

ERROR ANALYSIS ON STUDENTS' WRITING

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Abstract

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui jenis-jenis kesalahan linguistik dan tahap-tahap kesalahan apa yang dibuat oleh para mahasiswa semester 1 Program Studi Sastra Inggris, Jurusan Ilmu Budaya, FISIP, Universitas Jenderal Soedirman Purwokerto dalam hal keahlian menulis bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori dari Politzer dan Ramirez, Burt dan Kiparsky tentang *Linguistic Category Taxonomy* untuk menganalisa jenis-jenis kesalahan linguistik serta menggunakan teori *Comparative Taxonomy* untuk membahas tahap-tahap kesalahan yang dibuat oleh para mahasiswa dalam tulisan mereka. Ada 10 tulisan mahasiswa yang dijadikan sampel penelitian dengan metode pengambilan sampel purposif dan penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif untuk menjabarkan hasil penelitian. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kesalahan mahasiswa dalam tulisan mereka ada 142 jenis kesalahan yang 132 diantaranya masuk dalam kategori yang dinyatakan dalam *Linguistic Category Taxonomy* oleh Politzer dan Ramirez; Burt dan Kiparsky, sedangkan 10 yang lain termasuk jenis kesalahan yang tidak ada dalam kategori diatas. Berdasarkan teori *Comparative Taxonomy*, *developmental error* adalah tahap kesalahan terbesar yang dibuat oleh para mahasiswa.

Key words: *Error Analysis, Linguistic Category Taxonomy, Comparative Taxonomy*

Introduction

The ability to write well is not a naturally acquired skill; it is usually learned or culturally transmitted as a set of practices in formal instructional settings or other environments. Writing skills must be practiced and learned through experience. Writing also involves composing, which implies the ability either to tell or retell pieces of information in the form of narratives or description, or to transform information into new texts, as in expository or argumentative writing. Perhaps it is best viewed as a continuum of activities that range from the more mechanical or formal aspects of "writing down" on the one end, to

the more complex act of composing on the other end (Omaggio Hadley, 1993). It is undoubtedly the act of composing, though, which can create problems for students, especially for those writing in a second language (L2) in academic contexts. Formulating new ideas can be difficult because it involves transforming or reworking information, which is much more complex than writing as telling. By putting together concepts and solving problems, the writer engages in "a two-way interaction between continuously developing knowledge and continuously developing text" (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987, p. 12). Indeed, academic writing requires conscious effort and practice in composing, developing, and analyzing ideas. Compared to students writing in their native language (L1), however, students writing in their L2 have to also acquire proficiency in the use of the language as well as writing strategies, techniques and skills. They might also have to deal with instructors and later, faculty members, who may or may not get beyond their language problems when evaluating their work. Although a certain amount of consciousness-raising on the part of the readers may be warranted, students want to write close to error-free texts and they enter language courses with the expectations of becoming more proficient writers in the L2.

Errors are the flawed side of learner speech or writing. They are those parts of conversation or composition that deviate from some selected norm of mature language performance. Teachers and mothers who have waged long and patient battles against their students' or children's language errors have come to realize that making errors is an inevitable part of learning. People cannot learn language without first systematically committing errors. Errors are not generally thought of as errors in the same sense as those produced by L2 learners. George in Ellis (1994:47) mentions that whereas L2 learners' errors are generally viewed as 'unwanted forms', children's errors are seen as 'transitional forms' and adult native speakers' errors as 'slips of the tongue'.

Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982:138) state that studying learners' errors serves two major purposes: (1) it provides data from which inferences about the nature of the language learning process can be made; and (2) it indicates to teachers and curriculum developers which part of the target language students have most difficulty producing correctly and which error types detract most from a learner's ability to communicate effectively. In an early, seminal article, Corder (quoted by Ellis) noted that errors could be significant in three ways: (1) they provided the teacher with information about how much the learner had learnt, (2) they provided the researcher with evidence of how language was learnt, and (3) they served as devices by which the learner discovered the rules of the target language. Whereas (1) reflects the traditional role of Error Analysis (EA), (2) provides a new role that is of

primary interest to the L2 researcher because it could be shed light on (3) – the process of L2 acquisition

Error analysis has yielded insights into the L2 acquisition process that have stimulated major changes in teaching practices. Perhaps its most controversial contribution has been the discovery that the majority of the grammatical errors second language learners make do not reflect the learner's mother tongue but are very much like those young children make as they learn a first language. Researchers have found that like L1 learners' errors, most of the errors L2 learners make indicate they are gradually building an L2 rule system.

