An Analysis of Paragraph Writing Abilities of
English Department Students at Universitas Negeri Makassar

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ABSTRACT

Studies on the errors of linguistic elements in students' writings have been carried out. Students learning English as a Foreign Language from various universities seem to make the time same type of errors, for example in aspects of tenses, verb forms, perpositions, subject-verb agreement, word order, and passive constraints (Rahman et al. 2016; Murrow, 2004; Rahman, 1994; & Rahman & Rasyid). This study is expected to find the weaknesses of students of English Department, Faculty of Languages and Literature in terms of paragraph writing. In particular, this research examined the ability of students to write or develop paragraphing terms of unity, coherence, and development aspects. The findings of this study will be useful for instructors/lecturers of Writing courses especially in developing syllabus and effective writing exercises.

Key words: Error Analysis, Writing, Undergraduate Students

INTRODUCTION

Problems with raw inputs that are less qualified at one level of education tend to point out that mistakes are at the level below. A research done by Rahman (2001) examines freshmen's English capabilities when entering English Department Universitas Negeri Makassar. Some of the profound findings were (1) their initial English language mastery was 45.31 % (2) in general they did not master the elements of grammar comprehensively, (3) the sequence of language skills mastery from the most mastered aspects are speaking, listening, writing and reading, and (4) their vocabulary mastery level is at 40.15 % which is categorized as low.

This study focuses on writing abilities as it is necessary for students to produce a written thesis in their final year. Expressing ideas into writing may not be that simple. As it not only need the students to understand the basic grammar rules, but also how to develop ideas into paragraphs then arranging the paragraphs into a complete essay.

This study aims to find the strengths and weaknesses of students' paragraph writing seen from the elements of a paragraph. It is expected that the results of the research can contribute to the teaching of Writing. One of the

challenge for the writing instructors is the transition from the emphasis on writing as a result to the emphasis on the process of creating a written results.

LITERATURE OF REVIEW

According to, Hogue (1996), Boardman and Frydenberg (2008:3) and Zemach and Rumisek (2005:12) a paragraph has three basic parts: topic sentence, supporting senteneces, and closing sentences. A topic sentence if the main idea of a paragraph (Zemach & Rumisek 2005:12). Usually, the main idea is the first sentennce of a paragraph, and that is the most common sentence from a paragraph. Suuporting sentences are sentences that discuss or explain the topic sentenc. Supporting contain more detailed ideas that follow the topic sentence. One way to do this is by presenting facts (Boardman & Frydenberg 2008 : 6). Another way to support a topic sentence is by giving examples. The third common way to support topic sentnce is by using illustrations. The closing sentence of a paragraphs generally needed a stand-alone part in a paragraph. This can be found as the last sentence of a paragraph. The closing can repeat the main idea or just give a last comment on the topic (Zemach & Rumisek 2005:12).

A good paragraph also have some characteristics i.e, unity, coherence and compeleteness/development. The first feature of a good paragraph is unity, that is all sentences in a paragraph must be centered on one main topic. This reinforces the topic and units all paragraphs. In addition, all the sentences in the paragraphs must point to this topic and each is interrelated. The second feature is coherence. Coherence refelects the concete and logical structure of paragraphs. HuyenNga (2012) explaines that coherence is a seuence of sentences or sayings that hold each other together. Coherence reflects conceptual connectivity of a text. The last feature if compeleteness and development of paragraphs. A perfect paragraph is described as an integrated, coherent, developing and complete entity. Liu and Wang (2011) explain that paragraph development means that controlling ideas and other subordinate ideas in the paragraph must be adequately explained or illustrated. This means that paragraphs that do not have development are thos that introduce a topic but fail to provide enough information to explain to the reader.

METHOD

This is a descriptive study. Ary (2010) pointed out that descriptive resarch tries to discover and explain a phenomena or a variable. The aim is to give a wholostic understanding of the object, not just numbers. This study examines the English departments students' writings. The strengths and weaknesses of writings will be analyzed based on its unity, coherence and

development/completeness. The students writings are their term paper for the Writing Course. The sample consisted of 100 participants representing Diploma 3, Undergraduate and Graduate students of English Department at Universitas Negeri Makassar.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

From 100 respondents, apparently they still are making the same mistakes in writing. Although the results of this study cannot be used as a general description of the ability of the entire population, it is enough to be an initial reference to determine the differences in students abilities. This can be seen from the level of paragraph errors.

