as complex as that of English. In Bahasa Indonesia, people simply say “*semakin ... , semakin ...*” to show an increase or decrease in returns. Still, in English, the construction is quite rigid because one must understand how to construct a comparative structure first to be then able to construct the double comparatives. In fact, forming a simple comparative structure has already posed difficulties for students since they must know when to use *-er* and *more* with different adjectives or adverbs. Consequently, their problems get more complicated when they have to construct double comparatives.

When answering the double comparative structure, most students chose “it will be lower” to complete the sentence “According to Bernoulli’s principle, the higher the speed of a fluid gas, ----- the pressure.” Both Bahasa Indonesia and English require a minimum of one subject and one verb to construct a sentence. These students are already accustomed to forming sentences using this formation, and thus they chose “it will be lower” that contains both subject and verb. One of the students said,

“I am sure that a sentence must have at least one subject and one verb. In addition, these two components must be constructed in S + V formula. So, I’m sure the answer is *it will be lower*”. (Respondent C)

Another student also added that she clearly remembered the course tutors always say that a sentence must have a subject and a verb so that she was positive to apply this rule in this question. Based on these arguments, it could be assumed that the errors were caused by over-generalization based on partial exposure to L2. Therefore, it can be concluded that errors in double comparative structures could be linked to intralingual interference.

Bahasa Indonesia also has active and passive verb forms. Unlike that of English, passive construction in Bahasa Indonesia is quite simple, i.e., adding *di-* or *ter-* prefix to the main verb. Meanwhile, English passive verbs require a more complex construction using *be* + past participle form. Many students do not even remember what *be* verb to use when they have different subjects and what past participle form to use. This condition gets worse when they have to decide whether to use active or passive verbs.

When answering the active-passive verb question, most students chose the passive form instead of the active one. They thought that carnivorous plants are more appropriate to be

trapped, not to trap. There is a direct object “insect” following the verb, and thus the correct verb must be in the active form, i.e., trapped. The researchers assumed that this kind of error might be caused by the fact that Indonesian people often tend to talk about people or objects around them rather than about themselves. In addition, Indonesian culture that often shows modesty indirectly shapes the people’s habit of producing passive verbs instead of the active ones to hide the doer of the action (Fauziati, 2017). However, it turned out that this error had nothing to do with those assumptions, as mentioned earlier.

In the interview, Respondent B said that he chose the active instead of the passive verb because he did not know how to construct passive verbs in English. He stated,

“I knew that just like Bahasa Indonesia, English has a special formula for passive verbs. I remembered the course tutors ever explained passive verbs in one of our meetings, but I could not recall the formula”. (Respondent B)

Meanwhile, Respondent C mentioned that he did not even realize that this sentence needs a passive verb since he did not understand what the sentence wants to say. In addition, he also had no clue what sentence components should be put to complete the sentence. He said,

“I didn’t know the meaning of this sentence, and I couldn’t guess what components should be there. Maybe that’s why I didn’t even know that a passive verb was required to complete the sentence”. (Respondent C)

The reasoning behind errors in differentiating between active and passive verbs, as expressed by these respondents, concludes that this error was related to intralingual interference in which the error was caused by ignorance of L2 rules and semantic errors.

Like English, Bahasa Indonesia has pronoun and noun-pronoun agreement systems. This pronoun should agree with the plurality of its antecedent. However, the Indonesian pronoun and noun-pronoun agreement systems are not as complicated as that of English. Fitzgerald, Rispoli, and Hadley (2017) assert that English pronouns are linked to three grammatical persons and can take on several forms depending on the person (first, second, or third), number (singular or plural), case (subject, object, or genitive), and gender (masculine, feminine, or neuter). In contrast, the Indonesian pronoun can be placed in any position in sentences and does not change. Therefore, many students found it problematic to memorize all English pronouns with their different positions and match the pronoun to its antecedent.

