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## Analyzing Syntactic Errors In English Paragraph Writing

Sarah Davina L Tobing<sup>1</sup>, Tsabitha Azra<sup>1</sup>, M. Aidyl Fahri<sup>1</sup>, Ahmad Rizky Ardi<sup>1</sup>, Siti Ismahani<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Program Studi Tadris Bahasa Inggris, Universitas Islam Sumatera Utara, Kota Medan, Indonesia  
 Email: [davinasarah63@gmail.com](mailto:davinasarah63@gmail.com)

### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi variasi kesalahan sintaksis yang sering dilakukan oleh mahasiswa dalam penulisan paragraf bahasa Inggris dan untuk mengetahui jenis-jenis kesalahan yang paling umum terjadi pada mahasiswa. Penelitian ini mengadopsi pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan menggunakan metode analisis data yang dikumpulkan melalui observasi dan pengukuran, sedangkan instrumen pengumpulan data terdiri dari lembar observasi dan tes tertulis. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa terdapat beberapa jenis kesalahan yang ditemukan dalam penulisan mahasiswa, yaitu kesalahan dalam kategori sintaksis dan strategi permukaan. Kesalahan-kesalahan ini meliputi kesalahan pada noun phrase, verb phrase, transformation. Selain itu ditemukan juga jenis kesalahan pada kategori permukaan, seperti kesalahan penghilangan, penambahan, kesalahan bentuk, kesalahan urutan. Dalam tulisan mahasiswa, kesalahan sintaksis yang paling dominan terjadi pada noun phrase. Namun dalam kategori taksonomi komunikatif, ditemukan sedikit kesalahan saja, yang menunjukkan bahwa meskipun terdapat kesalahan sintaksis dalam frase atau kalimat, pesan yang disampaikan masih dapat dimengerti oleh pembaca.

**Kata Kunci:** Kesalahan sintaksis, menulis paragraf, bahasa Inggris.

### Abstract

*This research aims to identify variations in syntactic errors that are often made by students in writing English paragraphs and to find out the types of errors that most commonly occur in students. This research adopts a qualitative descriptive approach using analytical methods. Data is collected through observation and measurement, while the data collection instruments consist of observation sheets and written tests. The results of the analysis show that there are several types of errors found in student writing, namely errors in the categories of syntax and surface strategy. These errors include errors in noun phrases, verb phrases, transformations. Apart from that, types of errors were also found in the surface category, such as errors of omission, addition, form errors, sequence errors. In student writing, the most dominant syntactic errors occur in noun phrase. However, in the communicative taxonomy category, only a few errors were found, which shows that even though there are syntactic errors in phrases or sentences, the message conveyed can still be understood by the reader.*

**Keywords:** syntax error, paragraph writing, English.

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## INTRODUCTION

Mastering good and appropriate language is a very important aspect for every individual in interacting and sharing their ideas with other people. The ability to communicate well and correctly in various languages is the key for individuals to convey ideas and interact with other people effectively. Even though in the process of learning a language properly and correctly, difficulties and errors in language often occur, this does not have to be considered as something negative for learners. These errors are a natural part of the language learning process, which is influenced by the influence of the dominant mother tongue and the foreign language learning strategies used. As stated by Richards (1984: 182), many mistakes made are caused by the strategies they apply in learning a second language. Many individuals are interested in learning a second language. Many individuals are interested in learning

languages other than their mother tongue that they use every day. one example is English. They believe that by mastering English, they can compete with other people in achieving success in life, especially in getting a job.

In the era of globalization that we are currently facing, English has become a big attraction for many people, especially students. English is not only considered a tool of international communication, but has also become a standard in various languages throughout the world. Therefore, it is not surprising that in pursuing further education, someone must take various tests in English, including interview tests and written tests in English, to measure their ability in the language. Tests in English are often an important part of the college entrance selection process. This test is designed to test the understanding and English language skills of prospective new students. One example of a common test that we often encounter is writing paragraphs in English. This test aims to evaluate the extent to which a person can organize ideas effectively and express them appropriately in writing. Practice tests in selecting English language education study programs provide opportunities for prospective students to show their speaking and writing skills. Through this test, the selection team can assess the extent to which prospective students are able to think and communicate well in English.

Errors in language use do not only occur in oral speech, but also in writing. This difference can be seen from the variety of languages used, namely spoken language and written language. Written language must follow linguistic rules, such as spelling, sentence structure, systematics, and writing techniques. If students do not comply with these written language rules, language errors will occur. One type of error that students often make in written language is syntactic errors. These syntactic errors include errors in the use of words, phrases, clauses and sentences as well as the syntactic elements that form them. Language errors are basically caused by the individual using the language, not by the language itself. There are three possible causes for someone to make mistakes in language, namely: (1) the influence of the language they previously mastered; (2) lack of deep understanding of the language used; and (3) inappropriate or rudimentary language teaching.

