

ERROR ANALYSIS ON STUDENTS' WRITINGS
(A case study of General English Students of
Intensive English Course Semarang)

Setyo Prasiyanto Cahyono
Dian Nuswantoro University

***Abstract:** this study aims at describing the linguistics errors that appears in the students' writings and discovering kinds of error the students made in their writings. The subject of this research is taken from the students' writings made by the fourth level students of General English of Intensive English Course Semarang. The result of the data reveals that all the students made some errors in their writings. The types of error the students made are developmental, interlingual, ambiguous or other errors. Developmental errors are errors similar to those made by the students learning the target language as their first language. Then, interlingual errors are similar in structure to a semantically equivalent phrase or sentence in the learner's native language. Meanwhile, ambiguous errors are those that could be classified equally well as developmental or interlingual.*

Key words: error, developmental, interlingual, ambiguous

The ability to write well is not a naturally acquired skill; it is usually learned or culturally transmitted as a set of practices in formal instructional settings or other environments. Writing skills must be practiced and learned through experience. Writing also involves composing, which implies the ability either to tell or retell pieces of information in the form of narratives or description, or to transform information into new texts, as in expository or argumentative writing. Perhaps it is best viewed as a continuum of activities that range from more mechanical or formal aspects of "writing down" on the one end, to the more complex act of composing on the other end (Omaggio Hadley, 1993). It is undoubtedly the act of composing, though, which can create problems for students, especially for those writings in a second language (L2) in academic contexts. Formulating new ideas can be difficult because it involves transforming or reworking information, which is much more complex than writing as telling. By putting together concepts and solving problems, the writer engages in "a two-way interaction between continuously developing knowledge and continuously developing text" (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987:12). Indeed, academic writing requires conscious effort and practice in composing, developing, and analyzing ideas. Compared to students writing in their native language (L1), however, students writing in their L2 have to also acquire proficiency in the use of the language as well as writing strategies, techniques and skills. They might also have to deal with instructors and later, faculty members, who may or may not get beyond their language problems when evaluating their work. Although a certain

amount of consciousness-raising on the part of the readers may be warranted, students want to write close to error-free texts and they enter language courses with the expectations of becoming more proficient writers in the L2.

Errors are the flawed side of learner speech or writing. They are those parts of conversation or composition that deviate from some selected norm of mature language performance. Teachers and mothers who have waged long and patient battles against their students' or children's language errors have come to realize that making errors is an inevitable part of learning. People cannot learn language without first systematically committing errors. Errors are not generally thought of as errors in the same sense as those produced by L2 learners. George in Ellis (1994:47) mentions that whereas L2 learners' errors are generally viewed as 'unwanted forms', children's errors are seen as 'transitional forms' and adult native speakers' errors as 'slips of the tongue'.

Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982:138) state that studying learners' errors serves two major purposes: (1) it provides data from which inferences about the nature of the language learning process can be made; and (2) it indicates to teachers and curriculum developers which part of the target language students have most difficulty producing correctly and which error types detract most from a learner's ability to communicate effectively. In an early, seminal article, Corder (quoted by Ellis) noted that errors could be significant in three ways: (1) they provided the teacher with information about how much the learner had learnt, (2) they provided the researcher with evidence of how language was learnt, and (3) they served as devices by which the learner discovered the rules of the target language. Whereas (1) reflects the traditional role of Error Analysis (EA), (2) provides a new role that is of primary interest to the L2 researcher because it could be shed light on (3) – the process of L2 acquisition

Error analysis has yielded insights into the L2 acquisition process that have stimulated major changes in teaching practices. Perhaps its most controversial contribution has been the discovery that the majority of the grammatical errors second language learners make do not reflect the learner's mother tongue but are very much like those young children make as they learn a first language. Researchers have found that like L1 learners' errors, most of the errors L2 learners make indicate they are gradually building an L2 rule system.

This research tries to investigate errors in students' writing with several considerations and reasons. First, the students' writing that is analyzed in this research is in the form of paragraph. As it is a paragraph, it has more than two sentences, and the sentences are considered long. Second, the students who wrote the paragraph are those on the fourth level of General English at Intensive English Course. They have known about the mechanics for writing skill on their level, such as grammar, punctuation and capitalization, unity and coherence, style, etc. Considering this fact, it is expected that the students wrote paragraph with less errors. In line with the reasons above, the problems which are presented in this paper are:

1. What kinds of linguistic errors are there in students' writing?
2. What kinds of error students make in their writing? Whether it is developmental, interlingual, ambiguous, or other error?

Error Types Based on Comparative Taxonomy

The classification of errors in a comparative taxonomy is based on comparisons between the structure of L2 errors and certain other types of constructions. For example, if one were to use a comparative taxonomy to classify the errors of a Korean student learning English, one might compare the structure of the student's errors to that of errors reported for children acquiring English as a first language.

