An Analysis of PBI UINSU Students' Understanding of Imperative Sentences In English Syntax

Hanny Sarah Siregar [1], Nabila Putri Azmy [2], Suci Aisya Putri [3], Siti Ismahani [4]
[1,2,3,4] Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Indonesia
Email : hanny0304231001@uinsu.ac.id[1], nabila0304232027@uinsu.ac.id[2] ,
suci0304233084@uinsu.ac.id[3], sitiismahani@uinsu.ac.id[4]

Abstract

This study aims to analyze PBI UINSU students' understanding of imperative sentences in English syntax. The research employed a quantitative descriptive method involving five students from the English Education Study Program at Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara. Data were collected through a Google Form questionnaire consisting of ten multiple-choice questions and one Likert-scale item focusing on the definition, structure, verb forms, subject omission, negative imperatives, politeness, and students' self-confidence in using imperative sentences. The findings reveal that students demonstrate a strong understanding of the basic syntactic features of imperative sentences, including correct verb forms, implicit subjects, and negative constructions. However, minor difficulties were identified in recognizing polite imperative forms, indicating challenges in pragmatic aspects. In addition, although students reported feeling confident in using imperative sentences, the results suggest a gap between grammatical knowledge and pragmatic awareness. In conclusion, while PBI UINSU students possess solid foundational knowledge of imperative sentence structures, further instructional emphasis on pragmatic competence, particularly politeness strategies, is necessary.

Keywords: Imperative Sentences, English Syntax, Students' Understanding, Quantitative Descriptive Study

Analisis Pemahaman Mahasiswa PBI UINSU terhadap Kalimat Imperatif dalam Sintaksis Bahasa Inggris

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pemahaman mahasiswa PBI UINSU terhadap kalimat imperatif dalam sintaksis bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kuantitatif yang melibatkan lima mahasiswa Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris di Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner Google Form yang terdiri atas sepuluh soal pilihan ganda dan satu item skala Likert yang berfokus pada definisi, struktur, bentuk verba, penghilangan subjek, imperatif negatif, kesantunan, serta kepercayaan diri mahasiswa dalam menggunakan kalimat imperatif. Hasil

penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa memiliki pemahaman yang kuat terhadap fitur sintaktis dasar kalimat imperatif, termasuk penggunaan bentuk verba yang tepat, subjek implisit, dan konstruksi negatif. Namun, ditemukan beberapa kesulitan kecil dalam mengenali bentuk imperatif yang santun, yang mengindikasikan adanya tantangan pada aspek pragmatik. Selain itu, meskipun mahasiswa melaporkan tingkat kepercayaan diri yang tinggi dalam menggunakan kalimat imperatif, hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya kesenjangan antara pengetahuan gramatikal dan kesadaran pragmatik. Kesimpulannya, meskipun mahasiswa PBI UINSU memiliki pengetahuan dasar yang baik mengenai struktur kalimat imperatif, diperlukan penekanan pembelajaran lebih lanjut pada kompetensi pragmatik, khususnya strategi kesantunan.

Kata kunci: *Kalimat Imperatif, Sintaksis Bahasa Inggris, Pemahaman Mahasiswa, Penelitian Deskriptif Kuantitatif*

INTRODUCTION

Imperative sentences constitute a crucial component of English syntax, as they are extensively used to express commands, requests, suggestions, instructions, and invitations in everyday communication. Unlike declarative and interrogative sentences, imperatives are primarily directive in nature, aiming to influence the actions or behavior of the addressee. Due to this directive function, imperative sentences occupy a unique position at the intersection of syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, making them an important area of study in linguistic analysis.

From a syntactic perspective, imperative sentences exhibit distinctive structural characteristics, including the use of the base verb form, the absence of an overt subject typically understood as the second-person pronoun you and specific patterns of negation and modification. Examples such as Open the door and Don't be late illustrate these features. Han (2001) argues that imperatives encode a specific illocutionary force that distinguishes them from other clause types, emphasizing that their directive meaning is not merely derived from context but is grammatically encoded. This view highlights the importance of analyzing imperatives not only as surface structures but also as constructions with inherent semantic force.

