



## **STUDENTS' ABILITY IN UNDERSTANDING DANGLING MODIFIERS AT UNIVERSITAS NEGERI PADANG**

**Humaira Utami Putri<sup>1</sup>, Sitti Fatimah<sup>2</sup>**

English Department

Faculty of Languages and Arts

Universitas Negeri Padang

email: [mairaputri48@gmail.com](mailto:mairaputri48@gmail.com)

[sitti.fatimahbing@gmail.com](mailto:sitti.fatimahbing@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

Dangling modifiers is a problem in sentence structure where there is a mismatch between what the writer or speaker means and what the reader or listener means. This problem will certainly cause a misunderstanding. This study aimed to determine the ability of students to understand dangling modifiers and find out the types of dangling modifiers that were most frequently answered incorrectly by students. This research is a descriptive quantitative study. The population of this study was 35 students from K-2017 English Language Education. Samples were taken using the stratified cluster sampling method. Data were collected through grammar test. The data were given a general score and each part of the test is designed to determine students' ability in understanding dangling modifiers. It was found that the ability of third-year students to understand dangling modifiers was poor because the average score was 49. To find out the type of dangling modifiers that were most answered incorrectly, each answer error in each type of dangling modifiers would be added so that found 55% errors in dangling elliptical clause type. It can be concluded that students need to be aware of logic and illogical sentences (dangling modifiers).

**Key Words:** *Dangling Modifiers, Grammar, English Language Students.*

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Grammar is one of the language components that have to be mastered by students both in spoken and written form. It is because grammar is a fundamental thing in language learning. Thornburry (1999) stated that grammar allows us to use language to define the world in terms of how things occur, when, and where. In part, grammar is the study of acceptable forms or constructions in a language. So that students' need to be aware of their grammar.

Most students usually make grammar mistakes in their writing. The grammar mistakes usually occur in a simple word even to a complex sentence. As English Language Education students, they have some goals in the English language-teaching field, especially to teach and to educate, grammar becomes a

<sup>1</sup> English ELTSP of English Department of FBS Universitas Negeri Padang graduated on March 2020

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer of English Department of FBS Universitas Negeri Padang



subject that matters and has to be mastered by them. Therefore, the way of teacher or lecturer in teaching grammar has a considerable role in students' grammar comprehension.

According to Weaver (2008), "teaching grammar in conjunction with writing is pedagogy of possibility that is positive, productive, and practical" (p. 6-7). Grammar determines the quality of writing and how competent the writer. Through writing, a writer wants to emphasize their ideas, thoughts, and feelings by using correct use of grammar, words and sentences. Indonesian university students still have problems in using correct grammar, spelling, and even various vocabulary to express their ideas in their writing. As English becomes their foreign language, they may find some difficulties in constructing good sentences in a paragraph with the right use of grammar. Broughton (2003) states that one out of four main problems confronted by ESL students in writing is English grammar and lexis. As grammar is a fundamental thing in sentences, incorrect grammar in sentences will create confusion and misinterpretation. This is a fact that ESL students are facing these problems in producing good sentences and they also tend to make errors or mistake in sentence construction.