In the research literature, L2 errors have most frequently been compared to errors made by children learning the target language as their first language and to equivalent phrases or sentences in the learner's mother tongue. These comparisons have yielded the two major error categories in this taxonomy: developmental errors and interlingual errors. Two other categories that have been used in comparative analysis taxonomies are derived from the first two: ambiguous errors, which are classifiable as either developmental or interlingual; and, of course, the grab bag category, Other, which are neither.

Developmental Errors

Developmental errors are errors similar to those made by children learning the target language as their first language. Take, for example, the following utterance made by a Spanish child learning English:

Dog eat it.

The omission of the article and the past tense marker may be classified as developmental because these are also found in the speech of children learning English as their first language.

Two considerations underlie the interest in comparing L2 and L1 acquisition errors. The first has to do with facilitating L2 theoretical development. If characteristics common to both L1 and L2 acquisition could be identified, theoretical inferences that have been drawn from the large pool of L1 research data may be applicable to L2 acquisition theory as well.

The second consideration has to do with the role of the first language when learning a second. Since children acquiring a first language have not experienced learning a previous language, the errors they make cannot possibly be due to any interference from another language. When such errors are made by second language learners, it would be reasonable to hypothesize that the mental mechanisms underlying general language development come into play, not the rules and structures of the learner's native language.

Interlingual Errors

Interlingual errors are similar in structure to a semantically equivalent phrase or sentence in the learner's native language. To identify an interlingual error, researchers usually translate the grammatical form of the learner's phrase or sentence into the learner's first language to see if similarities exist. Then, compare both sentences to see if the learner's L1 structure is discernible in the L2 sentence.

Interlingual errors, as defined here, simply refers to L2 errors that reflect native language structure, regardless of the internal processes or external conditions that spawned them.

Ambiguous Errors

Ambiguous errors are those that could be classified equally well as developmental or interlingual. That is because these errors reflect the learner's native language structure, and at the same time, they are of the type found in the speech of children acquiring a first language. For example, in the utterance

I no have car

The negative construction reflects the learner's native Spanish and is also characteristic of the speech of children learning English as their first language.

The ambiguous category is particularly important in a comparative taxonomy. Assigning such errors to a separate category ensures the clarity of the findings resulting from a comparative error analysis and enables researchers to draw clear theoretical inferences from the rest of the data.

Other Errors

Few taxonomies are complete without a grab bag for items that don't fit into any other category. For example, in the utterance

She do hungry

The speaker used neither her native Spanish structure (the use of *have* for *is* as in *she have hungry*), nor an L2 developmental form such as *she hungry* where the auxiliary is omitted altogether. Such an error would go into the other category.

RESEARCH METHOD

Data and Subjects

Students' writing is the object of this research. It is in the form of paragraph in which there are more than 2 sentences in each paragraph. The students here refer to the Fourth Level students of General English, Intensive English Course Semarang.

Unit of Analysis

This research deals with **morpheme** or **word error** in students' writings.

Method of Data Collection and Analysis

The data of the students' writing is obtained from the writing task that was given to them. The data is the natural writing data. There are about 40 students. They are asked to write paragraph of a certain topic, and for the sake of this research, random sampling is used to get 10 students' writing as the sample of this research, regardless the score they get and the level of their writing ability. However, the sample is conditioned to represent all students' writing ability (low, mid, and high).

Developmental Errors

Developmental errors are kinds of errors mostly the students made in their writing. In this case, the students usually made ungrammatical writing especially in using of simple past tense, this errors are the highest errors found in the students' writings. These errors cover possessive case incorrect: use of subject pronoun instead of object pronoun, inappropriate choice of word, noun phrase: misuse of to be, and the auxiliary system: modal: misformation of the next verbal verb. The following sentences are the examples of error which are categorized into developmental errors.

- I am very happy.
- I have many friends in there.
- Actually I love they
- I have doing my examination in April
- My point not satisfied in math
- I can't forgot my friends in senior high school

Interlingual Errors

Interlingual errors are kinds of error where the students sometimes try to translate their source language into target language. Some errors the students mostly produced are noun phrase: determiner: use of article redundant use of article *a*, misplacement of conjunction: *because*, *and*, *but* at the beginning of a clause, use of preposition: redundant use of *in*, use of possessive pronoun: redundant use of *my*. Those errors can be seen in the examples given below.

- Because in grade 9 I have many friends in there
- I have many friends in there
- I have doing my examination in April
- I want to continue in SMK 2
- I hope I receive in there.

Ambiguous Errors

Ambiguous errors are those that could be segmented equally well as developmental or interlingual. That is because these errors reflect the learner's native language structure, and at the same time, they are of the type found in the speech of children acquiring a first language. In the tenth data of the students' writing, there is not found ambiguity sentence in the students' writings. It means that the students can avoid writing more than one possible meaning in their writings.

Other Errors

This type of errors is the least found in the students' writings. This error is said as other errors since the errors do not fit into any other category. The

following sentences are the examples of other errors found in the students' writings.

