

ERROR ANALYSIS IN EFL WRITING: LINGUISTICS AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON DESCRIPTIVE PARAGRAPH WRITTEN BY FIRST-YEAR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

I Made Agus Adi Gunawan¹, Ni Wayan Krismayani²

Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar^{1,2}-Indonesia

gun@unmas.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study investigates types, frequency and distribution of error in descriptive paragraph written by first-year university students. Error Analysis has been widely employed in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) research to investigate students' writing difficulties and interlanguage development. The analysis focused on three categories of error: grammatical, lexical, and mechanical errors. Moreover, this study incorporates linguistic and cultural perspectives to compare how those dimensions influence students' errors. Descriptive qualitative approach is done, supported by quantitative frequency analysis is done by classifying errors made by students. The findings reveal that mechanical errors occur more frequently followed by grammatical and lexical. The most recurrent mechanical errors involve misplacement or omission of commas, full stop and capitalization. These errors indicate limited awareness of English writing conventions. This study suggests that EFL writing instruction should place greater emphasis on writing mechanics alongside with grammatical and lexical development to enhance students' writing accuracy.

Keywords: Error Analysis; EFL Writing; Descriptive Paragraph; Cultural Influence

INTRODUCTION

Writing has been recognized as a challenging skill for students in learning English as Foreign Language (EFL). In addition, writing is assumed to play a crucial role in students' academic success, particularly university students. This is an essential skill for academic success and everyday life (Aminah & Supriadi, 2023). Writing is a means of communicating

people's thoughts and emotions through the use of symbols (Sasmita & Setyowati, 2021). Expressing ideas clearly, coherently, and accurately through written text becomes the main process in writing. Writers in writing meaning they are inventing something new through the process of discovery (Galbraith, 2009). Moreover, unlike speaking, in writing students are required to demonstrate control over

some aspect such as grammar control, lexical choice, and writing mechanical mechanics. For university students, especially first year students, challenges in writing is the transition between secondary education to a more academic education atmosphere since they need to adjust their way in writing ideas more academic that differ from those encountered in secondary education.

Error occur when students having lack knowledge of target language and need instruction for correction; however, mistake occurs when learners understand the concept but momentarily forget or use it incorrectly (Yuliah et. al., 2019). In understanding students' writing difficulties, error analysis becomes a way to encounter such students' difficulties. Error Analysis was introduced by Corder (1982), errors don't mean failure, but evidence of language development; moreover, all students' sentences should be analyzed, even a well-formed one may be produced through processes different from those of the target language. Through investigating error made by

students, systematic patterns that reflects students language learning difficulties could be identified. Error seems as natural and necessary part of second language acquisition. Learners' errors are viewed as an integral part of language learning and used in fields such as grammar, linguistics and psychology etc (Khansir, 2012).

Writing a paragraph frequently used in an EFL classroom. Related sentences are working together to express or develop a single idea (Nurrohmah, 2008). Chatta & Haque (2020) stated that paragraph writing is one of most important skill among others language skills. Moreover, descriptive paragraphs become the common paragraph that is taught for beginner and intermediate levels. The main benefit in teaching descriptive paragraphs to the student relies on encouraging students to describe people, places, or objects by using specific grammar patterns and vocabulary. Even though this looks simple, a descriptive paragraph often offers a wide range of linguistics problems that students may face. Struggling with verb consistency, word

choice, and writing mechanics are examples. These aspects revealed to be contained by students' error could suggest foundational as instruction development for the teachers. Errors are the inaccuracies in learners speaking or writing (Dulay, et. al., 1982).

Research about the errors made by students has been conducted by Yuliah et. al (2019). This study examines grammatical and mechanical errors made by students in essay writing. Result showed that the most common error that performed most frequently is punctuation mistakes (21,6%). These findings give an insight for educators to focus more on specific areas when teaching writing to improve students' grammatical and mechanical accuracy. However, in this research lexical error formed by students is not yet examined. Darus and Subramaniam (2009) conducting similar research that examined students' essay writing of secondary school reveals that common errors made by students are in grammatical errors such as singular/plural form, and verb tenses. Sawalmeh (2013) reported similar

results regarding errors made by Arab Saudi EFL learners. The result showed that grammatical errors performed in higher frequency over word order, subject/verb agreement, pronouns, spellings, capitalization, prepositions, articles, double negatives and sentence fragments.

Students' errors might also be affected by cultural elements such as first language interference. Watcharapunyawong and Usaha (2013) reported a research on Thai students' writing errors in different texts influenced by first language interference. The first language interference that influence the students writing can be named as follows: verb tense, word choice, sentence structure, article, preposition, modal/auxiliary, singular/plural form, fragment, verb form, pronoun, run-on sentence, infinitive/gerund, transition, subject-verb agreement, parallel structure, and comparison structure. Those interferences performed in different numbers of frequencies.

This study is designed to evaluate the types of error produced by first year university students in writing

descriptive paragraphs. The attention of the errors made by students consist of: grammatical error, lexical error, and mechanical errors. Identifying this error becomes essential because each category examined reflects different aspects of learners' linguistic competence. In addition, this highlights specific areas where students find difficulties in writing development.

