



The Use of Apostrophes in Theses of English Students

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Abstract

The purposes of this study were to find out the functions of apostrophes used in the students' theses and to identify the quality of students' understanding in using apostrophes. The objects of this research were 40 theses of 2015 English students who graduated in 2019. The instruments of this research were documents and a table checklist that were used to find out the functions and errors of apostrophes in introduction, results and discussion chapters. The data were analyzed by using descriptive quantitative method. The results showed that there were five functions of apostrophes including plural possession (65.9%), singular possession (29.1%), contraction (3.9%), separate possession (0.6%), and joint possession (0.5%). In addition, there were four types of errors consisting of possession words without apostrophes (57.1%), apostrophes in the wrong places (37.8%), plural nouns with apostrophes and the letter s (3.8%), and contractions without apostrophes (1.3%). From the calculation, the percentage of all errors was 25% which indicated that the quality of the students' understanding of the use of apostrophes was at a "high" level. It can be concluded that the students already understands the use of apostrophes well.

Keywords: Apostrophes; function; error; students' theses

Introduction

In writing, there are several features of punctuation marks. One of them is apostrophe. Apostrophe has three main functions. They are used to indicate contractions, to show nouns and some possessive pronouns, and to create letters of the

plural alphabet (Oshima and Hogue, 2007: 51). Shortly, this punctuation has different uses depending on its use in a sentence.

Nonetheless, sometimes apostrophe is an obstacle for students. This is because they probably don't understand the functions of apostrophes well (Barus, 2018). Consequently, they often make misuses of apostrophes.

Moreover, it is supported by several studies related to the use of apostrophe that have been done by several experts. First, a study done by Barus (2018) who analyzed the errors of using apostrophe in writing recount text at second grade student. This research showed that students made three types of errors in using apostrophes in the recount text. Second, Nasrudin (2015) also conducted a similar study who investigated the students' errors in using punctuation marks in narrative writing. The results told that the error made by students in using apostrophes was 63%. Third, Nuriyanti (2017) explored the students' ability to use punctuation in writing skill. The study explained that out of 26 students in semester IV, only 3 students put the apostrophe (') properly. The data from the three studies indicated that students often made errors in apostrophes.

In this case, students need to learn and understand more deeply about the rules for using apostrophes. By mastering them, students are able to create effective and good sentences, so that their meaning is easy to understand (Buncic, 2004: 200). Besides, they can minimize the errors in using this one punctuation. For this reason, apostrophe needs to be studied.

Based on the problems above and considering the importance of mastering apostrophes, the researcher would like to investigate the use of apostrophes in theses of English students at the University of Bengkulu. This research is different from the previous studies because it focused on the use of apostrophes in students' theses, notably in background, results and discussion sections. Moreover, this research had two research questions that are: "What are the functions of apostrophes used by students in their theses? How is the quality of students' understanding in using apostrophes?" The researcher hopes that the results of this study can help the readers, especially students, to understand more deeply about apostrophes and their functions so as to minimize errors.

Research Methodology

This study applied a descriptive quantitative method. Descriptive method was used to describe the functions and errors of using apostrophes contained in the students' theses. Meanwhile, the quantitative data was the result of calculations on the level of students' understanding in using apostrophes. It is supported by Gay's opinion (1990) which stated that descriptive research aims to describe and interpret subject of the research according to the prevailing situations. Whilst, Creswell (2014), Ary, et al. (2010), and Sugiyono (2011:7) claimed that, "Quantitative method presents numerical data resulting from analysis using statistics."

The object of this research involved 40 theses of 2015 English students graduated in 2019. The parts of the theses analyzed only include introduction, result and discussion sections because the sections contain logical reasons compiled by the writers themselves so that there are more apostrophes.

The instruments of this research were document and table checklist. Documents used in this study were English students' theses batch 2015 who graduated in 2019. Meantime, checklist instrument was adapted from Setiawan (2019) in thesis "An Analysis of Students' Subordinate Conjunction Errors in Recount Text Writing at the Second Semester of the Eleventh Grade of SMA Gajah Mada Bandar Lampung in the Academic Year of 2018/2019" based on theory of the function and rules for using apostrophes from Woods (2011).

The researcher worked with a co-rater to analyze data. Firstly, the researcher took photos of chapter 1 and chapter 4 of each thesis. The researcher then marked the words using apostrophes and entered the results of the analysis into the checklist instrument based on the functions of apostrophes. The researcher tested the reliability of the data using Cohen's Kappa coefficient. The researcher also calculated the frequency of each function and error in using apostrophes as well as overall errors with predetermined formula. The percentage of all errors was used to determine the quality of students' understanding of apostrophes. The results of the study were presented in tables of numeric data and descriptions.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

In the students' theses, apostrophes were used with five functions, namely plural possession, singular possession, contraction, separate possession, and joint possession.

