Analysis of Students Errors in Using WH Questions

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Abstract

The objective of this research are; 1). To identify students' errors in forming WH questions. 2). To describe the challenges students face when learning English WH questions. The data collection tehniques used were; class observation, interview, and documentation. Researcher used qualitative methods. Qualitative analysis includes transcription and examination of audio recordings as well as examining the results of student worksheets, using thematic analysis to detect and analyze errors made by grade IX (ninth) students when creating WH questions. As for the research obtained there are several errors were found from some of the questions given, namely: there is no auxiliary verb before the subject, the wrong preposition, such as the verb "wait" requires the preposition "for," writing some vocabulary that is not right, wrong in translation, sentences that are not accurate in the context of time, and the use of verbs that are not appropriate. Additionally, there are several things that make students find it difficult to make WH questions, include student language background, lack of auxiliary, lack of practical experience, and cause of cultural and cognitive barriers.

Keywords: Students Errors; WH Questions

Introduction

Learning a language's grammatical structures is not a goal in and of itself. The end is the ability to communicate meaning. The required tools are provided by the grammatical system. Linguists' and researchers' perspectives demonstrate that grammar is only one facet of teaching and learning English. Both grammatical and conversational proficiency are necessary for language proficiency. Nouns, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, spelling, capitalization, punctuation, vocabulary, and more are all included under the general term "grammar" (Golda L., 2019).

Making mistakes is a part of learning a language, just like learning anything else. Language instructors used to view student mistakes as something bad that they worked hard to avoid (Touchie Y H.).

Using WH questions, this paper will examine the mistakes made by students while creating interrogative sentences. Question words are used in WH inquiries in order to extract information. often called a "WH question" because all seven words (excluding "how") started with the letters "WH."

(Sitawati D A., 2015) Your queries should contain the following words: what, who, whom, whose, why, where, when, which, and how.

This paper will discuss the challenges Indonesian students face when learning English WH questions. These challenges include linguistic differences, teaching limitations, and cultural barriers. So that readers and schools can find solutions to the problems found in improving the quality of learning, especially in improving students' grammar in WH questions.

The research questions are: 1). What errors do students make when making interrogative sentences? 2). What are the challenges students face when learning English WH questions? Based on the research questions, this study aims 1). To identify students' errors in forming WH questions. 2). To describe the challenges students, face when learning English WH questions.

Literature Review

Understanding WH Questions in English

WH questions in English are used to inquire about specific information rather than receiving a simple yes or no response. These questions start with WH words (who, what, when, where, why, and how). Each of these words seeks a particular kind of information, making WH questions essential tools for gaining detailed responses in communication. WH questions are a fundamental aspect of the English language, used to inquire about specific information rather than simply confirming or denying a statement. They begin with words such as who, what, when, where, why, which, and how. These words serve different functions, depending on the type of information being sought (Yule, 2016).

The structure requires subject-auxiliary inversion, where the auxiliary verb comes before the subject, unlike in affirmative statements (Greenbaum & Nelson, 2002). This inversion is a common feature in English but can be challenging for learners from languages that don't use this format. In questions where there is no auxiliary in the main sentence (e.g., simple present or past tense), an auxiliary verb like "do" or "did" is introduced (Swan, 2005).

For instance:

- Statement: "He plays soccer."

- WH question: "What does he play?"

Understanding WH Questions in Indonesia

The structural and syntactic differences between English and Bahasa Indonesia are among the main challenges Indonesian students face when learning WH questions. English syntax for WH questions follows specific rules involving subject-auxiliary inversion, a structure that doesn't exist in Bahasa Indonesia. For example:

- English WH question: "Where are you going?"

- Indonesian equivalent: "Kamu pergi ke mana?" (literally, "You go to where?")

In Bahasa Indonesia, the WH word often appears at the end of the question, and there is no requirement to invert the subject and auxiliary verb. This difference can lead to negative transfer, where students apply Indonesian sentence structure to English, resulting in errors such as "you are going where?" instead of "where are you going?" (Lauder, 2008).

Studies suggest that the absence of auxiliary verbs (do, does, is) in forming questions, while Indonesian typically relies on context and intonation without additional verbs. This lack of structure mapping makes it difficult for Indonesian students to internalize and correctly apply English WH questions (Yulia, 2013).