Error analysis is a process carried out by analyzing errors made by individuals who are learning in the context of the target language. The target language can be a mother tongue, national language, or foreign language. Through syntactic error analysis, we can find out the success and failure of the learning program designed by the lecturer. Apart from that, syntactic error analysis can also be used as a tool to measure general language skills for students. The results of syntactic error analysis can be used as material to explain parts of syntax errors that are often made by students, so that similar errors can be reduced in the future.

Mistakes in language learning are inevitable. A person's language errors can be a problem if the person has an understanding of the concept of errors, but on the contrary, it can be a simple thing if the person is not aware of their mistakes in speaking or using language. According to Tarigan (1998), language errors not only occur in students learning a second language (L2), but also in students learning their first language (B1). This shows that language errors are closely related to the language learning process, both for the first and second languages. Therefore, it is important to understand and study the errors that occur in depth, because these errors are an integral part of the language learning process. By examining these errors, at least three pieces of information can be obtained. First, as feedback for educators to evaluate the extent of progress that students have achieved, so that they can determine what material still needs to be studied. Second, as evidence for researchers about how someone acquires and learns language. Third, as input, this error is one of the strategies used by students in acquiring their language (Corder, 1981: 56).

Richards (1984: 187) categorizes errors into two groups, namely errors caused by the influence of the first language (interlingual errors) and errors that arise due to the complexity of the target language itself (intralingual errors). Furthermore, Richards divided intralingual errors into four types, namely: (1) overgeneralization, namely errors that occur due to excessive generalization of elements of the target language; (2) ignore of rule restrictions, namely errors caused by ignoring restrictions on the rules of the target language; (3) incomplete application of rules, namely errors in incomplete application of target language rules; and (4) false concept, namely an error in making a hypothesis about the concept of the target language rules. Selinker (1972: 245) classifies language errors into five categories based on their causes, namely: (1) overgeneralization of target rules, namely errors that occur due to excessive generalization of target language rules; (2) transfer of training, namely errors that occur due to inappropriate learning methods; (3) strategy of second language learning, namely errors that occur due

to an inappropriate approach to the rules of the second language being studied; (4) strategy of second language communication, namely errors that occur due to inappropriate approaches used by learners in communicating with native speakers; and (5) language transfer, namely errors that occur due to the transfer of elements of the first language that have been fixed (fossilized) into the second language.

The analysis of language errors is an effort to identify and examine the mistakes made in using a foreign language that differs from one's native language. Errors are defined as deviations from established rules or violations of grammar norms that occur due to misunderstandings or communication difficulties (James, 1998: 123). Corder (1981) states that error analysis serves two functions in the language learning process: to investigate the language learning process itself and to determine whether instructional interventions are necessary for successful achievement of learning goals. Chafe (1982: 87) highlights three advantages of error analysis: (1) instructors gain insights into the extent of goal achievement in language learning; (2) error analysis provides data and evidence regarding how students learn and what strategies they employ; and (3) the errors made can serve as materials for subsequent learning, enabling students to recognize and understand correct and incorrect language usage.

According to Brown (2007: 105), error analysis involves examining language errors made by students, whether in foreign languages, second languages, or languages in general. Thus, the concept of error analysis refers to a working process used by language teachers and researchers, involving steps such as data collection, identification of errors within the data, explanation of those errors, classification of errors based on their causes, and evaluation of the seriousness of the errors.

Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982: 138) propose four descriptive taxonomies for analyzing errors, namely: (1) linguistic category taxonomy. This taxonomy classifies errors according to one or both language components (phonology, syntax and morphology, semantics and lexicon, and style) and other specific linguistic constituents. (2) Surface strategy taxonomy. This taxonomy focuses on errors related to how fundamental grammar is modified by students. Omission errors occur when essential elements are missing in correct communication. For example, "there is a doll in my room." Addition errors, on the other hand, involve the inclusion of items that should not appear in proper communication. There are three types of addition errors: (a) double markings, e.g., "she didn't went back"; (b) regularization, e.g., "eated" instead of "ate," "childs" instead of "children"; and (c) simple additions, e.g., "the fishes doesn't live in the water." Misformation errors are marked by the incorrect use of morpheme forms or structures. There are three types of misformation errors: (a) regularization errors, e.g., "the dog eated the chicken"; (b) archi-forms, e.g., "I see her yesterday" and "Her dance with my brother"; and (c) alternating forms, e.g., "I seen her yesterday." Misordering errors involve the incorrect placement of a morpheme or group of morphemes in communication. For example, "I don't know what is that." (3) Comparative taxonomy classifies errors based on the comparison between the structure used by learners and other specific constructions. Errors are categorized as developmental errors, interlingual errors, ambiguous errors, and unique errors. (4) Communicative effect taxonomy considers errors from the perspective of their impact on the listener or reader. This taxonomy classifies errors as global and local errors. Here are revised examples for each type of error: (1.) Omission error: "There's a doll in my room. (2). Addition error: - Double markings: "She didn't went back." - Regularization: "I eated my lunch," "I have two childs." - Simple additions: "The fishes doesn't live in the water." (3) Misformation error: - Regularization: "The dog eated the chicken." - Archi-forms: "I see her yesterday," "Her dance with my brother." - Alternating forms: "I seen her yesterday." (4). Misordering error: "I don't know what that is."

Writing skills involve the ability to convey ideas, opinions, and feelings through written language to others (Carson, 2001: 56). To express ideas accurately, the use of appropriate language is necessary. In addition to having grammatically correct vocabulary, writing skills should also be supported by proper context and spelling. Writing is often considered the most challenging skill compared to other language skills. When someone uses a second or foreign language orally, native speakers can still understand imperfect pronunciation or expressions. However, when someone uses a second or foreign language in writing, native readers tend to be more critical in evaluating texts with many spelling or grammar errors, even if the intended meaning is clear and the writing is well-organized. Writing is seen as reflecting the writer's level of education, so it should be error-free as much as possible. Writing literally means creating letters, numbers, names, and any linguistic symbols using writing tools on a specific page. A sentence should support a specific idea or concept. A systematic

sentence structure indicates organized thinking. To make ideas or concepts easily understood by readers, the syntactic functions such as subject, predicate, object, complement, and adverbial should be clearly evident. These five syntactic functions do not always appear together in a sentence. The elements of a sentence should be explicitly stated and logically and sensibly arranged (Carson, 2001). The research conducted will discuss syntactic errors. Syntax is a branch of linguistics that deals with sentence structure and its constituents or the study of sentence structure. Syntax is closely related to morphology, which deals with the details of words and morphemes. Syntax errors are often related to errors in morphology because sentences are composed of words.

Syntactic errors, based on the explanations provided, refer to mistakes, deviations, violations, or deviations from the predetermined rules in the syntactic level (the study of language that discusses the intricacies of phrases, clauses, sentences, or the arrangement and relationships between words or with larger units or between larger units in a language that has the smallest unit, which is the word). Richards (1984: 117) explains that "syntax is the study of how words combine to form sentences and the rules which govern the formation of sentences." Richards explains that syntax is the set of rules used to construct words into phrases or sentences and the rules used to analyze sentences. Syntactic errors in the writing process in a foreign language will differ from those in the writing process in one's native language. The causes of these errors will also vary. In the writing process of sentences using the English language, syntactic errors may be caused by various factors, such as interference from the native language or differences in grammatical rules between the native language and English. Syntactic errors related to the absence of a subject are often found, which is an interference caused by habits or carelessness when writing in the native language. Another common syntactic error is errors in tenses and pluralizing nouns and verbs. These syntactic errors are related to interference from the native language because, for example, Indonesian does not have tenses or pluralizing. In learning English, the native language will have some influence. Brown (2007: 187) states that there are two types of interference from the native language in acquiring a foreign language: interfering and facilitating. It is the errors in the interference category that cause syntactic errors. Brown (2007: 26) states that "... the native language of every learner is an extremely significant factor in the acquisition of a new language. Most of the time, we think of the native language as exercising an interfering effect on the target language, and indeed the most salient, observable effect does appear to be one of interference. The majority of a learner's errors in producing the second language ... stem from the learner's assumption that the target language operates like the native language." From this statement, it is clear that syntactic errors can occur due to interference from the native language, causing learners to assume that the foreign language has the same rules as the native language. When looking at one of the causes of syntactic errors, these errors are often caused by the assumption that the foreign language has the same rules as the native language.

Syntactic errors are deviations or violations of the established rules in the field of syntax, which deals with the structure of phrases, clauses, and sentences, as well as the arrangement and relationships between words and larger linguistic units. Syntax explores how words combine to form sentences and the rules governing their formation. In the process of writing in a foreign language, syntactic errors differ from those in one's native language, as they can be influenced by factors such as interference from the native language or differences in grammatical rules. Common syntactic errors in English writing include the absence of a subject, errors in tenses, and problems with pluralizing nouns and verbs. These errors often result from interference from the native language, where learners assume that the foreign language operates similarly to their native language. It is important to recognize that the native language plays a significant role, sometimes interfering, and other times facilitating, in the acquisition of a new language.

