

# ERROR ANALYSIS OF SENTENCE STRUCTURE ON STUDENTS' PARAGRAPH WRITING

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**Abstract-** *The objective of this study is to recognize errors in the sentence structure of students' paragraph writing tasks. Quantitative research is applied to find out what type of errors and frequent errors are made by students in writing English paragraphs. There were 20 students' paragraph writing analyzed on the aspect of the verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, articles, pronoun agreement, sentence fragments, and run-on sentences/ comma splices. The result showed that the total for all kinds of errors made by the students in this assignment of paragraph writing was 82 errors. The two frequent errors occur in verb tense (23%) and run-on sentences (27%).*

**Keywords:** *error analysis, sentence structure, paragraph writing*

## INTRODUCTION

Writing is considered to be a complex skill to learn for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. In formal education, writing refers to academic writing which is different from creative writing. In creative writing, like writing stories, it is acceptable to use informal languages such as the use of slang, abbreviation, and even incomplete sentences. Academic writing is formal, thus it requires the author to follow the grammatical rules, sentence structures, and the organization of ideas to make it appropriate for the style of English. In most writing classes, it is started by taking a paragraph writing. A paragraph is one piece of writing consisting of a group of related sentences that discuss one main idea. It is usually as long as ten sentences.

As Bryson in Muhtia et al., (2018) stated that a paragraph intends to support an idea that builds the whole purpose of writing. It means that good paragraph writing is very important in academic writing since it helps the readers understand the idea of the text. It is an essential skill in everyday life and also an important aspect of foreign language teaching. It is a good effort to reinforce what students have learned and enrich them with new vocabulary in the form of writing. Nevertheless, students frequently face the problem of writing in English regarding sentence structure. The sentence structure

including the aspect of academic writing, are verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, articles, pronoun agreement, sentence fragments, and run-on sentences/ comma splices (Oshima, 2006). Harris and Cunningham (1994) also stated that in the writing skill, students produced sentences in a certain order and joined together in particular ways. But the students still struggle when trying to produce sentences or write English paragraphs. Hence, the writing task is one of the most difficult tasks for many EFL students.

Such a problem is also experienced by English department students at IKIP Budi Utomo. The first subject of writing, Paragraph English Writing, is to be taken in the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester. In the 1<sup>st</sup> semester, the students took the subject of Basic English Structure. They have got the knowledge of English sentence structure from the subject; even so, they often make errors in producing sentences in most writing tasks. As Afaki in Utari (2019) mentions, the students are less capable to deliver ideas in appropriate writing; most students make errors in their compositions regarding grammatical rules. So, it is important to provide students with some materials that support their competence to construct sentences using correct grammar and structure in writing classes. As Khan, et al in Chintaradeja (2020) mentioned that error analysis is a type of linguistic analysis. In students' writing analysis, it focuses on finding students' errors that are not systematic in any simple way. In addition, Ozkayran & Yılmaz (2020) explained that error analysis provides important information about the students' language acquisition process and the areas of difficulty. It can also help other students avoid or reduce similar problems. Suntara (2021) also added that error analysis is the study of language structure deviation of target language accepted structure. By identifying the deviation occurring in students' writing, teachers can help identify the types and sources of errors and then correct them. This also can lead to accurate, focused, and pragmatic teaching.

Richard and Schmidt (2002) grouped language errors into two main parts: interlingual and intralingual errors. Interlingual errors can be seen as transfer errors caused by a learner's first language merits. They include lexical, grammatical, or pragmatic errors. While intralingual errors referred to the ignorance of rule restrictions, poor implementation of rules, and assumed false concepts, all leading to overgeneralization. Murtiana (2019) mentioned that due to the different Indonesian

structures from English structures, most Indonesian students' compositions are affected by the first language and inappropriate translation.

In this study, most students in this class communicate in the first language, *Bahasa Indonesia*, and the local language, Javanese, in daily conversation. Ellis (1996) stated that overgeneralization errors happen when learners use irregular structures different from the target language structures, while unawareness of rule restrictions is related to the rule implementation in inappropriate contexts. Furthermore, he added that poor implementation of rules appears when learners fail to evolve a full structure, whilst false concepts assumed arise when learners misunderstand the distinction in the target language.

Several studies regarding error analysis on students' writing have been conducted recently. Helmiyadi and Kamaliah (2021) in their study about error analysis on high school students' narrative text, found that the frequency of the occurrences of three grammatical errors categories found in the students' writing narrative text. They are tense errors, article errors, and sentence errors. A high percentage of errors were found in one out of three categories. The highest error category was a tense error and categorized as misinformation errors. These errors might occur because of interference by students' first language and translation from the first language. So, from the result, it can be inferred that the students' errors in English writing can be caused by the different grammatical rules of their first language.