One of the problems in making a good sentence is a misplaced modifier and dangling modifier. A misplaced modifier is incorrect modifier placement in a sentence. Meanwhile, the dangling modifier is no exact word is given a description by the modifier in a sentence so the whole sentence makes no sense. Both misplaced modifier and dangling modifiers often happened in students' piece of writing. Dangling modifier seems to explain something that is implied, but it is not written in sentences. Dumais (1988) states that a phrase dangles when it is not attached to some word that it is meant to modify. Dangling modifiers itself fails to refer to any word in the sentence; sometimes the sentence can be ridiculous or confusing for anyone who read the sentence. It is because the ambiguous clause or phrase that refers to words it modifies. Jumaa (2013) states that modifiers are an important element to read, define, and assess terms to alter their meaning. Meanwhile, Bovee (2016) says that dangling modifiers is a phrase or clause that has no connection to the subject of the sentence. It creates confusion by placing modifiers close to the wrong nouns or verbs. Finally, the dangling modifier should be avoided because it can change the meaning of a sentence and makes the reader confused about the doer of the sentence. For example, Mitchell, Baugh, and Kelly (2016) show a dangling sentence: "While eating a cookie, the phone rang." This sentence does not specify who is eating a cookie. The reader may get confused because while eating a cookie phrase, there is the phone rang, the sentence suggests that the phone rang while eating a cookie. Therefore, the correct sentence might be, "While he was eating a cookie, the phone rang". To repair this type of dangling modifier, we cannot simply move it to another place in a sentence; we should add or change words so that the sentence can make sense. As dangling modifiers commonly occur at the beginning of the sentence, with the infinitives, verbal that follows a preposition, the participial phrase, and elliptical clause, based on what types of words they describe.

Based on observation on August 2019 on third-year students of English Education Program in academic year 2019/2020 at Universitas Negeri Padang, the

researcher found that some students do not know what dangling modifier is and they produce some sentences that are dangling. Dangling modifier has become a subject that has been taught in the 4th semester in English Language Education Program at Universitas Negeri Padang. The subject name was Grammar for TOEFL and the goal was to give students a better understanding of every aspect of TOEFL tests such as grammar, writing structure, listening, and so on. Yet students still have difficulties in understanding dangling modifiers. It can be seen from students' Academic Writing final semester tests that there are some dangling modifiers found in their writing.

Research about dangling modifiers has been conducted by some researchers. A study conducted by Soesanto (2008) at Bina Nusantara University showed that students are able to differentiate correct sentences with the sentences containing dangling modifier well, they also have ability to revise it but only 18 students out of 32 that have good understanding on revising it. The next study conducted by Jumaa (2013) at Diyala University in Iraq showed that dangling modifiers commonly appear at the beginning of the sentence. Yet, English Language learners still create dangling modifiers in their sentences. The other study conducted at Universitas PGRI Semarang found 39 dangling sentences in the chapters of Research Findings and Discussion (Egar, et al, 2014). The study shows that last academic year students still have difficulties to create 'un-dangle' sentences. The studies also describe how dangling modifiers are used by students and give solutions to any dangling modifiers produced by them. In the similar degree, a research conducted by Khairiyah (2015) at State Institute for Islamic Studies (IAIN) Salatiga showed that from compound sentences and the types of dangling modifier that can be applied by students of the fifth semester of English Education Department of STAIN Salatiga are dangling modifier of conjunction, pronoun, adverb, subject of the sentences and object on the sentences. The use of grammar is not used properly so students tend to make dangling sentences.

This research has similarities and differences with those of previous studies. The similarity are most students in the third year of English language Education program in UNP do not know what dangling modifier is, also the researcher will find out how is students' ability in understanding dangling modifier using grammar test, meanwhile, this research has difference that is, what is the most wrongly answered type of dangling modifier based on their grammar test. Therefore, the researcher will conduct a study entitled "An Analysis of Students' Ability in Understanding Dangling Modifiers at Universitas Negeri Padang".

## **B. RESEARCH METHOD**

This research belongs to quantitative research that used the descriptive method. According to Mills (2016:7), "quantitative research is collected and analyzed of numerical data to describe, explain, predict, or control phenomena of interest". Furthermore, the participants of this research were 35 English education students. The technique sampling that used is stratified cluster sampling. Gay (1987:127) defines that stratified cluster sampling is ways of sampling for populations with heterogeneous characteristics. It is because there are two

lecturers teach in different classes that may give students different types of learning.

