

## CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background of the Study

Verb as one of the members of the parts of speech is regarded by many researchers as the most important part of any sentence. This statement confirmed by Palmer (2003) as he placed the verb on top of his list of his surveys of Parts of Speech. He (ibid.) further adds, “in any sentence, the verb is the word or words which tells you what is happening, whether it be an action (something done) or a state of being (something felt or just something existing)”. Nelson (2002) also supports this with his statement on his book, “Indeed, it is the most important constituent in the sentence, since regular sentences may consist of only a verb: imperatives such as *Help!* and *Look!*”. It is vital to be able to differentiate a verb and a predicate. While verb is the word or words which tells what is happening (an action, a state of being, or something felt or existing), predicate consists of the verb itself and any other elements of the sentence apart from the subject (Greenbaum and Nelson, 2002). They (ibid. p. 21) give an example: the sentence *I learned all this much later*, consists of *I* as the subject and *learned all this much later* as the predicate.

There are many kinds of verbs, e.g. main verbs, auxiliary verbs, primary verbs, modal verbs, regular verbs, irregular verbs, transitive verbs, intransitive verbs, and so on (Greenbaum and Nelson, 2002; Biber, Conrad and Leech 2003; Palmer, 2003). But in general, verb is divided only to two types: the main verbs (a.k.a. the lexical verbs) and the auxiliary verbs (a.k.a. the helping verbs). Meissner (2012) provides an example with the sentence *I could have been imagining*; the main verb in this verb phrase is *imagining*,

and the verbs that come before the main verbs *could have been* are called auxiliary verbs; or simply called auxiliaries.

As the most important part of a clause, verb in a clause determines other clause elements which may occur and specifies a meaning relation among those elements (Biber, Conrad, and Leech, 2003). Since verb is one of the member of the open classes word which means that it opens to new words (Greenbaum, Nelson, 2002; Biber, Conrad, Leech, 2003), this condition may result in a higher chance for the students to misuse particular words (especially the main verb), since students may choose more ‘prestigious’ words in accordance with academic writing (Hauck, 1969). However, a ‘bigger’ word is not always a better word in writing, but a more precise one is (ibid). Students tend to give their attention only on the grammatical correctness; abandoning the contextual/descriptive correctness of a clause/sentence. This means, if students find the word *get* has a synonym *earn*, they may only focus on the grammatical correctness, seeing both words has the same meaning (i.e. both words are verbs, and when they translate it into L1 (without any further clarifications) they will get the word *dapat/mendapat*). This is called literal translation or called metaphrase, a word by word type of translation; one of the three categories of translation described by Munday (2001). This kind of translation is forsaking the sense (contextual/descriptive correctness) of a word; focusing solely on the grammatical correctness

Since teaching and learning activities mostly done by writings or other written text, an effective writing skill is important in the academic field is a must-have. This can be done by practicing more and more, especially on grammatical correctness, descriptive correctness, dictions, and further study on verbs. The aim of writing is to transfer information in a clear and concise manner (Checkett and Feng-Checkett, 2004).

Several classes of writing are provided for the Students of English Language Education Study Program (ELESP) of State University of Jakarta: Basic Writing, Academic Writing 1, Academic Writing 2 and Business Writing. These classes share a similar aim: to develop students' writing skill, especially to fulfill one of the requirements to receive Bachelor's Degree: *Skripsi*.

There are several previous studies related to the errors in using verbs on writing. Tan (2007) on his research entitled *A Study of EFL Learners' Writing Errors and Instructional Strategies*; seek out EFL learners' major writing difficulties by analyzing the nature and distribution of students' writing errors. His error analysis revealed that the top four most commonly made errors were word choice, verb form, missing subject and verb tense. The major causes of these errors were attributable to limited vocabulary size, poor grammar knowledge and interference from first language. Sugeng and Hendriwanto (2013) on their research entitled *An analysis of the Grammatical Errors in the Narrative Writing of the First Grade Students of SMA 6 Yogyakarta*, found out that there are fourteen types of grammatical errors, and the top three are the verb tenses, finite verbs, and non-finite verbs. Noor (1996) on his research entitled *English Syntactic Errors by Arabic Speaking Learners*, found out that there are seven categories of errors, and the top of the list are the verbal errors (the use of tense, phase, aspect, voice, verb formation, concord, finite/non-finite verbs). And the last related previous study found, by Taghavi (2012) entitled *Error Analysis in Composition of Iranian Lower Intermediate Students*, found that most common errors on students' writing were spelling, word choice, verb tense, preposition, subject-verb agreement and word order.

These previous studies show that one of the students' problems in writing is mostly on verbs. Since none of the previous studies specifically focused on the errors in using verbs (although it is included on those studies), the writer is interested in doing a

further research on profiling the students' errors specifically in using verbs on their writings.

## **1.2. Research Questions**

This study is carried out based on the following main question:

- How is the profile of undergraduate students' errors in using verbs in their writings?

The writer uses these sub-questions to answer the main question above:

1. What are the types of errors made by undergraduate students in using verbs in their writings?
2. What are the frequencies of each type of errors made by undergraduate students in their writings?
3. What are the causes of students' errors in using verbs in their writings?

## **1.3. Purpose of the Study**

This study is carried out in order to profile the errors in using verbs made by students in their writings, by answering the sub-questions as follow:

1. Show the types of errors made by undergraduate students in using verbs in their writings
2. Show the frequencies of each type of errors in using verbs made by undergraduate students in their writings
3. Show the causes of students' errors in using verbs in their writings

#### **1.4. Scope of the Study**

This study focuses on profiling the students' errors in using verbs on their writings by finding the types of errors, the frequency of the errors, and the possible causes of the errors. The students mentioned above are ELESP students of State University of Jakarta year 2012 and 2014 in grammar class.

#### **1.5. Significance of the Study**

The result of this study may provide better insights to the writer, and specifically for students who have difficulties on dictions, vocabularies, synonyms, and writing compositions especially on English Department's undergraduate students. This study also complements the previous study by specifically focusing on the errors in using verbs and its categories, which may provide more specific results on the errors in using verbs on undergraduate students' writings in particular scope.