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## AN ANALYSIS OF ERRORS MADE BY ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT STUDENTS IN ENGLISH PARAGRAPH WRITING

**Nurlaily**

[nurlaily@uib.ac.id](mailto:nurlaily@uib.ac.id)

*Universitas Internasional Batam*

### ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze grammatical and mechanical errors made by English Language Education Department students in Batam City in writing a summary and response paragraph. This study applied a mixed-method approach to analyze the data. This study used documentation and a checklist as tools for collecting data which was the students' writing. The data illustrated that in grammatical aspects of writing, there are six types of errors: noun, pronoun, verb, article, prepositions, and subject-verb agreement. In mechanical elements, the students made errors in punctuation, spelling, and capitalization. It was also found that the most dominant error in grammatical features is in the use of articles. Meanwhile, punctuation had the highest percentage of mechanical errors (30% of the errors), which is the most prevalent in the students' writing. These results indicate that the students need to pay more attention to grammar and mechanics in their writing.

**Keywords:** Error Analysis, Grammatical Error, Mechanical Error, Writing

### INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the most productive skills students need to learn and practice while writing. The main aim of teaching writing is to help students enhance their communication skills through writing. In this writing process is communication. Students shall know the English language's syntactic structure and lexical composition and develop their creativity and understanding of its context. People with writing difficulties may have difficulty with one or more writing skills, such as grammar, conventions, punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and the correct use of elementary writing. It is also an unpleasant task

for English teachers and students in foreign language classes. Writers need to coordinate cognitive, metacognitive, and linguistic processes to create complementary text (Hidi & Boscolo, 2007). They must choose a source to get the information from, decide what ideas to include, and apply a time-taking strategy. In other words, the author must control himself on many levels. In addition to the cognitive and metacognitive aspects, self-management also includes interesting aspects (Hidi & Boscolo, 2007).

Writing is essential for undergraduate students, but it is a great skill for them. This phenomenon occurs in different situations around the world; there are some students' writing problems in (1) vocabulary, (2) grammar, (3) mechanical, and (4) vocabulary (Ginting, 2019; Toba et al., 2019). These findings emphasized that being a talented writer requires vocabulary and grammar aspects. Consequently, Identifying the student's language error is essential for choosing the correct language course for students.

In writing, grammar cannot be separated from it. Grammar is a set of rules that determine how words are arranged in units of meaning. According to Harmer (1987), grammar rules are essential for learning a language consisting of verbs, adjectives, nouns, and pronouns. People cannot use words without knowing how to combine them. In addition, the grammatical nature of a language determines how sentences are formed in that language. With a good understanding of grammar, authors can simplify the content of their writing and convey messages, ideas, or information more accurately and meaningfully. Without excellent or proper structure, it can lead to misunderstandings.

Everyone who learns a language makes mistakes when learning a language. Language learning and language errors are inseparable. When learning a foreign language, language errors often occur. Nguyen, Nguyen, & Phan (2021) confirmed that the degree of error in the text differs significantly. Most students show a lack of ability to recognize and correct mistakes without

realizing them. In particular, the study identified a list of errors that occur when writing in English, from the level of an English phrase to a sentence, as well as a group of errors when writing. In addition, Dulay, Burt, & Krashen (1982) argued that the error is caused by deception or negligence. Errors occur in all situations, including position errors. People cannot learn a language without making systematic mistakes. Because of the many errors made by students, teachers must analyze errors in students' writing.

As students in the English Language Education program are prepared to become teachers of English, they must have sufficient proficiency in all language skills to become excellent teachers of English. They must not only be good listeners and speakers but= readers and writers as well. They will learn how to write a paragraph or essay effectively if they are proficient in mechanics and grammar. When trying to master writing skills, reviewing errors in written paragraphs is crucial to determine how much they have learned in the teaching and learning process.