Common Challenges for Learners

Learners of English, especially those from language backgrounds without subject-auxiliary inversion, often find WH questions challenging due to structural differences. For instance, in Bahasa Indonesia, there is no inversion in question formation, so a question such as "Where are you going?" might be incorrectly formed as "You are going where?" (Lauder, 2008). Moreover, languages that lack auxiliary verbs can lead learners to omit or misplace auxiliaries, leading to errors like "Where are you going?" instead of "Where are you going?" (Richards, 2015). Another challenge lies in the correct selection of WH words. Learners may use incorrect WH words or translate them directly from their first language, leading to confusion and potential misunderstandings. (Murphy, 2019).

Pedagogical Challenges: Indonesian education historically emphasizes rote memorization and grammar-focused instruction, especially in English language learning. According to Huda (2018), Indonesian classrooms often prioritize grammar rules and vocabulary over communicative competence, a critical skill for using WH questions naturally in conversations. This approach means that students may be familiar with the grammatical structure of WH questions but lack practical experience in using them effectively. This focus on exam preparation rather than real-world usage limits students' exposure to interactive activities. For example, WH questions are crucial for eliciting information and engaging in meaningful exchanges in English, but traditional teaching methods in Indonesia may not provide enough practice in such contexts (Lie, 2007). Studies indicate that students who lack this communicative practice struggle more with using WH questions spontaneously, as they are accustomed to rigid, rule-based responses instead of adaptive, conversational language use (Krashen, 1982).

Cultural and Cognitive Barriers: Indonesian cultural norms and communication styles can also impact students' comfort and engagement with WH questions. Indirect communication is valued in Indonesian culture, where direct questioning—especially to a teacher or authority figure—may be perceived as confrontational or disrespectful (Lie, 2007). Consequently, Indonesian students may feel uncomfortable practicing WH questions openly, especially in classroom discussions or question-based activities. This hesitation aligns with cognitive patterns developed through cultural norms, which emphasize collectivism and respect for hierarchy. In classrooms, this often translates into a reluctance to challenge or openly question teachers, which affects students' engagement with WH questions that inherently require seeking information and clarification (Hofstede, 2010). Students might prefer indirect language or may avoid asking questions altogether, fearing it may imply a lack of respect or an attempt to "correct" the teacher.

Research indicates that these cultural barriers contribute to lower participation and practice levels among Indonesian students. Studies have shown that classrooms that encourage an open, inquiry-based environment help students become more confident in using WH questions. However, this requires a shift in classroom dynamics to make questioning a normal, encouraged part of learning (Cahyono & Widiati, 2004).

Previous Studies

Rentauli Mariah Silalahi (2017) led the initial investigation. The study looked at typical blunders that university students make when utilizing 'Wh-questions' in interrogative phrases. The study, which used a descriptive qualitative method and included 60 participants, discovered that the most common mistakes were selecting the right 'wh-question' and accurately putting components. Other problems

included the use of articles, demonstratives, verbs, and auxiliary verbs. The study also discovered a strong link between grammatical difficulties and meaningful sentence construction in English.

Nurjanah, Doni Anggoro, and Nina Dwiastuty (2017) carried out the second study. The study looks at the mistakes produced by MTs. Hidayatussalafiyah second-graders when utilizing "Yes/No-Questions" and "Wh-Questions." Books, paperwork, conversations, and observation were used to gather data. According to the study, pupils had greater trouble creating "Yes/No-Questions" (65.07%) and "Wh-Questions" (34.93%). "Are you studying your grammar book?" and "What time did you eat lunch?" were the most challenging inquiries.

The third investigation was carried out by Shely Perbina Br, Sitepu, and Ayu Indari. The study looked at how students' grasp of WH-questions correlated with their ability to ask and give views. 36 eighth-grade students from SMP Swasta Harapan Bangsa Kuala participated. The essay test was found to be valid and trustworthy, with a tcounted coefficient of 5.85 that exceeded the ttable coefficient of 1.69092. The Pearson Product Moment correlation study found a strong correlation coefficient (0.72) ranging from 0.600 to 0.799, which confirmed the premise. The crucial value for Pearson's r was 0.2785, showing a substantial association.

Research Methods

Research Design

This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze the mistakes students make when making WH questions, as well as exploring the problems that students face when making WH questions.