Relative frequency of each error is aimed to identify which aspects of writing pose the greatest challenge for first-year university students in learning EFL. Understanding the predominance of certain error categories becomes important to give an insight about pedagogical priorities in writing instruction. So, this study analyzed how writing errors are distributed between grammatical, lexical, and mechanical errors to reveal the error patterns. This becomes important for interpreting students' errors as manifestations of language development influenced by linguistics transfer and culturally shape the writing conventions. Through addressing these aspects, this study provides understanding of students' writing

difficulties and contributes empirical evidence that can guide more effective and culturally responsive EFL writing pedagogy.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used descriptive qualitative research design that was supported by quantitative frequency analysis. The participants consisted of 20 first-year university students enrolled in the English Language Education Program. Moreover, data collected through classroom writing tasks in which students were asked to write a descriptive paragraph of a familiar topic that is their favorite person. Tasks were designed to elicit natural language use and minimize content related difficulties.

The data analyzed using error classification frameworks that adapted from Dulay et.al (1982) that categorized error into:

1. Grammatical Error (e.g., tenses, subject/verb agreement, articles, and preposition)
2. Lexical Error (inappropriate word choice, literal translation, or incorrect collocation).

3. Mechanical Error (e.g., spelling, punctuation, capitalization).

Each error found then classified and counted to determine the frequency of the error and distribution across the category. The results were interpreted by relating the error patterns to possible linguistic interference and cultural influences.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of descriptive paragraphs written by 20 first-year university students reveals there major category of writing errors namely lexical, grammatical and mechanical errors. The findings indicate that mechanical error, the most dominant category, was found in 80% of the students' writing, grammatical errors in 60% and lexical errors in 55%. This distribution shows that students' greatest difficulty in descriptive writing rely on the application of basic writing conventions compared to grammar and lexical accuracy. The result showed the primary difficulties not only in language structure but also basic writing conventions. Students struggle in English writing convention

implementation, although students' are identified as an English discourse community, the composition tends to be more with their L1 (Inecay, 2015).

The dominant error, mechanical errors, shows that students struggle with surface level features of writing such as punctuation and capitalization. Moreover, deeper examination found that most frequent errors in mechanical errors are the misplacement or omission of commas and full stop, and the use of capitalization. The use capitalization errors found in writing proper nouns and personal names. These errors in mechanics indicate the low awareness of English punctuation rules and capitalization conventions which are simple but important in writing accuracy. Mechanical features play a crucial role to ensure the clarity and readability of writing. High mechanical error indicates that mechanical errors is underestimated, limited exposure of formal written English and insufficient practice in editing or proofreading.

Frequent occurrence of comma misuse may reflect students' first language and English terms of punctuation usage. Correct use of

punctuation helps readers understand the intended meaning accurately (Sujani et. al., 2025). The use of comma that found misplace founded in typing where commas need to be used appropriately in facing sentence connector. Comma, the punctuation that is most often ignored and misused by students nowadays (Abdesalami, n.d.). Since students' first language is Indonesian, commas commonly can be omitted in Indonesian writing when used before or after the connector. Another mechanical error in capitalization shows incomplete internationalization of English norms. In addition, this also can be influenced by the social media writing style performed by students where the capitalization doesn't really pay attention to in writing. Capitalization in English language helps to distinguish and organize the ideas, and it's important to correcting capitalization to improve students writing (Siddiqui, 2015).

The second error is grammatical error. Grammatical error performed by more than half of the students. The errors commonly involved subject-verb

agreement and verb tense selection. Grammar become essential to be mastered by learners, yet grammatical error has become issue in the field (Alahmadi, 2019). Moreover, grammatical errors can be interpreted as the confusion of grammar usage. The common error performed where the students used past tense rather than simple present in describing a person 's appearance and the impression. Grammatical error formed by students in this research in line with Darus and Subramaniam (2009) and Yuliah et. al (2019) that found grammatical error formed frequently by language learners in writing.

Lexical errors, while slightly less frequent compared to grammar errors in writing descriptive paragraphs. This indicates that students have limited lexical vocabulary that may trigger direct translation. The lexical errors observed therefore reflect limited vocabulary and culturally shaped ways of student expression description.

From the finding and errors categorized reflecting to students culture. These findings show that

writing development is a multidimensional process that is not only influenced by linguistics competence but also the cultural background.

CONCLUSION

The study investigated writing errors found in descriptive paragraphs that were produced by 20 first-year university students, focusing on lexical, grammatical and mechanical error categories. The findings reveal that mechanical errors constitute the most dominant type of error, followed by grammatical and lexical errors. This finding suggests that even if students demonstrate control over grammatical structure and vocabulary, they are having difficulty in applying basic English writing conventions accurately through writing mechanics. Moreover, most of the mechanical errors identified in this study consist of misplacement or omission of commas and incorrect use of capitalization. Limited awareness of English punctuation and capitalization rules are reflected. Even though this is considered as a simple and minor error this can significantly affect the clarity

and quality of students' written text. Therefore, the results highlight the need for EFL writing instruction at the university level to place greater emphasis on punctuation and capitalization through explicit instruction and guided editing process. Addressing the mechanical issues alongside with grammatical and lexical, could help first-year university students to produce more accurate, coherent and acceptable descriptive writing.

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