- I'm very love there
- Suddenly my father come out from my class and brought the report, and I got nice report.
- The cause of air pollution is the used of machine and the effect is the air is not good for health and also incomfortable.
- The cause of water pollution is throwing the waste into the river and the effect is water in the river is not clean.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded, that, there is a tendency that the longer the writing students make, the more errors they will make. The linguistic error mostly made by the students of General English of Intensive English Course is Noun Phrase. There are 26 cases of this error. Next, there is Simple Past Tense incorrect errors, which constitute 22 cases. Then, it is followed by Verb phrase with 14 errors. Errors in use of preposition reached up to 13 cases, whereas misplacement of conjunction 12 errors. Other errors have quite balance appearance that is less than 6.

From 142 errors students made in their writing, 64.5% is developmental error, 28.1% is interlingual error, and the rest, 7.7%, is other error. This fact supports the so far research in error analysis of second language acquisition that second language learners' errors are of developmental kinds. Interlanguage errors happened in this research is mostly in the noun phrase and simple past tense incorrect in Indonesian sentence. In Indonesian sentence it is enough to say "Karena di kelas 9 saya punya banyak teman disana" and when it is translated word-by-word the English version will *Because in grade 9 I have many friends in there*. This error commonly happens among Indonesian students.

The second one is about simple past tense. In Indonesia, simple past tense is formed in the construction of simple present.

In line with the finding above, teachers and curriculum developers should pay attention to this, and it is suggested they pay more attention to the errors above.

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APPENDIX

Text 1

When I was in a grade 9, I'm very happy. Because in grade 9 I have many friends in there. Actually I love they. I have doing my examination in april. And the result I with my friends graduate all. I'm very happy. After I hear I graduate I with my friends go to "NGREMBEL". My point not satisfied in math. But in English I got 8. yesterday I take my SKHU in my school. And my plan I want to continue in SMK 2. I hope I receive in there. Because I want school in there. I can't forgot my friends in junior high school. I'm very love there.

Text 2

In last Saturday, I'm with my father went to SMPN 3 to got the school report. I hoped I got a nice report. And then I waiting in front of the class with my friend. Suddenly my father come out from my class and brought the report, and I got nice report. I got 9.20 in English language, 8.20 in mathematic , and 8.33 in Indonesian language. After got the report I have some plan. There is I want to join with my friend in SMA 3. then I want to join in SMA 1. and the last I want to buy a new computer.

Text 3

Since the industry in this country was advance. Many factory used the machine to process their product. The effect from the machine is pollution. The high pollution are air pollution and water pollution. The first cause of pollution is air pollution. The cause of air pollution is the used of machine and the effect is the air is not good for health and also uncomfortable. Second pollution is water pollution. The cause of water pollution is throwing the waste into the river and the effect is water in the river is not clean.

Text 4

As we all know, in these recent months, rainy season is happened in Indonesia. We should get ready to face this kind of weather because it can cause some unpleasant things for some people. First of all, in rainy season, it is not a new thing if rain is happen everyday. Well, rain may cause flood if we are not take care our environment properly. In this weather, the wet condition of environment makes many diseases increase. Rain that's happen all day long sometimes makes some disturbance in the activities of people. Housewives sometimes get complain about their clothes that is never dry. And because of the rain, sometimes our trips must be delayed because there are some troubles in the transportation line.

Text 5

There are a lot of effect from the earth quake which happened on May 27, 2006 in Yogyakarta. For the first effect is a lot of people lost their house and now they are live on tend from the government. Second, a big part of them lost their family which died from that quake. Third, a lot of them lost their job, so a lot of unemployment there.

Text 6

I have problem with my boyfriend. Sometimes I feel upset with him. He always joules without any reason. The thing that makes me upset his exgirlfriend often call him. Actually he doesn't like again with her. She ever ask him to go up with him. But my boyfriend refuse while upset with her.

Text 7

When I was in second grade of senior high school exactly in first semester, I have a great experience. I was join Biology Olympiad in Semarang University. I met mush student from many cities in my province, central Java. I met a student from Taruna Nusantara senior high school. He is very handsome and clever and I met other students from other famous school. In a first test, I have a very nervous test because I must face smart students from many cities. It was really great experience.

Text 8

Recently, earthquake are happened in our country, for example tsunami, flood and tornado. Those earthquake have many effects such as, first, many people were died. Second, they lost their families, pets, houses, and their properties. Third, they are suffered, hungry and near with diseases. The last effects is many children lost their school so they will far from clever and lost many information. Because of the earthquale our country is knows as a poor country, poor of knowledge and poor as human sources.

Text 9

My best friend is Fadhillah Rachmawati. She is my classmate. We met in first grade in our junior high school. We often share about aour vacation, subject, our boyfriend and etc. we

don't in chairmate. We like going to mall together. She know how about myself and I too. She often gave me surprise. I hope we meet in third grade in junior high school.

Text 10

I have a brother. His name's Bahtiar. He just graduate from senior high school. He is 17 years old. He planned to continue his study in UNDIP. He wants to be an architect. He is a good boy. He always tidy up his room everyday. He always help my parents do the house work too. But he is temperamental. He often get upset easily. But for me, he is a good brother.