Most students incorrectly matched the pronoun “they” to its antecedent “capital” in the following sentence “The capital of the Confederacy was originally in Mobile, but they were moved to Richmond.”. The noun “capital” is singular, and thus the pronoun used must be “it.” However, most students failed to recognize this agreement matter. Their carelessness might

cause this inaccuracy in analyzing the sentence. Respondent A affirmed that she did not realize that the pronoun “they” refers to the noun “capital,” so she chose another option. She asserted,

“I didn’t think that the problem would be concerning the use of pronouns. Once I read the sentence, I thought that the pronoun *they* was correctly used. I paid more attention to the word *originally*. To me, it should be *original* not *originally*”. (Respondent A)

In addition, Respondent B mentioned that he understood the meaning of the sentence. Still, he did not consider “they” as the incorrect structure because he knew that the pronoun “they” has appropriately matched the *be* verb “were.” He said,

“I’m sure that the pronoun *they* must be matched to *were* as the verb. That’s why I didn’t look back at this option. I thought that the verb *moved* is the answer because I remembered the tutor ever explained that the verb *be* must be followed by *V-ing*”. (Respondent B)

The finding that the respondents were not affected by their L1 in answering this question shows that errors in the noun-pronoun agreement skill are caused by intralingual interference. In addition, even though they partially understood the materials, the participants had already known that the subject and verb agreement between *they* and *were* was correct, and they also remembered that the verb *be* could be followed by a present participle. This evidence affirmed that the nature of L1 does not interfere with their performance in this aspect, but partial exposure to L2 and incomplete application of the L2 rules do.

The researchers’ explanation above, which stated that differences between the students’ L1 and L2 contributed to the students’ errors, was as predicted by Lado (1957) as cited in Wang and Xiang (2016). He argued that the acquisition of L2 is much affected by L1 interference. He further acclaimed that the common elements in L2 will be easy to learn, while the differences tend to be complicated and grow to be the source of obstacles in learning. In addition, Marton (1973) in Lin and Chuang (2014, p. 100) stated that

Learners’ mother tongue had a great influence in a second language learning course, especially where the second language was regarded as a foreign language, with learners acquiring the second language in schools without being entirely immersed in an intensive course or in a country where the second language was spoken. In such circumstances, it was a hard task for EFL learners to acquire the foreign language.

This assertion supported the students’ condition in this study since English is a foreign language that they rarely use other than at schools, and there are differences between their L1 and L2. Based on this hypothesis, the researchers could conclude that the obstacles or the errors

the students committed in their L2 (double comparatives, active-passive verbs, and noun-pronoun agreement) were positively correlated to the differences between their L1 and L2.

Inadequate learning was the other reason affecting the constraints the students encountered in doing the test. This factor caused the students' competence errors as found in this study. Corder (1967), as cited in Nzerem and Bob (2019), states that competence error occurs regularly and indicates the misunderstanding of the L2 system. This inadequate learning could be rooted back in the students' motivation in learning English, especially grammar. Harmer (2010, p. 51) asserted that "intrinsic motivation is especially important for encouraging success." The students' failure in doing the test indicated that they were extrinsically motivated to learn English. All of the four students interviewed in this study conveyed their will to learn English and succeed at it, and yet not all of them were motivated enough to do something to make it come true.

The researcher then could say that to learn better, students have to have intrinsic motivation. This was as what Gardner (2001), as cited in Khodadad and Kaur (2016), stated that motivation indeed was highly correlated with any L2 learning success or failure. Moreover, He (2013) had explored this issue in particular on EFL students' individual differences in grammar learning. She found similar results that intrinsic motivation was a vital factor in EFL students' grammar learning and grammar competence development that would drive them to work at any necessary action to achieve it.

Other than extrinsic motivation, the context of learning was also evident to be one of the issues causing the students to have inadequate learning. The four students interviewed attested that they experienced the deductive teaching method through their nine years of learning at school. For them, this method proved effective for facing tests but not for language internalization. They confirmed that they got good results on the test, but they would soon forget the materials. It was in line with what Benitez-Correa et al. (2019) had revealed. They found that implementing the deductive approach in teaching grammar that usually comes with tedious and monotonous media was effective for students on short-term learning only.