1. Paragraph Unity

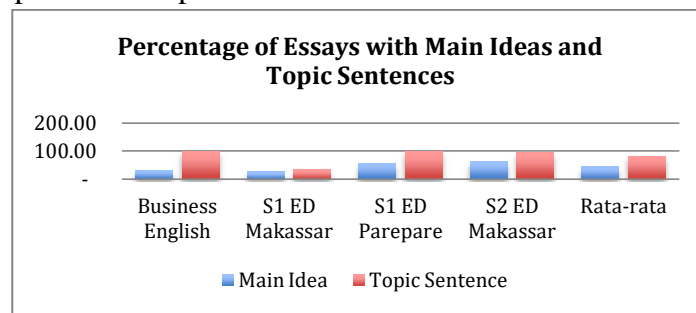Unity here emphasizes the presence of absence of main ideas and topic sentences.

Figure 1. Percentage of Essays with Main Ideas and Topic Sentences

Figure 1 above showed that 82.26 % have written the main sentence, but only 43.94 % have written their own main idea and/or introduction. Main sentence here refers to covering the topic or cas discussed and the controlling idea (Boardman&Frydenberg 2008). This may be caused by the fact that students just write down the main sentence from the question, but did not develop the main idea into an introduction as expected. In other words, only a small percentage of students can explain more of the main ideas in the introductory paragraph. Introductory paragraph aims to draw attention of the readers to the writing that will be presented and form the reasoning of the reader to read the entire writing (Keraf 1994).

2. Order/Organization

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that introduce a topic but fail to provide enough information to explain to the reader.
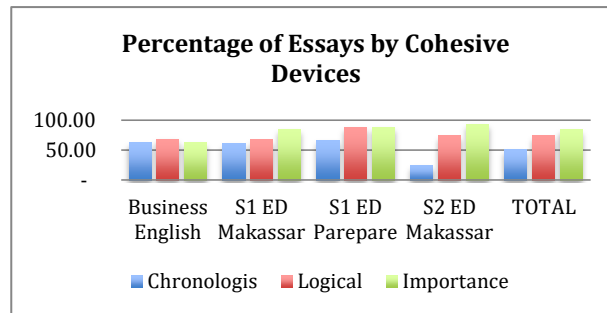

Figure 2 Percentage of Essays by Cohesive Devices

In this study, there are three aspects that are seen to analyze paragraph development, namely chronological, logical and importance. Figure 2 shows that only about 51% of the total students write an essay in good chronological order. 74% sof students can develop their paragraph logically and 85% included important aspects in their writing.

3. Coherence

Coherence in paragraph occurs when the paragraph as the compactness of the relationship between one sentence and another. These sentences are closely intertwined and support each other so that the paragraph is easy to understand and read. Here coherence also sees when students enter facts, supporting details and examples that lead directly to the topic sentence.

Table 3. General Profile of Students' Paragraphs

Prodi	No. of Students	# of Sentence	# of words	# of Detail	# of Trans Wrd
Bus. English	16	10.69	186.69	3.00	3.13
Eng Dept Mks	34	17.29	283.85	3.00	4.41
Eng Dep Pare	18	11.33	229.78	2.00	2.78
Grad Program	32	19.31	301.03	4.00	3.94
Average	**100**	**14.66**	**250.34**	**3.00**	**3.56**

Table 3 shows the various number of sentences that studenst succeeded in writing their final assignments. An interesting fact is that as the higher the level, the number of sentences increase. Diploma students wrote an average of 10-11 sentences, undergraduate students wrote between 11-17 sentences and graduate students showed an average of 19 sentences. This is alsoe related to the numebr of words produced which can be asascertained that if more sentences are produced, the more words they will use.

Table 3 above also shows that all students include details, such as including at least two examples. In addition, students also seemed to understand the importance of using transitional words eventhough the table showed a variation in the amount used in students' writings. Transition words used by students in their assignment was counted manually. For example, if a students used the word 'and' five times in an essay, it will only be counted as one type of transition word.

Hence, from the results of the data, it can be implied that the number of words or sentences, the using of details and transition words are not determinants of a smoothness of a paragraph's coherence.

4. Compeleteness

The complete paragraph here focuses on finding the last sentence or closing sentence. Zemach and Rumisek (2005) are in line with the opinion of Boardman and Frydenberg (2008:9) that the closing sentence is a restatement of the topic sentence. It is providing information that is the same as the topic sentence, but the information is expressed in a different way.