However, English Language Education department students still struggle with written grammar because they know that English and their first language are different. As a result, student problems can cause students to make errors in writing. This research focused on analyzing common grammatical and mechanical errors in writing a summary and response paragraph. Based on the research findings, this research question is: What kind of common grammatical errors do third-year English students at Batam City make when writing a summary and response paragraph?

### **Error Analysis**

Error analysis is defined as identifying, classifying, and systematically interpreting undesirable forms created by language learners. Richards & Schmidt (2010) described error analysis (EA) as "a technique for identifying, classifying, and systematically interpreting unacceptable linguistic forms in the production

data of a second or foreign language learner." Such a systematic error analysis will, in the end, provide valuable insights into the systems that work in learners' minds and demonstrate learners' knowledge of the grammatical system of the target language. By pinpointing a student's lack of competence, EA informs teachers, curriculum designers, and textbook authors about problem areas and differentiates between student knowledge and situational needs. In the context of this study, language errors were primarily related to student deviations in grammar, spelling, vocabulary, and dynamics (verbal and capitalization) compared to the language skills of educated native speakers (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005). Nevertheless, careful examination of student errors can help teachers understand students' specific language needs for effective pedagogical interventions.

Norrish (as cited in Subekti, 2018) identified three common reasons students make errors in writing in a second language. These are carelessness, first language interference, and translation errors (including collocation errors). The first is carelessness. For example, carelessness can take many forms in writing, like when students urgently need to write and write without properly editing. The second contributing factor is students' first language intervention. As a behaviourist, Norrish (in Subekti, 2018) believes that second language learning is related to habits. When students learn new habits, which is their second language, their mother tongue may interfere. It happens when students translate sentences using literal expressions from their mother tongue to the second language. This can be considered the most common reason for errors. However, some errors can result from simultaneous causes where one reason is stronger than the other rather than a single cause.

According to Corder (1982), error analysis is used to identify areas of learning opportunity. It requires specific steps to be followed in the errors analysis process. It includes collecting the learners' language, identifying the

errors, describing them, explaining them, and evaluating them. For error analysis, Ellis (1997) also suggests following similar steps. The procedures have the following steps: 1) Collecting samples of learner language: composition and translation; 2). Identifying errors; 3). Describing errors; and 4). Evaluating errors (Ellis, 1997).

Collecting samples of learners' language is a process where teachers decide which samples of learners' language will be used for evaluation and how these samples will be collected. The second stage is identifying learners' errors that have been collected. It is necessary to decide what constitutes an error and define a procedure to identify one (Ellis, 1997). Describing learners' errors involves a comparison of the learners' idiosyncratic utterances with a reconstruction of those utterances in the target language. It needs attention to the surface properties of the learners' utterances. Ellis (1997) categorized the errors into different parts, such as verb errors, omission, misinformation, and misordering. The next step is explaining the errors. It is about determining the source of the error, for example, calculating why it is written. Finally, evaluation of errors is a process that considers the impact of errors on the readers. It also consists in assessing its importance to making principled educational decisions. Error evaluation is necessary because it aims for academic purposes.

Hidayat et al. (2020) examined the writing properties and analyzed the common grammatical errors of students in the article by adapting the grammatical errors of Carl James. The research finding has shown seven common grammatical errors: preposition, article, singular/plural, irregular verb cases, tense, uniform, and possessive. The research then proposed specific issues related to how teachers try to motivate students to write better essays by recognizing students' weaknesses in writing.

Alghazo & Alshraideh (2020) investigated common grammatical errors for Arabic students attending an English writing course at AL-Hussein Bin Talal

University. The most common is the verb tense. The findings also showed that seniors in all sections of the grammar test performed better than first grade, junior and senior students.

## **METHOD**

This study employed mixed-method research. According to Dörnyei (2007), mixed-method research combines qualitative and quantitative methods into a single research project. According to Ary et al. (2014), the results of mixed-method research are more reliable and provide a complete interpretation of research results than just one method. In mixed-method research, the researcher plans from the beginning to generate both qualitative and quantitative data from a single data source to answer relevant questions (Ary et al., 2014).