Kadiatmaja (2021) reported a study of error analysis on students' composition. The participants were ESP students of Strata 1 Arabic Department of STAI. In this study, the researcher analyzed the data based on the surface strategy taxonomy proposed by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen and he found that the most dominant type of error is Passive Voice Usage. The errors occurred in the omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. The frequent error among those was an omission. This study also explained that one of the factors in the process of writing establishing the value of good writing includes the use of grammar. In sum, most errors that occur in students' compositions are grammatical errors.

Chaudhary & Al Zahrani (2020) investigated the types, frequency, and sources of writing errors that EFL students of a Saudi university can commit. This study reported that students committed several writing errors including basic grammatical

rules. These were the errors of omission, addition, misinformation, and misordering. It also showed that interlingual interference and intralingual are the most important causes of errors in students' writing. Moreover, limited knowledge of English, less practice in writing, and carelessness of learners also contributed to errors. From this study, it can be concluded that students' writing can be improved by identifying the areas of errors' sources.

The error analysis on students' English writing in different levels and study programs should be considered in light of English as a compulsory subject at any level of education. Students' competence in writing English appropriately needs to be supported by the good ability to construct the sentence using correct grammar and structure. Hence, investigating students' work in paragraph writing tasks is necessary to be done. Slightly different from the previous studies above, this study aims to determine the type of writing errors and the frequent errors made by students of the English department at IKIP Budi Utomo in writing English paragraphs.

## **METHODS**

### **Research Designs**

This study was descriptive quantitative research in which the research techniques used to gather information dealing with numbers and anything measurable known as quantitative data (Nunan, 2001).

### **Data Collection**

This study attempted to recognize the types of errors and the frequency of those in the paragraph writing written by the 2<sup>nd</sup>-semester students in the English department. The data was derived from students' writing assignments on the subject of Paragraph English Writing. The students were assigned to write a one-paragraph review of a local restaurant.

The data of this study were selected from the students' assignment to write a paragraph developed from the guided outline. 20 respondents were participating in this study. They were in the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester and had taken the subject of Basic English Structure in the previous semester. Their work of written paragraphs was collected to analyze the types and the frequency of errors.

## **Research Procedures**

This study was carried out in two meetings following the writing process; in the first meeting, the students were assigned to brainstorm ideas by browsing a local restaurant around their neighborhood. Then they were instructed to organize the ideas into an outline to put the important information about the restaurant. In the second meeting, the students were to develop the outline into a paragraph in  $\pm 200$  words. The Self-Editing Worksheet (paragraph format) was distributed to the students as a scoring rubric. This study focused on analyzing the aspects of sentence structures.

## **Data Analysis**

The data was analyzed based on the scoring rubric (Oshama, 2006) focusing only on the six aspects of sentence structure, they were verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, articles, pronoun agreement, sentence fragments, and run-on sentences/comma splices on each students' writing (shown on Table 1 below). Each student's writing was analyzed to recognize the error made regarding the six aspects of the sentence structure above.

**Table 1. Types of Error**

<b>No</b>	<b>Types of Error</b>	<b>Definition</b>
1	Verb Tense	The error of constructing a verb
2	Subject-Verb Agreement	The wrong combination of subject and verb.
3	Articles	An article is a word used with a noun to indicate the type of reference being made by the noun.
4	Pronoun Agreement	A pronoun must agree in number with the word or words it replaces (singular or plural).
5	Sentence Fragment	The sentence misses a verb or a subject so it becomes disconnected.
6	Run-On Sentences	The sentences are joined without a comma and a connecting word.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Findings**

#### **Types of Error**

After analyzing each student's work, it was found that all students made errors in their paragraph writing in terms of sentence structure in different types of errors in the different numbers. Table 1 showed that all 20 students who participated in this study

made errors in the aspects of sentence structure. Eleven students made errors on verb tense; six students made errors on subject-verb agreement; only three students made errors on articles; five students made errors on pronoun agreement; eight students made errors on sentence fragments, and 15 students made errors on run-on sentences.

This result also shows that the number of errors made by the students varied considerably. Three students made seven errors; two students made six errors; two students made five errors; seven students made four errors; one student made three errors; two students made two errors, and three students made one error.