To collect the data, the researcher used a grammar test as an instrument. Madsen (1983) states that grammar test designed to assess students' ability to use suitable language terms in both daily life or even in a study. The grammar test used in this research contained three parts: correct-incorrect sentences, completing sentence problems and sentence revision. Correct-incorrect sentences section has 10 questions, completing sentence problems section has 10 questions, and sentence revision section has 10 questions, so, the total of questions uses in this grammar test is 30 questions that have an approximate time for about 45 minutes. Those questions constructed from grammar books and TOEFL book so that the researcher decided to change them. Each item will provide 1 point for the correct answer and 0 for the wrong answer. (Arikunto, 2012:90). The maximum score shall be 30 and the minimum score shall be 0.

To analyze the data, the researcher will check each questions of the test that has been answered by students. The researcher then calculated the average student score to determine the student's ability in understanding dangling modifiers in overall and each part of the test. It was done by following Gay's formula. To know the most type of dangling modifiers that wrongly answered by students, researcher sum up the total each types of dangling modifiers in each section of the test. After sum up all of the incorrect answers, researcher converts the data into percentage using percentage formula.

## C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 1. The Students' Ability in Understanding Dangling Modifiers

The researcher analyzed the mean score of the students to know how their ability in understanding dangling modifiers. The data in Table 4 are presented the whole sections in the test. The mean score of the students is also calculated to obtain the data about student's level of comprehension as presented in Table 4 below.

*Table 1.a Results of Students' Score, Criteria, and Grade*

Name	Correct Answer	Incorrect Answer	Score	Criteria	Grade
S1	27	3	90	Very Good	A
S2	27	3	90	Very Good	A
S3	27	3	90	Very Good	A
S4	20	10	67	Good	B
S5	23	7	77	Good	B
S6	24	6	80	Very Good	A
S7	26	4	87	Very Good	A
S8	18	12	60	Fair	C
S9	6	24	20	Fail	E
S10	7	23	23	Fail	E
S11	6	24	20	Fail	E
S12	6	24	20	Fail	E
S13	11	19	37	Fail	E
S14	13	17	43	Poor	D
S15	9	21	30	Fail	E
S16	10	20	33	Fail	E

S17	6	24	20	Fail	E
S18	11	19	37	Fail	E
S19	11	19	37	Fail	E
S20	14	16	47	Poor	D
S21	12	18	40	Poor	D
S22	13	17	43	Poor	D
S23	10	20	33	Fail	E
S24	10	20	33	Fail	E
S25	7	23	23	Fail	E
S26	11	19	37	Fail	E
S27	7	23	23	Fail	E
S28	13	17	43	Poor	D
S29	20	10	67	Good	B
S30	10	20	33	Fail	E
S31	21	9	70	Good	B
S32	12	18	40	Poor	D
S33	22	8	73	Good	B
S34	16	14	53	Poor	D
S35	27	3	90	Very Good	A
		<b>Total Score</b>	1710		
		<b>Mean Score</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>poor</b>	<b>D</b>

Table 1.a shows that the students' mean score were 49 in categorized D (Poor). It can be said that in overall, the students had the poor ability in understanding dangling modifiers. The results show that there were 6 students in the category A (Very Good), 5 students in the category B (Good), 1 student in the category C (Fair), 7 students in the category D (Poor), and 16 students in the category E (Fail). The student number 1, 2, 3, and 35 got the highest score (90). This score is categorized as Very Good. The student number 9, 11, 12 and 17 got the lowest score (20). This score is categorized as Fail. In detail, students' mean score in each section of the grammar items are described in the tables as follows:

*Table 1.b students' score in answering questions in Section 1.*

No	Name	Correct Answers	Score	Category	Grade
1	S1	9	90	very good	A
2	S2	8	80	very good	A
3	S3	10	100	very good	A
4	S4	7	70	good	B
5	S5	8	80	very good	A
6	S6	8	80	very good	A
7	S7	6	60	fair	C
8	S8	7	70	good	B
9	S9	3	30	fail	E
10	S10	4	40	poor	D
11	S11	4	40	poor	D
12	S12	2	20	fail	E
13	S13	5	50	poor	D