Participants

Participants in this research were 9th grade students at SMP Islam Albayani (junior high school), which is located in East Lombok, Nusa Tenggara Barat, Indonesia. who were studying English as a foreign language. The selection of participants was carried out randomly based on their availability and relevance to the research.

Method of Data Collection

1. Class Observation

Researchers made direct observations of the process of teaching and learning WH questions in class. These observations include teaching methods, student responses, and challenges that arise during the learning process.

2. Interview

The interview was conducted after the researcher gave several examples of WH questions in Indonesian, and then the students changed them into English. The interviews were conducted with several students who had worked on the specified assignments. Students were interviewed to reveal the difficulties they faced and their understanding of the WH questions.

3. Documentation

Collecting documentation such as student worksheets and recordings of students during interviews, which are useful for analyzing errors made by students in forming WH questions and the challenges they face.

Method of Data Analysis

To analyze data comprehensively, researcher used qualitative methods. Qualitative analysis includes transcription and examination of audio recordings as well as examining the results of student worksheets, using thematic analysis to detect and analyze errors made by grade 9 students when creating WH questions, as well as identifying the difficulties faced when understanding WH questions and creating WH questions. This approach ensures that results are validated and strengthens the credibility of the research by leveraging the power of qualitative methods. Overall, this rigorous data analysis method promises to shed light on common errors and challenges encountered when constructing WH questions.

Finding

Understanding WH Questions in Analyzing the Errors

After the researcher collected data by asking grade IX (ninth) students to make several examples of WH questions based on the predetermined Indonesian WH questions, which can be seen in appendix 1, several errors were found from some of the questions given, namely: there is no auxiliary verb before the subject, the wrong preposition, such as the verb "wait" requires the preposition "for," writing some vocabulary that is not right, wrong in translation, sentences that are not accurate in the context of time, and the use of verbs that are not appropriate so that they are not in sync with the to be/auxiliary used.

Common Challenges for Learners

Based on direct research, namely by conducting exercises for students in making WH questions and interview activities carried out related to the difficulties faced by students. There are several things that make students find it difficult to make WH questions, which, when related to the literature review above, include student language background, lack of auxiliary, lack of practical experience, and cause of cultural and cognitive barriers.

Discussion

Understanding WH Questions in Analyzing the Errors

Students errors:

1. Missing Auxiliary Verb Before Subject

"Where you go?"

Error: There is no auxiliary verb before the subject.

Correction: "Where are you going?" (present continuous tense) or "Where do you go?" (present simple tense)

"when you come"

Error: There is no auxiliary verb before the subject.

Corrections: "When do you come?" (present simple tense) or "When are you coming?" (present continuous tense).

"why you cry"

Error: There is no auxiliary verb before the subject.

Corrections: "Why are you crying?" (present continuous tense) or "Why do you cry?" (simple present tense).

2. Missing Preposition

"who do you wait"

Error: The verb "wait" is usually followed by the preposition "for."

Corrections: a necessary preposition in this sentence. The correct sentence is "Who are you waiting for?"

3. Writing Some Vocabulary that Is Not Appropriate.

"Who do you seel a dress?"

Error: the word "seel" is written incorrectly; it should be "sell."

Correction: "Who do you sell a dress to?"

Who sen clothes?

Errors: The word "sen" should be "sell" or "sold" depending on the time context.

Corrections: this sentence needs a clearer time structure, e.g.,

"Who sells clothes?" to the question of a person who sells clothes.

"Who sold clothes?" to ask who has sold clothes.

4. Wrong Translation

"Who do you seel a dress?"

Error: the wrong writing of the word "seel" should be "sell" and wrong in the meaning of the sentence.

Corrections and Explanations: The improvement based on the student's work should be "Who do you sell a dress to?" with the preposition "to." However, basically, this WH question is not only wrong in writing vocabulary but also wrong in interpreting it, because when seen in appendix 1, the researcher asks students to make the sentence "who sells a dress?" instead of "who do you sell the dress to?"

5. The Sentence Is Not Right in the Context of Time

"when do you come"

Error: this sentence is not appropriate in the context of time; for certain situations, it should use the appropriate tense (e.g., present continuous or past).