**Table 2. Types of Error on Sentence Structure**

No	Types Of Error	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	
1	VERB TENSE	3	1	2	2	2		2			2	2	3	2							2	
2	SUBJECT-VERB AGREEMENT		2				1			1		1		1	1							
3	ARTICLES						1		1			1										
4	PRONOUN AGREEMENT	2		3	1	2															1	
5	SENTENCE FRAGMENT			1	3						1		3	1		2	1				1	
6	RUN ON SENTENCES	2	1			1	2	2	4		1		1		1	2	2	2	1	3	1	
<b>Total</b>		<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	

**Frequent Types of Error**

Regarding the frequent occurrence of the error types, it was recognized that the most frequent error made by the students was run-on sentences. Then it was followed by the error of verb tense, sentence fragment; pronoun agreement; subject-verb; and the least frequent, articles. Table 2 explains the frequency and the percentage of errors made by the students. The verb tense error occurred 23 times and it was 28% of the errors. While on the subject-verb agreement, the error happened seven times. Overall, there were 9% of errors. The least error found was related to the article. 4% of the overall text and occurred only three times. On pronoun agreement, the error happened nine times with a percentage of 11%. The sentence fragment error happened 13 times, and the percentage was 16%. The most frequent error that appeared was run-on sentences. It appeared 27 times and the percentage was 27%. The total errors made by the students in this assignment of paragraph writing was 82 errors.

**Table 3. The Frequency of Error**

<b>NO</b>	<b>TYPES OF ERROR</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>PERCENTAGE</b>
1	Verb Tense	23	28%
2	Subject-Verb Agreement	7	9%
3	Articles	3	4%
4	Pronoun Agreement	9	11%
5	Sentence Fragment	13	16%
6	Run-On Sentences	27	32%
<b>TOTAL</b>		82	100%

## Discussion

The findings showing that all students still made almost different types of errors regarding the sentence structure revealed the students' limited knowledge or false concept of English grammar or structure. Although the students have taken the subject of Basic English Structure before, they still made errors in arranging the words into correct English sentences. Besides, the first language's influence contributed to the students' writing performance. The different concept of the use of verb tense in *Bahasa Indonesia* poses repeated errors by different students. Those kinds of errors are categorized as intralingual and interlingual errors. Richard and Schmidt (2002) grouped language errors into two main parts: interlingual and intralingual errors. Interlingual errors can be seen as transfer errors caused by a learner's first language merits. They include lexical, grammatical, or pragmatic errors. At the same time, intralingual errors referred to the ignorance of rule restrictions, imperfect implementation of rules, and false concepts, all leading to overgeneralization.

The repeated and frequent errors made by the students on verb tenses indicate that the students are not aware of the distinction between the English and *Bahasa Indonesia* structure. In *Bahasa* sentence structure, a verb does not change its form due to the different subject and a verb does not need to agree with its subject. The error often occurs when they mix verb tenses within a sentence or description. While the most frequent error occurring in run-on sentences assumes that the students fail to understand the rules of sentence structure. Most run-on errors of sentences in students' writing do not put any punctuation in any clause. They did not put any connecting words or phrases to connect two or more closely related sentences though some students assumed that a comma is more appropriate than a full stop and period.

As Ellis (1996) stated that overgeneralization errors happen when learners use irregular structures different from the target language structures, while unknowing rule restrictions are related to the rule implementation in inappropriate contexts. In addition, the incorrect implementation of rules is recognized when learners do not succeed in adopting appropriate structures, whilst wrong concepts might increase when learners misunderstand the difference in the target language. Furthermore, Watcharapunyawong (2013) reminded us that the grammatical rules of each language are not similar. Errors made by the learners can be particularly different. Both teachers and students need to be aware of the syntactic differences between the two languages to produce a piece of writing with accurate grammatical structures.

## **CONCLUSION**

The problems of the students' paragraph writing on sentence structure occur in the six types of error; verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, articles, pronoun agreement, sentence fragments, and run-on sentences/ comma splices. The result showed that the total for all types of errors made by the students in this assignment of paragraph writing was 82 errors. The two frequent errors occur in verb tense (23%) and run-on sentences (27%). Those frequently occur due to the limited knowledge of English sentence structure and the interference of their first language categorized into intralingual and interlingual errors.

## **SUGGESTION**

The study can identify several problems of error analysis in students' writing. It is beneficial for teachers to provide important information about language learning problems which can be used to design and prepare effective teaching materials. Teachers' feedback on students' writing can help students become aware of the types of errors and anticipate repeated errors.



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