Error Analysis: Types and Causes of EFL Learners’ Errors in Writing Analytical Exposition Text

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Abstract. This research looked at errors made by the sophomores majoring in English Education of Tadulako University in writing analytical exposition text. It intends to (1) identify the kinds of errors committed by the students in writing the text, and (2) determine the causes of the errors. This is a qualitative research, employing 20 students enrolled in Text Type Writing course in the Academic Year 2020. Results of the data analysis indicated that there were 421 cases of errors which were then classified into five major categories: orthographic errors, word forms and grammar (morpho-syntactic errors), errors on words and meanings (lexico-semantic), errors in punctuation and errors in capitalization. These errors are caused by influence of the students’ first language (L1) (interlingual errors), lack of target language knowledge (intralingual errors), and communication strategies. This paper addresses error analysis using Dulay’s 1982 Linguistic Category Taxonomy, which so far lack considerably in scientific literature. Previous studies have almost exclusively focused on using Surface Structure Taxonomy, another taxonomy is therefore needed for investigation.

Keywords: Analytical Exposition Text, Error Analysis, Writing Skills

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INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the language skills that English language learners should master. It is defined as a communication process using a symbol to represent the sounds, syllables or words of language with different mechanisms - capitalization, spelling, punctuation, word form and function. It is a productive skill which not only involves graphic representation of the expressions but also develops and presents thoughts in a structured way. In order to develop the writing skills, writer needs to study and practice (Durga & Rao, 2018; Erniwati et al., 2022). This is to say that writing is a means of communication used to deliver messages and to communicate ideas, feelings and opinions of the writer in the written form through well-structured sentences and systematic ways.

Writing is also defined as a process involving four different steps; pre-writing, text writing, revising, and editing. Pre-writing means an activity done before writing a text. This first step allows a writer to detect ideas about the topic. The next step, text writing, is intended for the writer to develop a complete first version of the draft. This step helps the writer broaden, clarify, modify plan and idea, and arrange the content of the writing in a meaningful plot. Furthermore, revising is a process of re-arranging, adding or deleting paragraph, sentences or words; it is a key of an effective text. In this step, the writer also revises the text after writing it. The last step, editing, is an important part of the writing process. The writer will improve the text by revising any existing errors and making the sentences clear and effective. Editing process involves adding, deleting, and re-arranging words to avoid clutter and to adjust the overall structure of the writing.

Writing takes four types—descriptive, narrative, persuasive, and expository. At schools, these types of writing are often popular as types of texts, each type of which poses different styles, structures, and purposes. Text refers to a written or typed document that is structured in a different way in order to accomplish a different objective as well. It comes from Latin texere, which means ‘to release’. Many critics consider a text as a linguistic structure intertwined from words or marks. As such, a text is a human product in which its form and meaning are accomplished through the design and the use of an intentional verbal media of the writer (Sankar, 2017). A text or a composition can also be defined as anything which is readable or interpreted by involving structure, coherence, logical development, and range of linguistic resources such as grammar and vocabulary.

Mastering writing skills is important for English language learners. This is because writing can improve communication ability, sharpen creativity and imagination level, broaden knowledge, increase level of confidence, and support academic success (Rae, 2020). Many professional communications in the daily life make use of writing as media such as writing proposals, reports, interviews, correspondence, and the like. In addition, writing improves memory, increase vocabulary internalization, and improves communication skill. Through writing the students can learn new concepts, convince others, log information, build fictional worlds, convey feelings, amuse others, etc., which contributes immensely to the overall advancement of learning endeavors (Graham &
Harris, 2018; Gautam, 2019). In other words, writing plays pivotal role in students’ learning achievement.

Obviously, in order to write a text, it is necessary that students have certain competencies such as organization, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics of writing. Organization of writing refers to how paragraphs and sentences are organized. It helps readers follow and understand the information presented by the author. A text is intended for providing information to the reader; therefore, writers must organize their ideas into sentences to obtain unity and coherence of meaning. Furthermore, organization is one of the most important elements that make sentences or paragraphs easier to understand. Grammar, moreover, is defined as a system of sounds, structures, and meanings of a language. Sadiah & Royani (2019) argue that grammar is the study of words and how they are used in the sentence. It provides information in support of readers’ understanding. As such, grammar is a series of rules that explain the structure of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences of a language.