The participants of this research were English Language Education department students at one private university in Batam City, Riau Islands. There were 23 writings collected and analyzed as the data of this research. The data collection tools used in this study were the writing test and error correction checklist. A written test was used to collect information about errors made by the students. The writing test included writing instructions and an essay that should be summarized and responded to. Students were required to write a summary and response paragraph of 150 to 250 words within fifty minutes. The second tool was an error checklist used to determine the types and causes of students' writing errors. The error checklist was used as a guide for classifying, sorting, and identifying grammatical errors.

After collecting the data, the researcher conducted a research analysis to answer the research problem. For this purpose, the researcher collected data from students and examined the students' text for their grammatical and mechanical errors. The grammatical errors were categorized into five categories, and mechanical errors were three categories. Each error point was calculated to

determine the percentage of each error category. The next step was to report and explain grammatical and mechanical errors to determine the cause of the errors.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

After analyzing the data, the researcher calculated the percentages of all errors found in summary and response paragraphs written by the students. This research examined the kind of error analysis in grammatical and mechanical errors and found the most dominant type of errors. Total grammatical errors were 290. The distribution of the errors can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1. The Recapitulation of Students' Errors**

Types of Errors		Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Grammatical Errors</b>	1. Noun	18	6.21%
	2. Pronoun	5	1.72%
	3. Verb	32	11.03%
	4. Determiner/article	37	12.76%
	5. prepositions	33	11.38%
	6. Subject-verb agreement	16	5.2%
<b>Mechanical</b>	1. Punctuation	87	30.00%

<b>Types of Errors</b>		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Errors</b>	2. Spelling	31	10.69%
	3. Capitalization	31	10.69%
<b>Total</b>		<b>290</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 1 shows the result of the errors found in 23 paragraphs written by the English Language Education department students. The errors made by the students are classified into three main categories. They are grammar, punctuation, spelling, and capitalization. The grammar category is divided into six classifications: noun, pronoun, verb, determiner/article, prepositions, and subject-verb agreement. The findings showed that the second-year students of the English Language Education Department made 290 errors in total. First, there are 141 errors in grammar, consisting of errors in word classes such as noun (18 errors or 6.21%), pronoun (5 errors or 1.72%), verb (32 errors or 11.03%), determiner (37 errors or 12.76%), and preposition (33 errors or 11.38%). Moreover, there were 16 errors (5.52%) in the subject-verb agreement category. While the article was the most dominant error in grammar, there were 87 punctuation errors (30%) found in students' writing. This finding suggested that punctuation becomes the most prevalent error in summary and response paragraph writing as one of the mechanical aspects. Additionally, thirty-one errors were found in both spelling and capitalization categories, equal to 10.68% of the data.

### **Grammar**

#### 1. Noun



The major error made by the writers in this type of errors is the absence of the suffix -es/s in countable plural noun or the other way around. Some examples of errors made by the students can be seen as follows:

1) Error: ...*when people go to a **countries** that...*

Suggested Correction: ...*when people go to a **country** that...*

The example shows an error in the plural noun “countries”. The article 'a' with the plural noun “countries” is incorrect in the sentence. Therefore, it should be written as “countries” without an article.

2) Error: ...*people use technology for daily basis and **teenager** also use technology.....*

Suggested Correction: ...*people use technology for daily basis and **teenagers** also use technology...*

The sentence presents an error in the noun as the singular form does not agree in number with the other words in the sentence. The singular noun should be changed into a plural noun “teenagers”.

## 2. Pronoun

The result showed that the students did some errors in choosing the appropriate pronouns in the sentence.

1) Error: ...*sometimes when **their** speak in English...*

Suggested Correction: ...*sometimes when **they** speak in English...*

The possessive pronoun is incorrect to be put as the subject of the dependent clause in the sentence. It is supposed to be subject pronoun “they”.