### **The Non-Linguistic Factors Causing Difficulties in Doing the Structure and Written Expression Section of the TOEFL**

The interview showed that two major non-linguistic factors affected the students' performance on this test: past experience in learning L2 and exposure to L2. Harmer (2010) asserted that students' previous learning experience would influence their current learning outcomes, and it was proved valid. The students in this study revealed their unpleasant past

learning experiences. Respondents A and D said that they had a terrifying English teacher who often scolded the students back then in senior high school when they could not answer a question correctly.

“My English teacher in senior high school was a Ba\*\*\*nese man. His voice was so loud that my friends and I were terrified during the lesson. He scolded us and even threw away our workbook when our work didn’t meet his expectation. I couldn’t enjoy the class, I always tried to avoid participating in the discussion, and thus my grades were not satisfactory”. (Respondent D)

In addition, all respondents confirmed that they were taught using a deductive approach all the time. Their teachers or lecturers would directly give them the grammatical rules explicitly in the beginning, and thus they had no chance to generate the rules on their own critically. Respondent D specifically mentioned,

“My English teachers and even the tutors in this course had always taken the simplest way to teach us the grammatical skill. They directly showed us the formula and then gave some sentences as examples. Maybe they were worried that the students could not generate the formulas on their own or maybe doing such thing will only be a waste of time”. (Respondent D)

Such experience would indirectly shape the students’ beliefs and expectations about learning. They believed that learning English was so hard that they would not be able to understand it. They became passive during the learning process and lost their motivation to learn. They would try to avoid English in every chance they had to get in touch with it. Consequently, this negative belief caused their English to be not well developed, and thus they failed the test. It is as what Loh and Teo (2017), Tang, Chung, Li, and Yeung (2016), Ahmed (2015), Djonhar (2014), and Astuti (2013) have found that students’ past learning experience, especially what the teacher does in the classroom greatly contributes to the students’ success or failure.

Besides unpleasing past learning experiences, inadequate exposure to the L2 caused another problem for the students. It was indicated that the students had a few exposures to the language. Whereas, to be able to learn and perform better in the test, they had to get in touch with the L2 as often as possible to get intake or input (Pica, 2013) or be “exposed” to the L2 (Lakshmanan, 2013; Ullman, 2013; Verspoor & Schmidt, 2013). As the input was inadequate, inauthentic, and given in a one-way method, the students got insufficient exposure and were less exposed to the language. As a result, the students could not successfully acquire the language and failed the test. This was as expressed earlier by Carrol and Sapon (2002) in their study of foreign language proficiency level attained by language majors near graduation from



college that the more exposure to the target language, the greater the success of the students in proficiency tests (as cited in Smith, 2016).

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the elaboration above, it can be concluded that both linguistic and non-linguistic factors could cause difficulties for students in doing the Structure and Written Expression section of the TOEFL. The linguistic constraints were in three areas: active-passive verbs, double comparative forms, and noun-pronoun agreement. The students found it difficult to understand the meaning of the sentence due to their limited vocabulary, and thus they could not decide whether this sentence required an active or passive verb form. They also had difficulties concerning the application of the noun-pronoun agreement. Failure in identifying antecedents caused them to commit errors in this aspect. Double comparative posed even greater difficulty for the students to solve. They were accustomed to the subject-verb formula so that they generalized this rule in double comparative cases. Some non-linguistic factors worsened the students' performance on the test, such as unpleasant past learning experiences and non-supportive learning contexts, particularly the deductive teaching method and the inauthentic materials used in teaching.

The linguistic errors were mainly caused by the interference between the students' L1 and L2. When the students are confronted with particular English grammar, which is different from that of Bahasa Indonesia, they tend to use their knowledge of L1 to solve it. As a result, their grammar production sometimes falls into error. In addition, students' extrinsic motivation and poor teaching were proved to be the sources of inadequate learning which further resulted in poor performance on the test.

Because TOEFL is widely used as a determinant of students' English proficiency in Indonesia, further studies on this area are very much needed, particularly those in the Structure and Written Expression section. The present study results only apply to a limited number of students and could not be generalized into a broader context. The prospect of investigating more descriptive quantitative data would help clarify these findings. Aiming to identify what measures could be taken to overcome these constraints could be pursued. Overall, further research on this topic could benefit the students and teachers, lecturers, and policymakers.

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