14	S14	7	70	good	B
15	S15	5	50	poor	D
16	S16	6	60	fair	C
17	S17	2	20	fail	E
18	S18	5	50	poor	D
19	S19	5	50	poor	D
20	S20	7	70	good	B
21	S21	6	60	fair	C
22	S22	5	50	poor	D
23	S23	4	40	poor	D
24	S24	4	40	poor	D
25	S25	5	50	poor	D
26	S26	6	60	fair	C
27	S27	5	50	poor	D
28	S28	7	70	good	B
29	S29	9	90	very good	A
30	S30	5	50	poor	D
31	S31	6	60	fair	C
32	S32	3	30	fail	E
33	S33	8	80	very good	A
34	S34	7	70	good	B
35	S35	10	100	very good	A
		<b>Total</b>	2080		
		<b>Mean</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>fair</b>	<b>C</b>

Table 1.b indicates the students' ability in understanding the correct and incorrect dangle sentences. It can be stated that students' ability in understanding dangling modifier through section 1 is in Grade C (Fair) because the students' mean score is 59. It means that students have fair ability in understanding dangling modifier because they had trouble in recognizing which sentence was correct (with proper subject/doer in the introductory phrase or in the main clause) or incorrect (no proper subject/doer in the introductory phrase or in main clause).

According to the result, it was also found that there was 8 students who got A (Very Good), 6 students who got B (Good), 5 students who got C (Fair), 12 students who got D (Poor), and 4 students who got E (Fail). The highest score in this section is 100, which is categorized A (Very Good) and the lowest score is 20, categorized E (Fail). 13 students got the highest score, 22 students who got the lowest score.

Table 1.c Students' score in answering questions in Section 2.

No	Name	Correct Answers	Score	Criteria	Grade
1	S1	9	90	Very Good	A
2	S2	10	100	Very Good	A

3	S3	7	70	GOOD	B
4	S4	3	30	Fail	E
5	S5	5	50	Poor	D
6	S6	6	60	Fair	C
7	S7	10	100	Very Good	A
8	S8	5	50	Poor	D
9	S9	3	30	Fail	E
10	S10	3	30	Fail	E
11	S11	2	20	Fail	E
12	S12	0	0	Fail	E
13	S13	6	60	Fair	C
14	S14	6	60	Fair	C
15	S15	3	30	Fail	E
16	S16	1	10	Fail	E
17	S17	3	30	Fail	E
18	S18	5	50	Poor	D
19	S19	4	40	Poor	D
20	S20	5	50	Poor	D
21	S21	5	50	Poor	D
22	S22	4	40	Poor	D
23	S23	4	40	Poor	D
24	S24	5	50	Poor	D
25	S25	2	20	Fail	E
26	S26	3	30	Fail	E
27	S27	0	0	Fail	E
28	S28	5	50	Poor	D
29	S29	6	60	Fair	C
30	S30	2	20	Fail	E
31	S31	6	60	Fair	C
32	S32	2	20	Fail	E
33	S33	6	60	Fair	C
34	S34	4	40	Poor	D
35	S35	8	80	Very Good	A
		<b>Total Score</b>	1580		
		<b>Mean score</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>D</b>

Table 1.c shows that students' ability in understanding dangling modifier in section 2 was 45 as categorized D (Poor). It means that students have the poor ability in understanding dangling modifier through multiple choices section. It was because the distraction in each questions has lead them to choose the sentence that has improper subject in its main clause or introductory phrase.

According to the result, it was also found that there are 4 students who got A (Very Good), 1 students who got B (Good), 6 students who got C (Fair), 11 students who got D (Poor), and 13 students who got E (Fail). The finding showed that the highest score in this section was 100 with categorized A (Very Good) and the lowest score was zero with categorized E (Fail). There are 5 students who got the highest score, and there are 30 students who got the lowest score.