Vocabulary is also one of the important components in writing. Being competent on it greatly affects the learning of a language. Vocabulary is fundamental for learning all of the language skills because languages are based on words. It is the key to language instruction (Sinaga et al., 2020; Erniwati et al., 2021; Rosdiani et al., 2022). It means, when language learners learn a language, they will learn the vocabulary of the language. Just like grammar and vocabulary, mechanics is also considered as a critical aspect in learning writing skills. In order to easily understand the writer in delivering messages to the readers, it is crucial that they understand rules about how to use mechanics of writing such as punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. Writing mechanics makes writing clear, effective, and impressive.

Without having such competencies, the students frequently find it difficult to write a text, analytical exposition text in particular. For example, in the research reported by Putri et al. (2021) that students found grammar troublesome. Similarly, Elfa (2020) found that students were overwhelmed when reiterating argument, language features, vocabulary and mechanics of writing. In addition, Muhammed (2019) reported that it is difficult for students to choose an appropriate word because there are several words that have several meanings (polysemous words). Thus, further investigation using error analysis is needed in order to identify types of errors and, if possible, to explain causes of the errors the students committed in writing analytical exposition text.

Analytical exposition text is a non-fiction text containing a particular piece of information. It comprises the writer’s opinions and arguments about certain problems or phenomena. Yudianto et al. (2017) note that analytical exposition text is a kind of argumentative text that requires the writer’s creativity in sharing the ideas. This text intends to inform and persuade the readers or listeners about something to be a problem. Nonetheless, an exposition text does not expect its readers to believe the writer’s argument; it only presents an opinion about an issue from a different perspective.
Just like other text types, analytical exposition text has its own generic structures, which include a thesis (a sentence with a main idea), arguments, and a conclusion (reiteration). A thesis explains a problem or an opinion of the writer. Arguments contain the ideas to support the writer's opinion. A conclusion is the last part of the text reiterating the opinion of the writer and to strengthen the thesis. This part is normally initiated by phrases such as “based on the fact above, therefore, or in conclusion”.

Analytical exposition text embodies several characteristics. First, it uses the simple present tense. Arguments of the writer should be expressed using words that can link the arguments such as “firstly, secondly, in addition, furthermore”, etc. Second, this text employs words expressing the writer’s opinions and feelings, for example “I personally believe ..., therefore, my conclusion is ...”, etc. Third, it uses casual conjugation or causes of the impact such as “because, even though, the reason”, and so forth.

The sampled students were already taught this type of text. Unfortunately, they kept making errors when writing this text. Permatasari & Yuliasri (2020) reported that errors produced by learners are related to inappropriate lexical choice, ambiguity, wrong forms of verbs, and addition of unnecessary verbs. This indicates that the learners have problems on vocabulary. Other research done by Elfa (2020) found that learners made errors on vocabulary and mechanics of writing. These errors occurred naturally for they came across new rules, vocabulary, and grammar.

Errors made by English language learners are associated with their lacking knowledge about the language they learn (i.e., English). Savitri (2019) points out that errors are systematic deviation from rules made by learners who have not mastered the rules of the target language (TL) yet. In addition, Fauzan et al. (2020) reported that errors that the students mostly produce are errors portraying failure in pronouncing words and inaccurate spelling. Thus, making errors is natural and unavoidable.

Errors and mistakes are often interchangeably used in language learning. However, they actually differ one another. Lexically, error, in the one hand, means something is incorrectly done through a wrong way. It depicts a lack of competence in the language being learned. The learner does not realize that he deviates from the norms. Mistake, on the other hand, can be caused by slips of tongue as well as physical states which includes “memory lapses, fatigue, and other psychological conditions such as lack of attention and strong emotion” (Corder, 1967, p. 166). Hence, error can be regarded as the inability to identify accurate rules or structures of the foreign language.

Error is related to the learners’ knowledge in the target language learned. Dulay et al. (1982, p.138) define error as “the flawed side of learned speech or writing. They are those parts of speaking or writing that deviate from some selected form of mature language performance.” Mistake, however, is related to slip or uncontrolled focus of the learners on learning. The learners are basically aware of the language rules so that, when they commit error, the are able to correct it. In other words, mistake is a slip that is made
unconsciously due to a momentary carelessness and it can be easily self-corrected by the student himself.

Error can be analyzed using a method called error analysis – a process which is based on the analysis of an error committed by students in leaning a second language (L2). According to Muqbel (2018), error analysis is a method used to describe and explain types and causes of errors produced by either second or foreign language learners. Furthermore, Divsar & Heydari (2017) define it as a way to gather errors found in students’ language, decide if the errors are systematic or not, and clarify what the reason behind the errors. In other words, error analysis is a method applied to sum up all errors appearing in students’ language.