## **METHOD**

The research employed a qualitative descriptive approach and an analytical method. The choice of this approach is based on the descriptive nature of the study and the use of analysis. Description is performed on natural phenomena without any experimental intervention or treatment. The research starts with data and utilizes existing theories, leading to the development of new theories. Cresswell (1994) states that qualitative research is descriptive because researchers are interested in the process, meaning, and understanding through words or images. The data collection technique used in the study involved observation and a written test administered to the students as the research instrument. In the

written test, students were asked to write a sentence using the English language. The test was conducted to assess the students' initial English paragraph writing skills and identify the errors they made related to the subject matter.

Researchers used descriptive analysis methods in conducting data analysis. The aim of the research is to identify, describe and classify spelling errors contained in a sentence, as well as explain the sources or causes and communicative impact of these errors. The variable that will be studied is syntactic errors in writing paragraphs using English.

## DISCUSSION

In the 20 student writings analyzed, there were 128 sentences that did not comply with writing rules. Each of these sentences has at least one syntax error. The number of errors in each student's writing varies, ranging from 3 to 27 errors. Syntactic errors found in student writing can be categorized into four categories. First, the error is related to the noun phrase. This category includes errors in noun usage, article usage, or errors in noun phrase structure. Second, errors related to verb phrases. Errors in this category relate to verb usage, verb placement in sentences, or inappropriate verb phrase structure. Third, errors related to the transformation of the structure of phrases, clauses or sentences (transformation). Errors in this category include errors in changing sentence structure from active to passive form, use of the wrong clause, or inappropriate transformation of sentence structure. The fourth error may fall into another category that is not described in detail in the information provided. This research will analyze these errors descriptively, identify the sources or causes of the errors, and explain the communicative impact of these syntactic errors.

In the noun phrase category, errors that occur include inappropriate use of determiners, numbers, pronouns, prepositions, and the use of nouns. Examples of errors in this category are inappropriate use of determiners, incorrect use of numerals, inappropriate use of pronouns, incorrect use of prepositions, and incorrect use of nouns. The verb phrase category involves errors in sentence structure related to certain tenses, such as present tense, present perfect tense, simple past tense, as well as errors in the use of certain verbs that require special sentence patterns. Examples of errors in this category include errors in forming sentences with these tenses and errors in sentence structure caused by the use of certain verbs. In the transformation category, errors focus on the formation of passive sentence structures. Errors in this category can include errors in changing active sentences to passive or errors in the structure of the passive sentence itself. Another category of errors, namely miscellaneous, includes errors that do not fall into the previous category and are random. Examples of errors in this category include errors in word order, incomplete sentences due to the omission of certain grammatical functions, multiple uses of grammatical functions, and errors in the use of conjunctions. To gain an understanding of what changes occur in problematic sentence structures, this research uses a classification based on surface strategy taxonomy. By using this classification, it can be seen whether there are additions, omissions, misformations or misorderings in sentences that have syntactic errors.

### **Errors in noun phrases**

#### **Incorrect use of *determiners***

In student writings, the most frequent blame for determiner use is associated with articles "a" and "the." Of the total 314 wrongs found, 63 (20% of the total) occurred in the use of the determiner. It is important to note, however, that errors in those writings are strictly relevant to the use of the articles "a" and "the." This suggests that students tend to have difficulty understanding and applying the rules of use the articles "a" and "the" in the correct context.

#### **Incorrect use of number**

In the student's English writings, there are 47 errors (15% of total errors) in the use of Numbers. Of these, 33 errors occurred because of the appropriation of plural nouns by single nouns. That is, students use a single noun when they should use plural.

On the contrary, there were 14 errors in the plural plural pronoun. This means that students use plural nouns when supposedly using a single noun. Errors in the use of Numbers indicate that the student has difficulty understanding and applying the rules for using the singular and plural nouns in the correct context.

#### **Pronoun errors**

In these writings, 31 errors were found in the use of pronouns. These errors are distributed in several categories, namely (1) Omission of relative pronouns: There is an error in eliminating relative

pronouns. For example, the omission of "who", "which", or "that" in a sentence.(2.) Substitution of relative pronouns: There are errors in replacing relative pronouns with inappropriate pronouns. For example, replacing "who" with "which" or vice versa.(3)Subject pronoun substitution: There is an error in replacing the subject pronoun with an inappropriate pronoun. For example, using "he" instead of "she" or vice versa.(4)Pronoun object substitution: There is an error in replacing the pronoun object with an incorrect pronoun. For example, using "him" instead of "her" or vice versa.