*Table 1.d. Students' score in answering questions in Section 3.*

No	Name	Correct Answers	Score	Criteria	Grade
1	S1	9	90	Very Good	A
2	S2	9	90	Very Good	A
3	S3	10	100	Very Good	A
4	S4	10	100	Very Good	A
5	S5	10	100	Very Good	A
6	S6	10	100	Very Good	A
7	S7	10	100	Very Good	A
8	S8	6	60	Fair	C
9	S9	0	0	Fail	E
10	S10	0	0	Fail	E
11	S11	0	0	Fail	E
12	S12	4	40	Poor	D
13	S13	0	0	Fail	E
14	S14	0	0	Fail	E
15	S15	1	10	Fail	E
16	S16	3	30	Fail	E
17	S17	1	10	Fail	E
18	S18	1	10	Fail	E
19	S19	2	20	Fail	E
20	S20	2	20	Fail	E
21	S21	1	10	Fail	E
22	S22	4	40	Poor	D
23	S23	2	20	Fail	E
24	S24	1	10	Fail	E
25	S25	0	0	Fail	E
26	S26	2	20	Fail	E
27	S27	2	20	Fail	E
28	S28	1	10	Fail	E
29	S29	5	50	Poor	D
30	S30	3	30	Fail	E
31	S31	9	90	Very Good	A
32	S32	7	70	GOOD	B
33	S33	8	80	Very Good	A
34	S34	5	50	Poor	D
35	S35	9	90	Very Good	A
		<b>Total Score</b>	1470		

		Mean score	42	Poor	D
--	--	------------	----	------	---

Table 1.d shows that students' ability in understanding dangling modifiers in section 3 was in category D (Poor) because the students' mean score was 42. It means that students also had the poor understanding in putting appropriate subject in the main clause and lack of understanding in changing passive sentences to active sentences.

According to the result, it was also found that there were 10 students who got A (Very Good), 1 students who got B (Good), 1 students who got C (Fair), 4 students who got D (Poor), and 19 students who got E (Fail). The highest score in this section was 100 with category A (Very Good) and the lowest score was 0 with categorized E (Fail). There are 11 students got the highest score, and 19 students got the lowest score.

Based on the explanations on the table 5 to 7, it can be seen that the highest mean score was in section 1. The mean score of section 1 was 59 with category C (Fair). It assumed that the students had fair understanding in recognizing dangling sentences among the correct sentences. Furthermore, the lowest mean score was in section 3. The mean score of section 3 was 42 with category D (Poor). That the students had the poor understanding in revising dangling sentences that have no proper subject in the main clause or in passive structure.

The average score of the students score is used to know the ability of them in understanding dangling modifiers. Based on table 4, the mean of the score was 49. Thus, the third-year English department students' ability in understanding dangling modifiers at Universitas Negeri Padang was poor.

## 2. The Most Type of Dangling Modifiers that Wrongly Answered by The Students

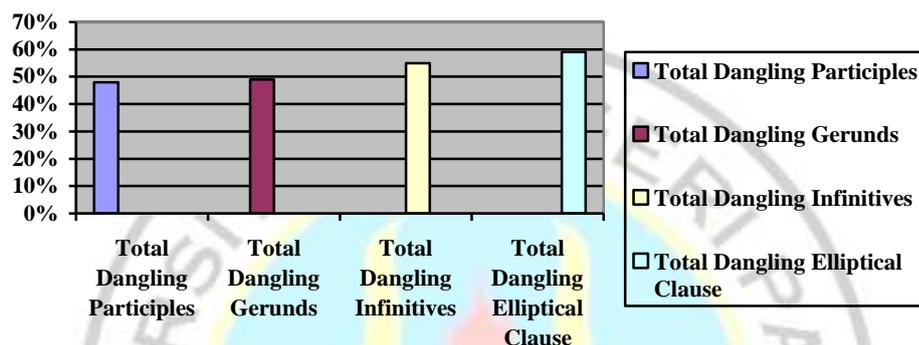
The most type of dangling modifiers questions that wrongly answered by the students can be seen in Table 8 below. The type of *dangling modifiers* distributed in all section of the test that got the least wrong answers is *dangling participles*. Of 280 total answers provided by the students, 135 (48%) are incorrectly answered. For *dangling gerunds*, of 245 total answers, there are 121 (49%) wrong answered. There were 153 (55%) incorrect answers about *dangling infinitives* out of 280 total answers provided by the students and the most incorrect answers are about *dangling elliptical clauses* which 145 (59%) out of 245 total answers. Because of the various total answers in each type of dangling modifiers, dangling elliptical clauses become the most type of dangling modifiers that wrong answered by the students.