Correction: if the question is for the future, it is best to use "when will you come?" If for habit, the sentence "When do you come?" is correct but rarely used. It is more common to use "When are you coming?"

6. The Use of Verbs That Is Not Appropriate So That It Is Not Synchronized with the To-Be/Auxiliary Used.

"why are you cry"

Error: The verb form "cry" is wrong because it is out of sync with the verb to be used.

Corrections: In this sentence, the auxiliary verb "are" should be followed by the present participle (-ing) to indicate that the action is in progress. The correct sentence is "Why are you crying?"

"what do you feeling"

Error: incorrect in the verb form "feeling" should be "feel."

Correction: after the auxiliary verb "do," the basic form verb should be used. The correct sentence is "What do you feel?"

Common challenges for learners

There are some challenges that students face when forming WH questions based on the data obtained:

1. Student Language Background

Based on direct and validated observations from the interviews that have been carried out, the 9th-grade students of Albayani Islamic Junior High School use Sasakness as their L1 and Indonesian as their L2. Meanwhile, English is a foreign language for them, so it is dominant when students make WH questions; they are still affected by the structure of L1 and L2.

Students: "Ya, saya punya Bahasa Sasak sebagai Bahasa pertama, dan Bahasa Indonesia yang saya gunakan Ketika di sekolah."

Translate: "Yes, I have Sasak as my first language and Indonesian, which I used when I was in school."

2. Lack Auxiliary

When students do the exercise of making WH questions, it is found that students make mistakes in placing WH questions and even do not put WH questions in sentences that should exist. It can be seen in the discussion of understanding WH questions in analyzing the errors.

3. Lack Practical Experience

Based on the statements of students in class during the interview, one of the students stated that he did not make WH questions too often, so this made her rigid in making WH questions.

Student 1: "Ya jarang, tidak terlalu sering."

Translate: "Yes, rarely, not very often."

4. Cultural and Cognitive Barriers

The environment is something that affects students' habits so that students, when they want to practice WH questions in English and when they ask questions in class, are so awkward and always afraid of being wrong. After conducting direct observations and interviews, it turned out that it was due to the

support of the environment to practice it. So that this makes students not used to practicing it and makes students lack vocabulary and not even know the order of sentence structure that should be.

Student 2: "Ya, kadang sebagian nggak tahu kosakatanya.

Translate: "Yes, sometimes I don't know the vocabulary."

Student 1: "Urutan katanya ketika menyusunnya kadang nggak tahu."

Translate: "The order of words when compiling them sometimes I don't know."

Conclusion

The paper discusses the mistakes made in making WH questions as well as the difficulties of students in the IX (ninth) class in learning English WH questions. WH questions are crucial for understanding responses, but they can be challenging for Indonesian students due to differences in sentence structure and syntax. The lack of subject-auxiliary inversion in Indonesian and the absence of auxiliary verbs in English can lead to negative transfer and errors. Additionally, Indonesian education prioritizes grammar rules over communicative competence, limiting students' exposure to interactive activities. Cultural norms and communication styles may also make direct questioning perceived as confrontational or disrespectful, and affecting engagement. These barriers contribute to lower participation and practice levels among students in the IX (ninth) class.

Suggestions

Teachers' questioning in the classroom, however, doesn't always play its proper role. In daily teaching, as like the data obtained, the students are sometimes not familiar with the certain vocabulary used by the teacher. Students do not know the order of the words. Students are never used to making English questions. And students have been affected by the first language and the second language, which is not English. It makes it difficult for the students to make WH questions.

To improve Indonesian students' understanding of WH questions, several strategies are effective:

1. Contrastive Analysis: Explicitly teaching the structural differences between English and Bahasa Indonesia WH questions can help students understand why errors occur and prevent negative transfer (Ellis, 1994).
2. Role-Play and Interactive Practice: Role-playing and communicative activities provide opportunities for students to use WH questions in real-world contexts, building both competence and confidence (Nunan, 1999).
3. Culturally Sensitive Instruction: Teachers who create a classroom environment that values questions and encourages inquiry can help students overcome cultural hesitations and use WH questions more openly (Harmer, 2001).
4. Focus on Auxiliary Usage: Dedicated exercises on using auxiliary verbs in questions can reinforce English-specific syntax and help students master inversion (Thornbury, 1999).

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