There are several types of errors. Corder (1971) classifies errors into two; competence and performance. Competence errors occur when students apply rules not belonging to the target language, which is caused by the students’ inadequate knowledge on the target language. Performance errors, on the contrary, are errors caused by faulty start or slip of tongue. This may happen if students are stressful, anxious, confused, fatigue, and the like. Burt & Kiparsky (1974) recommended two types of errors, which are local and global errors. The so-called local errors affect part, clause, phrase of a sentence, while global errors influence interpretation of a sentence as a whole.

Some taxonomies can be applied to identify errors. Dulay et al. (1982) proposed four taxonomies to group the student errors in view of observable output characteristic from the errors without referring to cases or sources of the intended errors. The four taxonomies are linguistic category, surface strategy, comparative, and communicative effect. This study applies the linguistic taxonomy in which the errors are classified into five categories; orthographic errors, lexico-semantic errors (errors between words and meaning), morphological syntactic errors (errors between word forms and grammar), punctuation errors and capitalization errors.

Sources of errors can be varied. According to Richards (2019), errors may be classified as intralingual and interlingual interferences. Interference, translation, and interlanguage interference are called interlingual errors. Such errors take place because of the linguistic difference between the students’ first language (L1) and that of the target language (Corder, 1971). These errors occur because of the first language. This happens when the students’ first language habits influence the target language. In other words, mother tongue or first language of the students affects the learning process of the second or foreign language.

Interference coming from student first language is not solely the cause of the students’ errors. The errors occurred maybe because the students know very little about the target language. These errors are called intralingual errors; they are related to specific interpretation of the target language and are realized as general phenomena in the learning of a language (Corder, 1971). Intralingual errors includes overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restriction, incomplete application of rules, and false concept hypothesized by the students. For example, students often make errors in using tenses.
They may say, “*Andy is go to school*” because, based on their knowledge and experience, ‘Andy’ is a third person singular and, thus, it is necessary to add ‘is’.

Furthermore, intralingual errors are due to the target language (L2) or the language being learned (Murtiana, 2019). These errors are based on learning strategy, communication strategy, and induced errors. Errors because of strategy of learning are caused by false analogy, wrong analysis, incomplete rule application, excessive redundancy exploitation, ignoring co-occurrence limits, hypercorrection and overgeneralization. Errors due to strategy of communication are associated with two issues, they are holistic and analytical. Errors because of teacher’s induced strategy are associated with teaching materials, teacher’s language, drills given and pedagogical priority (James, 2013).

Causes of the errors made by the students varied from case to case. Sermsook, Liamnimitr & Pochakorn (2017) reported that there are four causes which have driven the students’ errors to occur in writing—they are interlingual, intralingual, lack of grammar knowledge and English vocabulary, and students’ recklessness. Tauchid & Fatoni (2019) added that of all the sources of the errors mentioned, lack of students’ grammar knowledge as well as the target language vocabulary were considered the main causes of their errors. When the students lack the knowledge of the grammar of the target language, they will automatically switch to their first language (L1), which ultimately leads to their producing errors in writing.

Clearly, English language learners can produce errors in writing a text. In the Indonesian context, however, most of the previous studies were more interested in looking at errors made by English language learners in light of Dulay’s surface structure strategy taxonomy. It means, they scrutinized students’ errors by focusing on what is observable of the students’ superficial grammatical knowledge. Studies on aspects of the errors from the perspective of linguistic category taxonomy are still lacking. Therefore, the overall goal of this work is to analyze types and causes of errors made by the sampled students in writing analytical exposition text. The questions which then arise are, first, what type of errors are produced by the sampled students in writing analytical exposition text? Second, what are the causes of the errors?

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**The Design**

This research used qualitative design - an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry which explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, report detailed views of information, and conducts the study in a natural setting. It aims to provide in-depth insights and understanding of real-world problems (Creswell, 2018). Thus, this method allows researchers to get a detailed understanding of the type of errors produced by the participant students in writing analytical exposition text and the causes of the errors.
This study only used one data collection method called examining records. The procedures of handling the data were as follows. Firstly, the errors produced by the sampled students in writing analytical exposition text were identified. The errors then tabulated in the forms of table, diagram, and the like, aiming to easily compose, quantify, and arrange. Next, they were categorized in order to simplify and facilitate the process of data analysis. Finally, the data were analyzed by converting them into information from which conclusion can be drawn, followed by data interpretation in order to understand the whole information collected and to determine the conclusion, significance and implications of the findings.