In addition, Portner (2007) provides a pragmatic account of imperatives by proposing that they function to update the addressee's "To-Do List" in discourse. According to this framework, imperative sentences contribute obligations or suggested actions rather than truth-conditional content, which differentiates them fundamentally from declaratives. This theoretical perspective reinforces the idea that imperatives cannot be fully understood through syntactic analysis alone, but must also be examined in terms of their discourse function and pragmatic interpretation.

Beyond their structural and semantic properties, imperative sentences are closely related to issues of politeness and social interaction. Although imperatives are often perceived as direct or face-threatening, several studies have demonstrated that they can function as polite requests, suggestions, or invitations depending on contextual factors and linguistic markers. Swales et al. (1998) note that the use of politeness strategies, such as the inclusion of please, modal softeners, or indirect phrasing, can significantly alter the perceived force of an imperative. Similarly, Tharwat and Maklai (2019) found that imperatives in instructional and educational contexts frequently serve cooperative and supportive functions rather than authoritarian ones. This pragmatic flexibility makes imperatives particularly complex for language learners.

For students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), mastering imperative sentences involves more than understanding their basic grammatical structure. Learners often face difficulties in applying imperatives appropriately in real communication, especially when politeness and social norms are involved. Research has shown that EFL learners may struggle to evaluate the appropriateness of their own grammatical choices, particularly in constructions that require pragmatic awareness (Swales et al., 1998; Charlow, 2014). As a result, learners may either avoid using imperatives or rely on overly direct forms that do not align with communicative expectations.

In the context of the English Education Study Program (Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris/PBI) at UIN Sumatera Utara (UINSU), imperative sentences are introduced as a fundamental topic in English syntax courses. However, empirical studies that specifically investigate students' understanding of imperative sentence structures covering verb forms, subject omission, negation, and politeness strategies remain limited. This lack of focused research indicates a gap between theoretical discussions of imperatives and learners' actual comprehension.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the understanding of imperative sentences among PBI UINSU students in the context of English syntax using a quantitative descriptive approach. By examining students' responses to items addressing both grammatical and pragmatic aspects of imperative constructions, this research seeks to identify students' strengths as well as areas requiring further instructional attention, particularly regarding politeness strategies and self-evaluation in English usage.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design. Quantitative descriptive research aims to describe phenomena as they exist by collecting numerical data and analyzing it statistically without manipulating variables (Creswell, 2014). This design was considered appropriate because the study focuses on describing students' level of understanding of imperative sentences in English syntax.

The participants of this study were five students from the English Education Study Program (PBI) at Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara (UINSU). The participants were selected as respondents to represent students who have learned basic English syntax, particularly imperative sentence structures.

The research instrument used in this study was a questionnaire distributed via Google Form. The questionnaire consisted of ten multiple-choice questions designed to measure students' understanding of imperative sentences. The questions covered several aspects, including the definition of imperative sentences, grammatical structure, verb forms, subject omission, negative imperatives, polite imperative forms, and self-assessment of imperative usage.

Data were collected by sharing the Google Form link with PBI UINSU students. The respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire independently. Google Form was chosen as it allows efficient data collection and automatic recording of responses in numerical form.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis. Students' responses were calculated in terms of frequency and percentage to determine the level of correct and incorrect answers for each item. The results were then interpreted to identify students' strengths and difficulties in understanding imperative sentences, particularly in grammatical and pragmatic aspects.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
1. Results

This section presents the results of the study based on data obtained from a Google Form questionnaire. The instrument consisted of ten multiple-choice questions designed to measure students' understanding of imperative sentences in English syntax, along with one Likert-scale item measuring students' self-confidence. A total of five PBI UINSU students participated in the study.

a. Students' Performance on Knowledge-Based Questions

The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine students' level of understanding of imperative sentences. Overall, the results indicate

that students demonstrated a high level of accuracy on most items related to the basic characteristics of imperative sentences.

All respondents correctly answered Question 1 regarding the definition of imperative sentences, identifying them as sentences used to give commands, requests, or instructions. Similarly, in Question 2, all students correctly selected Close the window as an example of an imperative sentence. These results suggest that students possess a strong foundational understanding of the concept and function of imperative sentences.