This research is to investigate errors in students' writing with several considerations and reasons. The objectives of this study are: 1) to describe the linguistic errors that appears in students' writing, 2) to discover kinds of errors students make in their writing.

Error Types Based on Linguistic Category

Many error taxonomies have been based on the linguistic item which is affected by an error. These linguistic category taxonomies classify errors according to either or both the language component or the particular linguistic constituent the error affects.

Language components include phonology (pronunciation), syntax and morphology (grammar), semantics and lexicon (meaning and vocabulary), and discourse (style). Constituents include the elements that comprise each language component. For example, within syntax one may ask whether the error is in the main or subordinate clause; and within a clause, which constituent is affected, e.g. the noun phrase, the auxiliary, the verb phrase, the preposition, the adverb, the adjectives, and so forth. A full presentation of language components and constituents would require a summary of descriptive linguistics, an undertaking much beyond the scope of this book.

Curriculum developers have long used linguistic category taxonomies to organize language lessons in student textbooks and workbooks. While second language textbooks are increasingly organized according to content topic, such as renting an apartment or going to market, many are still organized according to linguistic category.

Such materials permit teachers and students to feel that they have covered certain aspects of the language in their classes. They also allow users to find easily those parts of the language they are most interested in studying or teaching.

Many researchers use the linguistic category taxonomy as a reporting tool which organizes the errors they have collected. Although some use it as the only classification scheme offered, many use it to add to the description of errors provided by other taxonomies. For example, if researchers have classified their errors as interlingual and

developmental, they often additionally report the linguistic categories into which these major error types fall, e.g. developmental errors in the auxiliary, in the noun phrase, in the complement system; interlingual errors in phonology, in word order, and in vocabulary. Below are the results of two error analyses that used linguistic category as the primary classification scheme. The first is Politzer and Ramirez taxonomy for morphology and syntax. It was got from the study of 120 Mexican-American children learning English in the United States. They tapped children's narrative of a short, silent animated cartoon. Errors were extracted for analysis from this body of natural speech. The second is taken from linguistic category taxonomy developed by Burt and Kiparsky. It classified several thousand English errors made by students learning English in foreign as well as host environment.

Error Types Based on Comparative Taxonomy

The classification of errors in a comparative taxonomy is based on *comparisons between the structure of L2 errors and certain other types of constructions*. For example, if one were to use a comparative taxonomy to classify the errors of a Korean student learning English, one might compare the structure of the student's errors to that of errors reported for children acquiring English as a first language.

In the research literature, L2 errors have most frequently been compared to errors made by children learning the target language as their first language and to equivalent phrases or sentences in the learner's mother tongue. These comparisons have yielded the two major error categories in this taxonomy: developmental errors and interlingual errors. Two other categories that have been used in comparative analysis taxonomies are derived from the first two: ambiguous errors, which are classifiable as either developmental or interlingual; and, of course, the grab bag category, Other, which are neither.

Findings and Discussions

There are 10 students' writings used as the data of this research. The writing is in the form of paragraph with different topic and different length. They are shown in the appendix. The appearance in the appendix is arranged in such a way that no. 1 until no. 7 represent writing from students with low ability, no. 8 and no.9 represent writing from students with mid ability, and no. 10 represent writing from students with high ability.

Errors of the students' writing are analyzed based on Politzer and Ramirez and Burt and Kiparsky's taxonomy. However, not all of the category in their taxonomy appear in the students' writing, additionally, there are some errors that cannot be classified in the taxonomy but exist in the students' writing.

From the analysis, it can be seen that there are total of 142 errors found. Of this much, 132 of them can be matched with Politzer and Ramirez' taxonomy or Burt and Kiparsky's taxonomy, 10 of them are considered other kinds of error out of their taxonomy (The 10 errors considered other errors are not completely new kinds of error. The linguistic category for some of them is similar to those in the taxonomy, but with different error problem such as mentioned in the taxonomy). In the data analysis below, this kind of error is written in bold.