The Participants

Sophomores majoring in English Education of Tadulako University were chosen the participants of this research. Twenty students were not randomly chosen—they were purposively selected out of 252 students registered in the academic year 2020/2021. The participants involved have met the criteria set such as they were all sophomores ranging from 18 to 19 years of age. They have attended one of the writing courses called Text Type Writing. They have learned various types of text, including analytical exposition text.

The Instrument

Twenty writing samples were collected from the report of the final semester exam paper of the participant students used as the instrument of this study. The paper captures individual students’ work to be examined. In other words, the data used in this study were collected from artifact, that is records or documents of individual students’ paper that can provide evidence of their writing of analytical exposition text.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The results of the data analysis demonstrate two things. First, there were 421 error frequencies categorized into orthographic errors, lexico-semantic errors, morpho-syntactic errors, punctuation and capitalization errors. The morpho-syntactic errors were dominant with a percentage of 58.67 percent, followed by lexico-semantic errors of 17.01 percent, capitalization of 16.63 percent, orthographic and punctuation of 3.80 percent, respectively. The overall measurement results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Type, Frequency and Percentage of Errors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Classification of error</th>
<th>Types of error</th>
<th>Frequency of error</th>
<th>Percentage of error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Orthographic errors</td>
<td>Spelling word breaks</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Morpho-syntactic errors</td>
<td>singular/plural form</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>8.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>parts of speech</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>23.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Second, it was found that the sources of the errors were interlingual errors, intralingual errors, and communication strategies. The major cause of the students’ errors was lack of knowledge in the target language (intralingual) as shown in the following table.

Table 2. Causes of Errors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Causes of error</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Interlingual</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>18.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Intralingual</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>61.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Communication strategies</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>20.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>421</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

This study aims to specify the types and the causes of the errors produced by the sophomores majoring in English Education of Tadulako University in writing analytical exposition text. Data analysis shows that there are 17 types of errors subtracted into five major categories as follows.

Parts of Speech

The errors related to parts of speech came in the first place with a percentage of 23.99. This is in line with the findings of (Nanning et al., 2020) that the most frequent grammatical errors produced by the students were related to parts of speech (45.33%). Of this category, prepositions emerged to dominate the errors with 32 cases or 7.60 percent, which is similar to the findings of (Shweba & Mujiyanto, 2017). Other previous studies (Qamariah et al., 2020; Phommavongsa et al., 2021; Agustin & Wulandari, 2022)
reported that prepositions were one of the most frequent errors produced by the students in their writing. The example of this errors is found in a sentence “*The teacher will divide them into 3 or 4 people on the group to do some work.” The preposition ‘on’ in the above sentence is not appropriate because it requires a preposition of place which means to put someone/something into. Therefore, the sentence should read “The teacher will put the students in a group of 3 or 4 to do some work.”

**Capitalization**

The second most frequent errors produced by the students in their writing is capitalization. Some studies carried out in the field of error analysis on the EFL writing (Pathan, 2021; Sermsook et al., 2017; Shweba & Mujiyanto, 2017) noted that capitalization was among the top ten errors mostly found in the EFL writing. The students often ignored rules on capitalizing the first letter of the first word in the beginning of a sentence. This was found, for example, in the sentence “*…then in the group work you can work together…” This sentence should be started with a capital letter, which can be “Then, you can work together in the group work.” In addition, the students often used capital letter in the middle of the sentence as in “NOT all people Agree with Group work.” This sentence only needed a capital letter in the beginning and is supposed to be “Not all people agree with group work.”

**Literal Translation from the Indonesian Language (Bahasa)**

The students were obviously influenced by their first language (L1) when writing sentences in the target language. As a result, the sentence they produced resembled a direct translation from Bahasa to the target language (English). An example of this was found in “*Like in many cases, there are students who being selfish to one of their member or even make that one person do it by themselves.” This sentence is absolutely ill-formed and, thus, it should be written “In many cases, selfish students tend to be free-riders and let over-bearers do the work.” Wongranu (2017) mentioned that most of the students translate the source text in their mind, and write down the target text. They translate the text word by word, try to adjust their translation, but still hold onto the source text. As a consequence, they produce grammatical errors. It means, the interference from the mother tongue in the students’ production of writing can lead them to produce the errors.