## 3. Verb

In using verbs, the students tend to write the wrong form of verbs to complete certain tenses structures. Additionally, there was the inappropriate use of verbs related to their type of tenses.

1) Error: *However, sometimes we find application for chatting is different than we **expecting**.*

Suggested Correction: *However, sometimes we find application for chatting is different than we **expected**.*

In the example, it appears that the sentence or clause uses an incorrect form of verb “expect”. The verb shall be changed into “expected”.

2) Error: *...English is already **fill** the gap to be the world’s international language...*

Suggested Correction: *...English is already **filling** the gap... or ...English already **fills** the gap...*

The verb in the sentence seems to be wrongly used as the verb “fill” does not work in the sentence. Hence, the suggested correction will be either use present continuous or simple present tense.

#### 4. Article

Another error found in this research was omission of determiners. Most of students omitted the article “the”, “a” and “an” in their noun/noun phrase. The data supported this finding was as follows:

1) Error: *...creating a new language for the nations will causes people **a distress**...*

Suggested Correction: *...creating a new language for the nations will cause people **distress**...*

In the sentence, the article “a” should not be used with the uncountable noun distress.

2) Error: *.... people can speak to each other in **application**...*

Suggested Correction: *people can speak to each other in **an application/the application**...*

In the sentence, an article is missing before the phrase "application." It is necessary to put an article "a" or "the" in the phrase. Therefore, it should be written “an application” or “the application”.

3) Error: ***As the conclusion**, English is already...*

Suggested Correction: *As conclusion, English is already...*

It appears that the phrase “As the conclusion” is not paired with the correct article. The article “the” shall be omitted.

## 5. Prepositions

33 out of 290 errors tokens are identified as misuse of prepositions. Examples are as follows:

1) Error: *...so it's easy to ask or need something **to** the people...*

Suggested Correction: *...so it's easy to ask or need something **from** the people...*

The sentence has an error in the preposition. The preposition “to” in this sentence is incorrect, and shall be changed into acceptable preposition "from".

2) Error: *...so people can communicate **to** each other.*

Suggested Correction: *...so people can communicate **with** each other.*

The example shows an error in the use of preposition. The preposition “in” in the sentence is incorrect. It should be replaced with preposition “at”.

3) Error: *And technology also brought many things **in** our daily life...*

Suggested Correction: *And technology also brought many things **into** our daily life...*

The sentence shows an error in the preposition “in”. The correct preposition for the sentence is “into”.

## 6. Subject-verb agreement

The students made errors in subject-verb agreement when they wrote and constructed the English sentences. Some examples of their errors in making the subject-verb agreement can be seen below:

1) Error: *The widespread use of modern technology **have** tremendously...*

Suggested Correction: *The widespread use of modern technology **has** tremendously...*

The sentence displays an error in its verb. The plural verb “have” does not agree with the singular subject “The widespread use of modern technology”. It should use the verb form of appropriate Subject-Verb agreement which is “has”.

2) Error: *...English **are** so influential to our globalization, tourism and technology.*

Suggested Correction: *...English **is** so influential to our globalization, tourism and technology.*

The example above shows that there is an error in the verb “are”. The plural verb “are” does not agree with the singular subject “English”. Therefore, the sentence should use verb “is” instead.

3) Error: *...however, it **do not** work well because...*

Suggested Correction: *...however, it **does not** work well because...*

The subject pronoun it and the verb do are not in agreement. It should be change into does not as the subject is singular (it).

4) Error: *...the nations already **has** an international language to communicate...*

Suggested Correction: *...the nations already **have** an international language to communicate...*

The singular verb has does not appear to agree with the plural subject nations. The sentence should use “have” as the verb.

## **Mechanical Errors**

### 1. Punctuation

Among all indicated errors, errors in the use of punctuation are the most common errors made by the students in their English writing.

1) Error: *I totally agree with the author's point of view, because English is an international language.*

Suggested Correction: *I totally agree with the author's point of view because English is an international language.*

A comma (,) should not put before any coordinating conjunctions which connect two independent clauses together.