Table 1.
The linguistic errors in students' writing

<i>Grammatical Error</i>	Text										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
	Frequency										
Noun phrase	2	1	5	3	5	1	6	1	2	-	26
Simple past tense incorrect	11	5	-	-	-	-	3	1	2	-	22
Misplacement of conjunction	5	2	1	1	-	1	-	-	-	2	12
Misuse of proposition	5	2	2	2	1	-	-	-	1	-	13
Possessive case incorrect	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Past participle incorrect	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	2
Superficial tense incorrect	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Inappropriate choice of word	2	1	1	4	2	-	-	-	2	-	12
The auxiliary system: modal misformation of the next verbal word	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Word formation	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Verb phrase	-	5	2	3	2	1	-	1	-	-	14
Verb-and verb construction	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Coordinate construction	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
use of pronoun	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	2
Passive sentence	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	1	-	-	4

Superlative adjective incorrect	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Problem with word construction	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Word order	-	-	2	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	5
Problem with formation "conditional sentence"	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Subordinate construction	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	2
Auxiliary system: Have and be: be missing	-	-	-	-	2	1	1	-	-	-	4
Missing part	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Omission of verb	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Third person singular incorrect	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	2	5
Punctuation	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	2
Present perfect in correct	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Inappropriate word form for writing	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
Total of errors											142

The linguistic and comparative errors students make in their writing, then, can be outlined as follows:

In text 1, the topic is graduation. The student tried to develop his paragraph using mixed up strategy. He made error here and there concerning with linguistic items. There are 31 errors, and here are the examples of the errors:

When I was in **a** grade 9, I'm very happy.

In the above example, the learners made two types of errors, namely redundant use of article *a* and simple past tense incorrect with the use of to be. The sentence should be:

When I was in grade 9, I was very happy.

Another error that is made by the student is the substitution of simple non past and redundant use of preposition 'in' as can be seen in the following example:

I **have** many friends **in** there (incorrect)

I had many friends there

In text 2, the topic is a plan to get a new school. The student tried to develop his paragraph using mixed up strategy. He made error here and there concerning with linguistic items. There are 20 errors, and the examples of errors are as follows:

I'm with my father **went** to SMPN 3 to **got** the school report

In the sentence above, the learner made an error because he was not able to use subject and verb agreement, especially he failed to use together/along with. He also made an incorrect simple past verb after *to*. The sentence should be:

I was together with my father going to SMPN 3 to get the school report

In addition, the learner also made failure to apply STAGR (Superficial Tense Agreement) with *after*, applied incorrect simple past tense and substituted plural with singular in the following example:

After **got** the report I **have** some **plan** (incorrect)

After getting the report, I had some plans

In text 3, the topic is pollution. The student tried to develop her paragraph using cause and effect strategy. She made error here and there concerning with linguistic items. There are 18 errors and most of the errors are in noun phrase problems especially in the substitution of plurals for singular such as in the following example:

Many **factory** used the machine to process their **product** (incorrect)

Many factories used the machine to process their products

Another example deals with the error in the disagreement of subject and number as follows:

The high **pollution** are air pollution and water pollution (incorrect)

The high pollutions are air pollution and water pollution

In text 4, the topic is season. The student tried to develop his paragraph using cause and effect strategy. He made error here and there concerning with linguistic items. There are 16 errors in which some of them deal with verb phrase and formation of conditional sentence. Here are some examples of them:

Rainy season **is happen** in Indonesia

In the above sentence there is an overuse of *be* with verb. It should be:

Rainy season happens in Indonesia

Problems deal with the formation of conditional sentence can be seen in the following example:

It is not a new thing if rain **is happen** every day (incorrect)

It is not a new thing if rain happens everyday

In text 5, the topic is disaster. The student tried to develop her paragraph using cause and effect strategy. She made error here and there concerning with linguistic items. There are 15 errors and the significant errors can be seen below:

For the first effect ___ **is** a lot of people **lost** their house and now they are **live on** tent from the government

From the above example, there are at least 5 errors done by the learner. First, she made an omission error due to the absence of subject 'there' in the sentence. Second, the learner misused the subject-verb agreement 'is' that should be replaced by 'are' and it was followed by the third error in the form of simple present verb which was replaced by past verb. There was also an error due to the missing of 'ing' to indicate present continuous and the last error, the learner misused the preposition 'on' that actually the correct form is 'in'. Hence, the correct sentence should be:

For the first effect there are a lot of people lose their house and now they are living in tent from the government

In text 6, the topic is boy friend. The student tried to develop his paragraph using mixed up strategy. He made error here and there concerning with linguistic items. There are 12 errors, and below are two examples of them:

I have **problem** with my boy friend

He _____always jealous without any reason

In the first example, the learner omitted an article that should be attached to the noun 'problem'. He also made an error in the second example by missing the main verb that should precede adjective in a sentence. Both sentences can be revised as follows:

I have a problem with my boy friend

He is always jelous without any reason

In text 7, the topic is past experience. The student tried to develop her paragraph using mixed up strategy. She made error here and there concerning with linguistic items. There are 11 errors that can be seen in the following examples:

When I was in __ second grade, I **was join** Biology Olympiad in Semarang University

I met **much student** from many cities

In the first clause of the first sentence, the learner made an omission by neglecting the appearance of determiner 'the' before 'second grade' and in the second clause she made two errors namely incorrect past tense. The second sentence had two errors in the choice of quantifier and the replacement of singular for plural form. The correct forms of those sentences are:

When I was in the second grade, I joined Biology Olympiad in Semarang University

I met many students from many cities

In text 8, the topic is earthquake. The student tried to develop her paragraph using cause and effect strategy. She made error here and there

concerning with linguistic items. There are 8 errors in the text and here are some examples of them:

Those **earthquake** have many effects ...

Our country **is knows** as a poor country, poor of knowledge and poor of human sources.

In the first example, there is an error due to substitution of singular for plural and in the second example, the learner is unable to make a correct use of past participle. There is also a misuse of comma instead of semicolon to separate things in series in the second sentence. Therefore, the correct constructions should be:

Those earthquakes have many effects ...

Our country is known as a poor country; poor of knowledge and poor of human sources

In text 9, the topic is best friend. The student tried to develop her paragraph using description strategy. She made error here and there concerning with linguistic items. There are 7 errors, and one of the examples is as follows:

We **don't** in chairmate

In above example, the learner made an inappropriate choice of word for the verb. Since the sentence is adverbial sentence, it should not be the auxiliary "don't" for the verb instead "aren't". the correct sentence is

We aren't in chairmate

Another example deals with the omission of -s as third person singular in simple present, the wrong use of 'wh-question', reflexive pronoun, and the wrong construction of parallel form.

She **know how** about **myself** and I **too** (incorrect)

She knows whatever about me and I know her too

In text 10, the topic is telling about brother. The student tried to develop her paragraph using description strategy. She made error here and there concerning with linguistic items. There are 5 errors and some of examples are as follows:

He ___ just **graduate** from senior high school

He always **help** my parents do the housework too

In the above examples, the first sentence has two errors, namely the omission of has and -ed as the indicator that the sentence is in the present perfect tense. In the second example, the learner made error by omitting -s as the indicator of third person singular verb in simple present tense. Hence, the correct sentences are:

He has just graduated from senior high school

He always helps my parents do the housework too

Based on the findings and discussion above, it can be summarized the Linguistic Errors Types in students' writing and the percentage of Comparative Error Types in students' writing.

Table 2.
Percentage of Comparative Error Types in students' writing

Text	Developmental	Interlingual	Other
	%	%	%
1	12.8	8.5	0.7
2	10.6	2.8	0.7
3	5.7	4.9	2.1
4	6.4	3.5	1.4
5	8.5	2.1	-
6	4.9	2.1	1.4
7	5.7	-	1.4
8	3.5	2.1	-
9	4.3	0.7	-
10	2.1	1.4	-
Total	64.5	28.1	7.7

Conclusion

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded, that, there is a tendency that the longer the writing students make, the more errors they will make. The linguistic error mostly made by students is Noun Phrase. There are 26 cases of this error. Next, there is Simple Past Tense incorrect errors, which constitute 22 cases. Then, it is followed by Verb phrase with 14 errors. Errors in use of preposition reached up to 13 cases, whereas misplacement of conjunction 12 errors. Other errors have quite balance occurrences, namely less than 6.

From 142 errors students made in their writing, 64.5% is developmental error, 28.1% is interlingual error, and the rest, 7.7%, is other error. This fact supports the so far research in error analysis of second language acquisition that second language learners' errors are of developmental kinds. Interlingual errors happened in this research are mostly in the noun phrase and simple past tense incorrect in Indonesian sentence. In Indonesian sentence it is enough to say "*Karena di kelas 9 saya punya banyak teman disana*" and when it is translated word-by-word the English version will *Because in grade 9 I have many friends in there*. This error commonly happens among Indonesian students.

The second one is about simple past tense. In Indonesian, simple past tense is formed in the construction of simple present. In line with the finding above, teachers and curriculum developers should pay attention to this, and it is suggested they pay more attention to the errors above.

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