The closing sentence usually starts with a transition, such as *in the end*, *conclusion*, *in a nutshell*, or *in summary*. Not all closing sentences need a transition.
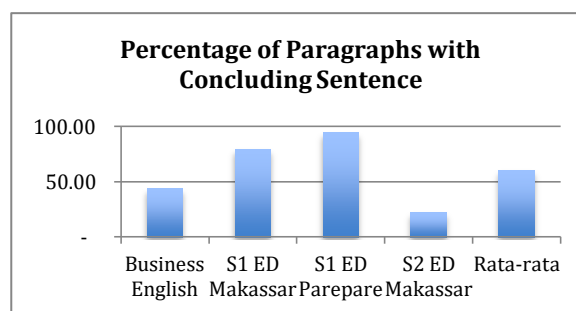
Figure 3. Percentage of Paragraphs with Concluding Sentence

Figure 3 shows that of all students, on average only 58 students wrote a closing sentence. Of these 58% respondents, some were able to write a closing sentence which is a restatement from the topic sentence, while the rest just wrote it in a simpler way.

Discussion

In this study, students were asked to write their opinion on a topic. It seems that most of them or about 76% were able to put down whether they agree or disagree with the statement given in the question. This is a good start because this statement also becomes their topic sentence. However, 74% of them were not able to develop it further into an introductory paragraph than can direct reader to the things that are their next discussion.

In terms of writing chronologically 51% of the students were able to make and develop the paragraph in order. While there may be a couple of reasons why some other students were not able to write chronologically, the absence of a good introductory paragraph may be one of it. Without it, students may write and write but lost the essence of the discussion along the way. Therefore eventhough the writing produced can be logical (74%) and contains important aspects (85%), it is essential to write chronoogically to make the writing easy for the readers to follow.

Below is an example of a student's writing with a toic sentence, introductory paragraph and written chronologically.

> Nowdays, students and technology can not be separated. Aware or not students need technology to help them to find more information. students need technology not only in learning process but also in their daily activities. some technology like computer and internet take important role in helping students. This essay will explain why the writer agree if technology can help students to learn more information and learn it more quickly.
>
> The first reason why technology can help students is because technology is more easier to use. for example in internet.....
>
> Second reason why technology can help students is because there is so many benefits that students can get but using technology. ...
>
> <div align="right">(PM07)</div>

In comparison, below is an exceprt of a student's writing without an introductory paragraph and less chronological.

> Technology is one of way to learn or get information quickly. We know, everything can be accessed there but it must be supported by situation and geographical. Let see in Papua, there is no electricity and network. It means technology is useless. If students depend on technology, they will not learn. Moreover, information that technology or internet provides is not really valid at all. Most of it is just attached to get more benefit. Internet is like trade who gives much will get more. It provides everything so there will be much temptation disturb students' mind when they access. We can compare with other sources such as books. They are printed after editing. It makes books more believable and valid than internet.
>
> (BI06)

This study also looked into the coherence aspect in the students writing. One way to do this is including supporting details, facts and examples that are relevant with the main idea. Only 34 from 100 students included this in their writing. Below are samples of student's writings that included details/examples.

> Example if I at KFC, we can mix sause and pepper. If we at the home, sometime spices that we want to use is not at the home.
>
> (BE18)

> For example, the soup I cook at home and the soup I order from restaurant/food stand are different in many ways.
>
> (PR06)

> For example, using computer in the classroom.
> For example, by using email.
> Eg computer and mobile phone.
>
> (PM25)

All students used transitional words in their essay, although there are those that only used a very few words which was not as expected. This can be the basis for finding out what causes the lack of use of these transition words. It may be caused by the lack of vocabulary, knowledge and practice. The following are the transition words used by the students:

and	but	first (ly)	second (ly)	third
because	besides	moreover	if	also
when	so	next	last	however
another	first of all	in conclusion	during	instead
in additional in addition additionally	as a result for a result	even eventhough	not only ... but also	on the other hand other than that

gradually	finally	despite	as well as	fourth
fifth	as	although	overall	nevertheless
therefore	then	in the end	in line with	while
as long as	thus	recently	Even	eventhough

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATION, AND SUGGESTIONS

Students writing ability should be intervened from the beginning so that students can produce a good quality of writing with unity, order/organization, coherence, and complete. From the results and discussion, students' weaknesses were found when writing an introductory paragraph, making their writing chronological, and writing a concluding sentences. The students strengthes were found when writing the main sentences and the use of transitional words. Although there are a number of students who have completed all aspects of writing, they still need more execise and training to sharpen their skills to make a better writing.

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