2) Error: .... experience of mass people so it has many rich features.

Suggested Correction: ...experience of mass people, so it has many rich features.

It appears that a comma is missing before the coordinating conjunction so in a compound sentence.

3) Error: *I'm also in favor that introducing a new language would just cause an uproar upon the world*

Suggested Correction: *I'm also in favor that introducing a new language would just cause an uproar upon the world.*

The sentence does not have any punctuation (.) at the end. Adding a period (.) is necessary as it is an independent clause.

## 2. Spelling

Sample of students' spelling errors are displayed and the errors identified in each sentence is shown accordingly in the words.

1) Error: *Language is the most **cucial** communication...*

Suggested Correction: *Language is the most crucial communication...*

The spelling is incorrect. It is supposed to be "crucial".

2) Error: ...*world full of challenges and super **thight** competition...*

Suggested Correction: ...*world full of challenges and super tight competition...*

The spelling is incorrect. It is supposed to be "tight".

### 3. Capitalization

Some students are still confused to use capital. In this analysis, data in students' error on the use of capital is presented as follows:

- 1) Error: *the most appealing evidence is that many have failed...*

Suggested Correction: ***The** most appealing evidence is that many have failed...*

As the first word of the sentence, “the” should be capitalized.

- 2) Error: **moreover**, English has become the most widely used language...

Suggested Correction: **Moreover**, English has become the most widely used language...

As the first word of the sentence, “moreover” should be capitalized.

- 3) Error: most countries in Asia also use *english as a medium of instruction...*

Suggested Correction: *...most countries in Asia also use **English** as a medium of instruction...*

The word “English” is a proper noun in this context. It should be capitalized.

### Discussion

There are two aspects of error found in students' writing, grammatical errors and mechanical errors. The grammatical errors written on a summary and response paragraph are the errors in nouns, pronouns, verbs, articles, prepositions, and subject-verb agreement. The most common grammatical error appeared to be an error in the use of the article. This error was identified when the students used zero articles instead of putting an article as the correct form in their sentences. This finding is similar to a study conducted by Alhaisoni et al. (2017), which found that omitting articles were the most frequent writing error.

It happened because students' mother tongue strongly influences the process of language learning.

On the other hand, mechanical errors were found from the data, including punctuation, spelling, capitalization. The most frequent error type observed in this study was punctuation errors which were 87 data found in this type of error. This study has some differences from the previous research. The results were not in line with research done by Al-Ghabra & Najim (2019) which showed that the highest number of students' errors were in the three different categories including grammar, capitalization, and spelling. It was also found that a large number of the students used punctuation randomly. However, they were required to use only the basic ones, which had to be familiar. On the other hand, Nuraini (2019) identified determiner as to the second most occurring error. Her finding showed that students tended to omit determiners in their writing.

The most common punctuation error in students' writing is the full stop, where students write sentence after sentence without a period at the end of one sentence. Additionally, it is not unusual to see students misplace commas in compound sentences. They put a comma when the coordinating conjunctions were in the middle of the sentences. It implies that students have lack knowledge in using a comma. Students also did not use capital letters at the beginning of the sentences or proper nouns. These findings are in line with research done by Shweba & Mujiyanto (2017). They found that such errors occurred because of their lack of knowledge, lack of balance in the curriculum, and mother tongue influence. It is suggested that students be encouraged to practice their writing through writing assignments as much as possible.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Through the data analysis, the researcher found that the most occurred error is punctuation which 87 errors were identified in students' summary and

response paragraph. Moreover, the researcher found that the most grammatical errors made by students were in the use of articles from the five classifications of grammatical errors analyzed in this research. The results indicated that the students need to pay more attention to their writings. Errors in writing can cause confusion and misunderstanding among the readers as the ideas may not be well written. It is suggested that lecturers should create an impressive teaching technique that can lead to English writing activity. Furthermore, future researchers are suggested to conduct their research on a larger scale of participants by increasing the number of universities.

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