Table 1: Frequency of Functions of Apostrophe Found in the Students' Theses

No.	Functions	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Plural Possession	407	65.9
2.	Singular Possession	180	29.1
3.	Contraction	24	3.9
4.	Separate Possession	4	0.6
5.	Joint Possession	3	0.5
	Total	618	100

The following is example of each function of apostrophe.

a. Plural Possession

"Foreign language anxiety may affect *students'* oral comprehension." (Thesis 1)

An apostrophe in the word "*students*" indicated plural possession because the word is a plural noun.

b. Singular Possession

"This is similar to the *Rahimi's* finding which found that..." (Thesis 7)

An apostrophe in the word "*Rahimi*" indicated singular possession because the word is a singular noun.

c. Contraction

"The material in the textbook *doesn't* suit the level of the students." (Thesis 17)

The word "*doesn't*" is a contraction of *does not*. An apostrophe in the word was used to replace the omitted "o".

d. Separate Possession

"...to find the listening comprehension strategies used by high achiever learners based on *O'Malley's and Vandergriff's* listening comprehension strategies classification theory." (Thesis 29)

Apostrophes in the name of "O'Malley and Vandergriff" stated separate possession. It was because O'Malley and Vandergriff have their respective theories,

even though they both discuss listening comprehension strategies. That is why apostrophe was given to every expert's name.

e. Joint Possession

"This presentation is also similar to *Sari, Nurkamto, & Supriyadi's* study in Indonesia..." (Thesis 34)

An apostrophe in the italicized words indicated joint possession. It means that Sari, Nurkamto, and Supriyadi conducted a study jointly or in one group.

Additionally, in the students' theses there were four types of errors in the use of apostrophe. The errors were possession words do not have apostrophe, apostrophe in the wrong places, plural noun with apostrophe and the letter *s*, and contraction does not use apostrophe.

Table 2: Frequency of Errors in Using Apostrophe

No	Types of Errors	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Possession words do not have apostrophe	89	57.1
2.	Apostrophe in the wrong places	59	37.8
3.	Plural noun with apostrophe and the letter s	6	3.8
4.	Contraction does not use apostrophe	2	1.3
	Total	156	100

The following is example of each function of apostrophe.

a. Possession words do not have apostrophe

"...special technique to increase *students* ability in speaking English." (Thesis 16)

There should be an apostrophe at the end of the word "students" to show possession.

b. Apostrophe in the wrong places

"...there are four main basic skills that *students'* need to master." (Thesis 3)

The italicized word should not be added with apostrophe because the word (*students*) is subject which followed by verb (*need*).

c. Plural noun with apostrophe and the letter *s*

"External factors usually come from *teachers's side*..." (Thesis 1)

In plural nouns it is not recommended to add the letter *s* after apostrophe, except for irregular plural nouns. The word “*teachers*” is not an irregular plural noun, so the letter “*s*” in the word should be removed.

d. Contraction does not use apostrophe

“Actually, *its* not only improves students’ learning...” (Thesis 33)

The word “*its*” in the sentence above referred to contraction of *it is*. Thus, the word should be inserted an apostrophe.

Although the students still made errors in using apostrophes, the quality of their understanding towards apostrophes was at the “*high*” level. It can be seen from the result of calculation which showed that the percentage of all errors was only 25%. It means that they already understand the use of apostrophes well.

Discussion

This study investigated the functions of apostrophe used by students in their thesis and the quality of their understanding of apostrophe. From the results of analysis, in those theses, apostrophe was used as five functions. They were plural possession, singular possession, contraction, separate possession and joint possession. Yet, the most common function was plural possession and singular possession. On the contrary, the least common function was separate and joint possession.

Moreover, the data also indicate that there were errors in using apostrophe. The errors involve possession words that do not have apostrophe, apostrophe in the wrong places, plural noun with apostrophe and the letter *s*, and contraction does not use apostrophe. Not putting apostrophe in possessive was an error students often made. In contrast, the least error was not putting an apostrophe in contractions.

The results of this study are similar to the results from Barus in 2018 which also found that the most errors were possession and the least errors were contraction. However, the result of this study is different from the result from Ratih in 2015. Ratih found that apostrophe most often used was contraction, while in this study, apostrophe most often used was plural possession.

Furthermore, the results of the researcher's calculation show that the percentage of all errors in the use of apostrophes was only 25%. It means that 75% of the

apostrophes were used correctly. Thus, the quality of students' understanding of the use of apostrophes was at the **"high"** level. In sum, the students already understand the use of apostrophes well.

Conclusion

In 40 students' theses, there were various functions of apostrophe, among others as plural possession, singular possession, contraction, separate possession, and joint possession. The most common functions were plural and singular possession, whereas the other functions were used sparingly.

Nonetheless, there were some errors of apostrophe consisting of possession words do not have apostrophe, apostrophe in the wrong places, plural noun with apostrophe and the letter *s*, and contraction does not use apostrophe. The error students often made was possession words without apostrophe, followed by apostrophe in the wrong places. Meanwhile, the others were only made a few times.

Further, the students' understanding of apostrophes was classified as **"high"** with the percentage of all errors was only 25%. It indicated that the students had good understanding towards the use of apostrophes.

Suggestion

The researcher suggests the readers of this thesis, especially students, continue to study and deepen their knowledge and understanding of apostrophe. In addition, other prospective researchers are advised to use other instruments such as test or interview to get better results.

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