In terms of syntactic structure, students also showed excellent performance. For Question 3, all respondents correctly identified that the subject in imperative sentences is usually implicit (you). In Question 4, all students selected the base form of the verb as the verb form commonly used in imperative constructions. These findings indicate that students clearly understand the core grammatical features of imperative sentences.

With regard to negative imperatives, all respondents correctly chose Don't be late in Question 5, showing that students are able to recognize correct negative imperative forms. In Question 7 and Question 8, all students correctly identified Open the door now as a grammatically correct imperative and selected a subject as the element that imperative sentences usually do not require. Furthermore, all respondents correctly answered Question 9 by identifying She cleans the room as a sentence that is not an imperative. These results further confirm students' strong understanding of imperative sentence structure and identification.

However, a minor difficulty was found in Question 6, which focused on polite imperative forms. While most students correctly chose Please take a seat, one respondent selected an incorrect option. This indicates that although students generally understand politeness markers in imperative sentences, pragmatic aspects such as politeness still present some challenges.

b. Students' Self-Confidence in Using Imperative Sentences

In addition to knowledge-based items, students' self-confidence was measured using a Likert-scale statement in Question 10. All respondents selected Agree when asked whether they felt confident using imperative sentences correctly in English. This result suggests that students perceive themselves as reasonably confident in using imperative sentences, although this confidence may not fully reflect their pragmatic competence.

2. Discussion

The results of this study reveal that PBI UINSU students generally possess a strong foundational understanding of imperative sentences in English syntax. The

high accuracy rates on items related to definitions, examples, verb forms, subject omission, and negative imperatives indicate that students have successfully acquired the basic syntactic properties of imperative constructions. This finding is consistent with Huddleston and Pullum (2002) and Han (2001), who argue that imperative sentences have relatively simple and systematic grammatical patterns, making them easier for EFL learners to master.

Students' strong performance on questions related to subject omission and base verb forms supports Portner's (2007) view that imperatives are structurally distinct clause types with a clear directive function. Frequent exposure to imperative constructions in classroom instructions and daily communication may also contribute to students' high level of accuracy in these areas.

Nevertheless, the difficulty observed in identifying polite imperative forms highlights an important pragmatic issue. This finding aligns with Tharwat and Maklai (2019), who report that EFL learners often struggle with pragmatic aspects of language use, particularly politeness strategies, even when their grammatical knowledge is adequate. Polite imperatives require an understanding of context, social relationships, and mitigating expressions such as please, which may not be sufficiently emphasized in form-focused instruction.

The self-assessment result further suggests a possible gap between students' perceived confidence and their actual pragmatic competence. Although all students reported feeling confident in using imperative sentences, the error found in the politeness-related item indicates that confidence does not always correspond to accurate usage. As Charlow (2014) notes, mastery of imperative sentences involves not only syntactic knowledge but also semantic and pragmatic awareness in real discourse contexts.

Overall, the findings suggest that while PBI UINSU students demonstrate strong grammatical understanding of imperative sentences, greater instructional emphasis is needed on pragmatic competence, particularly in relation to politeness and contextual appropriateness. Incorporating contextualized examples, discourse-based activities, and explicit instruction on politeness strategies may help students use imperative sentences more accurately and appropriately in real communication.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated PBI UINSU students' understanding of imperative sentences in English syntax using a quantitative descriptive approach. Based on the analysis of data collected through a Google Form questionnaire, the findings show that students generally possess a strong foundational understanding of imperative sentences, particularly in terms of definition, sentence identification, verb forms, subject omission, and negative imperative constructions.

The results also indicate that most students are able to distinguish imperative sentences from other sentence types accurately. However, minor difficulties were identified in recognizing polite imperative forms, suggesting that students' pragmatic awareness, especially related to politeness strategies, is not yet fully developed. Although students reported feeling confident in using imperative sentences correctly, the findings suggest a potential gap between grammatical knowledge and pragmatic application.

In conclusion, while PBI UINSU students demonstrate adequate syntactic competence in understanding imperative sentence structures, further instructional emphasis is needed on pragmatic aspects of imperatives. Integrating contextualized examples and explicit instruction on politeness may help students use imperative sentences more appropriately and effectively in real communication contexts.

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