Table 2.1. Students' Most Wrongly Answered Questions

Types of Dangling Modifiers	sec 1	sec 2	sec 3	Most wrong answered	Percentage	Section 1	Section 2	Section 3	total answers in each type of DM
Total Dangling Participles	33	39	63	135	48%	105	70	105	280
Total Dangling Gerunds	60	22	39	121	49%	105	70	70	245
Total Dangling	32	60	61	153	55%	70	105	105	280

<b>Infinitives</b>									
<b>Total Dangling Elliptical Clauses</b>	32	73	40	<b>145</b>	<b>59%</b>	70	105	70	245
									1050

Table 2.2. The Percentage of Most Type of Dangling Modifiers Wrongly Answered by Students



### 3. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings, the students' ability in understanding dangling modifier was poor in categorized D and the most type of dangling modifier that incorrectly answered by the students was dangling elliptical clause. The result reflected that students did not understand the topic about dangling modifiers. They tend to ignore the subject for the modifier to refer to, problem on active and passive form, also the lack of ability to revise the dangle sentence to untangle sentence. As a result, the student' ability in understanding dangling modifiers may be not good enough. This study model came from previous studies and research related to dangling modifiers, grammar, and modifiers that concerned in constructing sentences or paragraphs. Based on this research, the researchers wanted to give some suggestions, the Every teacher should give students the opportunity to be more active in learning, because it has the benefit of enhancing students ' skills. Teachers should be innovative to inspire students and build a teaching method or a teaching cycle.

. As dangling modifiers is one of the parts in the TOEFL test especially in structure and written expression that aims to test their ability to identify written English that is used in formal situations (formal written English). They also must understand the context of sentences to avoid the mistakes in using dangling modifiers.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arikunto, S. (2012). *Dasar-Dasar Evaluasi Pendidikan (Edisi 2)*. Jakarta: PT Bumi Aksara.
- Bovee, L. & Thrill, V. (2016). *Business in Action (8<sup>th</sup> ed)*. USA: Pearson Education.

- Broughton, G., Brumfit, C., et al. (2003). *Teaching English As a Foreign Language*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Dumais, L. A. (1988). *Writing in English*. Department Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan: Jakarta.
- Egar, N., et al. (2015). *Analisis Dangling Modifier Pada Hasil Penelitian dan Diskusi yang ditulis oleh Mahasiswa Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Universitas PGRI Semarang Tahun Akademik 2013/2014*. Journal.
- Jumaa, A. (2013). *Thesis: Dangling Modifiers in English*. English Department College of Education of Human Sciences: Diyala University. No 502 Volume 2.
- Khairiyah, U. (2015). *Descriptive Analysis of Dangling Modifier Made by The Fifth Semester Students of English Education Department of Stain Salatiga in The Academic Year of 2013/2014*. State Institute for Islamic Studies (IAIN): Salatiga.
- Madsen, H. (1983). *Techniques in Testing*. New York: OXFORD.
- Mills, G. E., & Gay, L. R. (2016) *Education research: Competencies for analysis and applications*. London, England: Pearson Education.
- Mitchell, S. et al. (2016). *Writing On the Run!*. USA: Open School BC.
- Soesanto, O. (2008). *An Analysis of Students Capability in Understanding Dangling Modifier: A Case Study of The Sixth Semester Students of English Department at Bina Nusantara University*. Thesis. Bina Nusantara University.
- Thornburry, S. (1999). *How to Teach Grammar*. England: Longman.
- Weaver. C., & Bush, J. (2008). *Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing*. Portsmouth: United States of America.