The total number of errors in the use of pronouns was 10% of the total errors found, namely 31 errors out of a total of 314 errors. This shows that students have difficulty understanding and applying the rules for using pronouns correctly in their writing.

### **Errors in the use of prepositions**

Based on the research results, it was found that only 5% of the total errors that occurred were related to the use of prepositions. There are three types of errors that arise in the use of prepositions, namely omitting prepositions, adding prepositions, and substituting prepositions. The total number of errors in the use of prepositions is around 16 errors. One example of an error found was the change from "...understand to the other ideas..." to "...understand the other ideas...". In this example, there is an omission of the preposition "to" which is not in accordance with the rules for correct use of prepositions.

Errors in the use of prepositions show that students face difficulties in understanding and applying the rules for using prepositions in the correct context.

### **Errors in the use of nouns**

In English, the word "cantik" can be translated as "beautiful," which is an adjective, while the corresponding noun is "beauty." The errors in choosing the appropriate words are caused by interference, which refers to the influence of the native language (Indonesian) on the target language (English). The formation of noun phrases in Indonesian differs from that in English, and there are syntactic differences between the two languages. Negative transfer or interference from the native language to the target language, as proposed by Selinker (1972), is a significant factor contributing to these errors.Errors in forming noun phrases can also occur due to excessive generalization, such as the omission of suffixes (-s/-es) in plural nouns in the category of number. However, in the case of preposition errors, the main factor is often related to interference from the Indonesian language. While the categories of prepositions in English and Indonesian are similar, their usage may differ. These errors frequently arise when students directly translate phrases from Indonesian to English without considering the appropriate use of prepositions.]

In addition to interference, the causes of errors in forming noun phrases include intralingual factors. This is because students learn words separately from their knowledge of the target language, which can differ significantly. The intralingual factors encompass aspects such as excessive generalization, disregard for language rules, and imperfect application of rules, as explained by Richards (1984).By understanding these factors that contribute to errors, appropriate measures can be taken to help students improve their use of nouns and noun phrases in English writing.

### **Errors in verb phrases**

Errors that occur in verb phrases include errors in tense structures, such as omission or addition of "be," verb agreement, and errors in verb forms in relation to tense usage. Additionally, there are errors in the construction of specific verbs, the use of to-infinitives, and gerunds.

Out of a total of 314 errors found by students, approximately 30% or 94 errors are related to verb phrases.The factors that contribute to these errors are overgeneralization and interference. Overgeneralization occurs when students excessively use basic verbs. This can be observed in errors across various tenses that tend to have incorrect forms. Many of these errors occur because basic verbs should have suffixes (-s) or (-ed) added to them in accordance with specific tense structures. The use of basic verbs often represents an unmarked form, while the addition of suffixes transforms them into marked forms, which are known to be challenging to learn according to the theory of second language acquisition (Brown, 2007).

Interference or the influence of the native language (Indonesian) is also a contributing factor to errors in verb phrase usage. Tense structures and verb usage in Indonesian differ from English, and interference from Indonesian can impact understanding and proper usage in English.To help address these errors, it is important to provide a thorough understanding of tense structures and verb usage in English. Structured exercises and relevant contexts in verb usage can also assist students in improving

their errors.

### **Transformations**

The transformation error that occurs is a change in the formation of the passive sentence structure. Found as many as 5% or 16 errors related to this. One example of an error found was the deletion of the auxiliary verb "be", and there were also errors caused by the deletion of the ending "-ed" in the verb. For example, the sentence "activities can be done together" should be "activities can be done together..

## **CONCLUSION**

The error categories used in the analysis are the surface error category and the communication effects category. In the surface category, errors were found in noun phrases, verb phrases, transformations, and other errors (miscellaneous). The total number of sentences that do not comply with writing rules is 128 sentences, with a total of 314 errors. The most dominant syntactic errors in student writing are errors in noun phrases, covering 55% of the errors found, with determiners as the most frequent type of error. Furthermore, in surface taxonomy errors, omissions and additions are the types of errors most often made by students. Meanwhile, in the communication effects category, few errors were found and no overall errors were found. This means that even though students use sentences that do not comply with writing rules, the message or intent of the writing can still be conveyed well. This shows that the errors found are more related to surface aspects, such as grammar and sentence structure, rather than errors that affect overall communication understanding.

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