**Singular/Plural Form**

Errors made in this category displayed no conformity between the articles used and the nouns that follow. For example, the students wrote “*There is a people who can help with their assignment.” It is clear that the students failed to pair properly the article ‘a’, which functioned as a singular noun marker, and the noun ‘people’ that came afterwards, which required a plural noun marker. This error can be classified as ‘malformation’. According to Ermanda & Hendar (2022), the malformation is due to limited knowledge of L2 rules pertaining to the formation of irregular plural nouns. The
malformation becomes one of the highest frequency errors committed by the students as reported by Ozkayran (2020) that 68.05 percent of the students’ errors were in the form of malformation. Hence, this sentence should be “There is a person who can help them out with their assignment.”

**Sentence Structure**

The most frequent errors committed by the sampled students in this category were related to phrases and clauses. In the sentence like “*When we ask to our friends then we get some new knowledge.” Insertion of the preposition ‘to’ as well as the presence of adverb of time might obscure the meaning of the sentence. A plethora of studies (Hendrawati, 2018; Setiyorini et al., 2020; Hakim et al., 2022) have imparted that simple addition, that is to put an additional word which is grammatically unnecessary, frequently occurs in the complex sentence structure. The error is caused by double complex sentence and grammar (Hendrawati, 2018). The sentence therefore can be expressed as in “We may gain new knowledge when asking our friends.”

As for the causes of the errors, three causes are found – interlingual, intralingual, and communication strategies. Yet, the main cause is related to the students' ignorance or lack of understanding of the rules in the target language (intralingual errors). This occurs because the more differences that the first language and the target language have, the more difficult for the ESL/EFL learners to master the language and the more mistakes they will perform. Generally, the mistakes are related to the use of available grammar pattern strategies to new strategies (overgeneralization). An example of this is found in a sentence like “*...the group work can be do...” where English allows “He can do” and “It can be done”.

Furthermore, the errors caused by the influence of the students’ first language or interlingual errors, are generated by the same basic skills that underlie academic performance between the two languages. This is supported by the Theory of Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) suggested by Cummins (2016). Accordingly, the skills, ideas, and concepts that ESL/EFL learners learn from the first language will be transferred to the target language. An example of this error is “*For me, the group work have good or bad impact on students, it depends on them.” It is obvious that the sentence is ill-formed as the noun ‘group work’ does not agree with the verb that follows ‘have’. This is because in the Indonesian language verb (predicate) does not change regardless of the subject.

In addition, errors related to communication strategies are mostly caused by the need to communicate while knowledge of the target language is deficient. As a result, students no longer consider the use of correct grammar and/or the right choice of words because the most important thing is to achieve the communication goals. For example, the students wrote “*It is very difficult for student introvert because student usually studying or doing some work by their self”, which indicates a misplacement of the noun ‘student’ and the adjective ‘introvert’. Moreover, the sampled students clearly ignored the copula ‘be’ (am/is/are) where its presence in that context is a must.
Although many studies on error analysis have been addressed, research in using linguistics taxonomy remains limited. As a result, factual information about the topic being examined is insufficient. Previous research can only be considered a first step towards a more profound understanding of the way how to describe and explain errors committed by the students in learning English either as a second or foreign language. Furthermore, the topic of error analysis in writing analytical exposition text using linguistic taxonomy of Dulay’s is rarely found in the previous literature; therefore, this study presents to fill the literature gap.

The findings of this study provide some implications. First, the errors produced by the students tell the teacher about the progress of the students’ learning as well as their weaknesses or problems in learning writing skills that the teacher needs to improve or strengthen further. Second, the researcher gets some information on how the English language is learned or acquired by the Indonesian learners, what strategies they use in learning the target language. Last, sources of errors due to the lack of target language’s knowledge (intralingual errors) inform that it is necessary for the teacher to be more creative in teaching the students the target language.

CONCLUSION

Data analysis shows that the sampled-students produce various types of errors in writing analytical exposition text. The errors are related to the spelling system (orthographic errors), word form and grammar (morpho-syntactic errors), words and meanings (lexico-semantic), the use of punctuation and capital letters (capitalization). These errors are induced by some factors such as the influence of the first language (intralingual), lack of knowledge of the target language (intralingual), and the communication strategies used by the students in learning the language.

The findings also provide information for the teachers and the future researchers about the students’ difficulties in writing English texts, especially the analytical exposition text. For this reason, some efforts are needed in the form of class-based research that focuses on existing problems solving using certain strategies to obtain better results. Further research can either take the experimental study or classroom action research. Thus, errors produced by the students in writing certain texts can be minimized.

REFERENCES


