CHAPTER I

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

The most important means of communication for human being is language because it is used to express ideas, sense, thoughts, information, etc. Sapir (1921:8) says that language is purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of system of voluntarily produced symbols.

Furthermore, Wasson (1966:5) says that language is the supreme means of formulating and expressing thought. Human communicate by producing sounds or the combination of words which represent the object ideas and emotions of human thought.

From the above definitions, we may conclude that the main function of language is to communicate to others. A good communication between someone and others can be achieved if they are able to use the language perfectly. Otherwise, if the language, they are using is not understood by the listeners and speakers, of course, the communication used can not reach the goal. In the process of teaching and learning, language plays an important role. Without a language this process can not be reached well.

We can use more than one language if we learn other languages besides our native language. The language that we learn first is called first language. Richards (1985:106) says that first language is a person’s mother tongue or the language acquired first. The first language may be used to communicate with family members, other people of the same ethnic group or it is the language of the country where we are living. We will find problems when we have to speak in the other languages which
are different from our first language. Therefore, we need to learn Second language. The word “Second” in Second Language Acquisition may refer to any language that is learned subsequently to the mother tongue of first language. Our mother tongue is Indonesian language while other language that we want to learn is called Second Language.

We can find the term “Error Analysis” in second language Acquisition. Brown (1987) says that according to cognitive approach the making of errors is an inevitable and necessary part of language learning. The language of a language learner contains errors. The errors are made by non-native learners in learning a Second Language.

There are many languages in this world such as English, Dutch, Spain, and Japanese. English is one of international languages. It is very important for us to learn English because we know that many countries use this language as their introductory language based on formal or non-formal activities. Furthermore, there are also many books, mass media, reference books and other forms of communication written in English. Because of its importance, Indonesian Government decided English as a formal subject. According to GBPP (Garis-Garis Besar Program Pengajaran) the 2004 Competence-Based Curriculum (Depdiknas:2004) states that all students learn English for communicative purpose both in written and spoken forms. As a consequence, English has been taught as formal subject from primary school to university.

But there is a big problem; Indonesia has Indonesian language as their native language of which structure is different from English. Because of different structure, there might be some errors made by the students when they speak and write.

Agnes in Webster’s New Word Dictionary (1998:222) defines error is the state of believing what is untrue, a wrong belief, and something incorrectly done.
Richards in Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics (1985:96) defines error analysis as the study and analysis of errors made by second and foreign language learners. Error analysis may be carried out in order to find out how well someone knows a language, how a person learns language, and to obtain information on common difficulties in language learning, as an aid in teaching or in the preparation of teaching material.

There are probable mistakes and errors in studying second language. Brown (1980:166) cites that learners do make errors and these errors can be observed, analyzed and classified to reveal something of system operating within the learner lead to a surge of study of learner’s errors called error analysis.

Tense is a grammatical category that locates a situation in time that indicates when the situation takes place. Tenses is a part of grammar. Mastering tenses is very important because if we do not use appropriate tenses, it can make misunderstanding especially in written language. Unfortunately, students are often confused with English tenses, even for the University students. They assume tenses as a big burden. There is a fact that the students always make errors in using tenses and it is a phenomenon that the writer finds. The writer finds it after doing pilot study by distributing questionnaire to the students. She makes an English questionnaire for third year students of SMK 7 Medan who get first until fifth rank from three classes (Administration, Marketing and Accommodation of Hospitality class). The writer’s purpose why she chooses students who get first until fifth rank as her pilot subject because she thinks that those students tend to make fewer errors than others. But the fact is the students also make errors. These are some errors as the findings in the writer’s pilot study as the following:

`a. I goed to school yesterday.`
b. She watch TV every night.

c. When the head master lose his books?

All those sentences are incorrect grammatical.

a. The first sentence’s error is called overgeneralization. Because the students generalize all past verbs by adding –ed. While the verb is irregular verb. The correct sentence is I went to school yesterday.

b. The second sentence’s error is called omission. Because the students leave out an item that is required to be considered grammatical. She is the person singular subject that must be followed verb by adding –es or s. The correct sentence is she watches TV every night.

c. Where the headmaster lose his book last night? The error of this sentence is called incomplete application of rules because the students forget to put auxiliary verb after when.

The correct sentence is Where did the headmaster lose his book last night?

From those answers that the students make, it is clear that they make errors in using tenses. The errors that the students made are grammatical errors.

Ellis (1985:297) cites that the first way of classifying errors is through grammatical categories. In addition, he says that there are four kinds of errors, they are: omission, misinformation, misordering, and overgeneralization.

Strevens (1969) in Richard (1974:4) hypothesizes that errors should not be viewed as problems to be overcome, but rather as normal and inevitable features indicating the strategies that learners use. He conjectured that if a regular pattern of errors could be observed in the performance of all learners in a given situation, and if a learner was seen to progress this pattern, his errors could be taken as evidence not of
failure but of success and achievement learning. Errors in this case are not inhibitory, but rather evidence of one’s learning strategies.

Based on the above explanations, the writer is very interesting in doing a research on errors in using tenses made by the third year students of SMK 7 Medan. In addition, because the writer is an English teacher in SMK 7 Medan, she wants to find out both the students’ progress and every students’ level in understanding tenses.

1.2 Problems of Study

The problems that writer would like to investigate are as the following:

1) What kinds of errors are usually made by the students in using Simple Present Tense, Present Continuous Tense, Simple Past Tense, Past Continuous Tense, and Simple Future Tense?

2) What are the percentages of errors made by the students in using those tenses?

3) What is the nature of errors in using tenses made by those students?

1.3 Objectives of Study

The objectives of these studies are:

1) To classify the kinds of error made by the students in using Simple Present Tense, Present Continuous Tense, Simple Past Tense, Past Continuous Tense, and Simple Future Tense.

2) To count the percentage of errors made by the students in using those tenses.

3) To get the nature of errors in using tenses made by those students?

1.4 The Scope of the Study
In this thesis the writer would like to analyze the errors in using tenses made by the third year students of SMK 7 Medan. Based on the syllabus in the school, there are few tenses that the students have learnt; they are Simple Present, Present Continuous/Progressive, Simple Past, Past Continuous, and Simple Future although there are 16 tenses in English language. So the writer limits her analysis only to the tenses they have learnt.

1.5 Significance of Study

The writer hopes that the result of this research would be useful for both learners and teachers. For the learners, they can learn from the errors that they make and it can also increase the students’ knowledge about tenses. This research is also useful for English teachers, both theoretical and practical purpose. Theoretical purpose is to develop teachers’ study. While practical purpose is after a systematic analysis the teachers can determine the level of every learners and the knowledge that is still to be taught. In other words, it tells the teachers how far towards the goal the learners have progressed and what remains for them to learn. It can be also a feedback for the teachers reflecting how effective they are in their teaching style and what changes they have to make to get higher performance from their students. Furthermore, it can be as addition material for teachers in teaching method, making lesson plan, syllabus or so on.

The writer also hopes that this research could motivate other researchers who want to carry out in the same topic. She also hopes that the result of the research would be useful to other people who are interested in learning English to understand their problems and difficulties especially in tenses. Moreover, the result of this
research can motivate the headmaster and English teachers in where the writer gives the questionnaire to increase the quality of English Teaching in their school.