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# Grammatical Analysis of Students' Reflective Writing

*by* Bram Barli

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## Grammatical Analysis of Students' Reflective Writing

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### Abstract

Grammar is a crucial element in communication, especially in a second language, and without the organization of grammar, language exchange is intruded. This paper explored grammatical issues in students' reflective writing. Data were collected from reflective writing products of a number of students belonging to a class of the English Education Master's Program of Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The collected data were analyzed to examine grammatical issues encountered by the students using Gulay, Burt, and Krashen's (1982) surface strategy taxonomy, which covers omission, addition, misinformation, and misordering errors. Results showed there existed 41 errors in total and were distributed in the following categories: 23 errors of others (other types), six omission errors, five addition errors, four misinformation errors, and three misordering errors. It is expected that the findings can assist learners in overcoming grammatical issues so that they can improve their English grammar and writing skills.

**Keywords:** *grammatical analysis, grammar error, reflective writing*

### INTRODUCTION

Many components of writing need to be considered in producing a good and comprehensible piece of work. Thus, making this language skill demanding as the process of writing includes organizing ideas, information and the language itself. The practice is needed to become good at something and in this case, writing needs a lot of practice, as it is time-consuming and takes a lot of concentration as well as guidance and needs effort by both teachers and students themselves (Hinkel, 2013). In this case, creative writing in the academic environment mirrors "education as exploration" and highlights self-expression through the progress of their learning (Anae, 2014). This also needs cultural context as language is inseparable from culture, and this context can be taken as scaffolding (Pople, 2014). The cultural context within this study refers to the classroom setting in which the creative writing tasks are assigned to the students. Utilizing concepts in teaching gives a positive impact on learning (Saaristo, 2015). Further, an important aspect of writing is the appropriate use of grammar (Hinkel, 2013) and that writing itself has its different aspects from other skills of language (Harmer, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> This study is to investigate the grammar abilities of a group of students at the English Education Master's Program at a university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. As these students are expected to become educators of English, and that they will pass on their language knowledge and skills to students, it is important to identify their abilities – to analyze grammatical issues in writing. Creative writing was chosen as it provides the freedom that students have in expressing their ideas (Anae, 2014). Within this, grammar ability is needed to create and understand sentence structure which in this case the target language is English (Chomsky, 1965). The importance of grammar ability is obvious and if the grammatical rules are omitted, communication would be interrupted (Harmer, 2002). Grammar is what shapes sentences and that it should not be absent or incorrect and to be native-like (Chomsky, 1965). Although this may be so, even native speakers of English may also produce incorrect grammar in their language discourse, and therefore making it even more difficult for second language learners of English to have consistent grammar skills and abilities, including using correct grammar in creative and reflective writing.

Creative writing has been a debatable topic in the aid of learning a second language (Koehler, 2013), and that even people having English as their mother tongue often make errors and mistakes in language output, which also includes speaking as well as writing. Creative writing, according to Agus and Menikwati (2011), involves imagination and words to describe and express ideas. Moreover, reflective writing is another form of writing that also needs to be developed, as it is the impression that students gain, and then reflected on afterward. Analysis of written products especially in the second language likewise has been investigated in the field of education for a long time. The reasoning behind this is that it would help identify in what aspects learners need to improve on in the case of producing written work and how these can be fixed in the future use of the English language in terms of learning and teaching the second language. Further, investigation of finding solutions by educators for their students can also become the next step of this research.

This study covered recent related studies in conducting the research and analyzing the data. Specifically, the study focused on the following question, namely: what grammatical errors do the students of the English Education Master's Program of Sanata Dharma University make in their reflective writing products?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Writing Skills*

Writing has been an essential part of language as it is also considered as a means of communication. Literature in this case has been proven by Hismanoglu (2005) to being an essential helping aspect for learners to learn a second language. Ostrom (2012) mentioned that creative writing can create space for knowing and understanding information. Moreover, creative writing has been a skill that has been taught in institutions to let students express their thoughts on an assigned topic within the class, and considered as freedom and as exploration (Anae, 2014). Anae (2014) stated that it is crucial for students to reach their creativity and self-expression. Anae (2014) also mentioned that the current curriculum has put aside the urgency of creative writing, forming a rigid outline of writing productions within the class. In this case, the Australian curriculum for schools has created different importance on creativity and critical writing, which makes it more difficult for students to produce a creative writing piece (McGaw, 2013). Harper (2014) supported McGaw's proposition that creative writing research is

based on the concerns of creativity and being critical. Further, Koehler (2013) also stated the urgency of extended research on understanding the process of creative writing and its impacts on making produced writing pieces, in practice and theory. The focus of making creative writing pieces is on the individuals' abilities in personal motivation in grasping knowledge for their creativity; therefore, this needs a lot of practice for the long term (Harper, 2014).

One of the four skills of language that needs to be paid attention to, as well as to become good at is writing, as stated above. Many components play a role in forming a well-written piece, especially in the academic setting. The product should be concise and coherent, with a good organization of ideas being put forward so that it is clear what is being conveyed by writers.

Reflective writing, according to Henter and Indreica (2014), is a set of triggers in developing metacognitive skills for students. Within the reflections, students can express their thoughts on their work progress, the awareness of the use of strategies in a conscious state of mind, as well as their beliefs toward their learning process as well as future learning plans (Henter & Indreica, 2014). Additionally, reflective writing, as proposed by Jasper (2005), is a method for emphasizing reflective practice, where experience can result in learning knowledge. This technique of conducting a class can improve critical thinking skills, analytical skills, cognitive abilities, and creativity, connecting experience, and knowledge at the same time (Jasper, 2005). Effective reflective writing can also give a positive impact as stated by Shum et al. (2017) by deepening a person's conception skills, understanding their identity growth and bettering learning experience. Researchers have believed that reflective writing promotes the progress and skills of teacher understanding in their process of conducting the class (Bain, Ballantyne, Packer, & Mills, 1999).

### *Error Analysis*

Learners of language experience a different pace of learning according to their ability in absorbing language input and producing language output, no matter if the language is their mother tongue or second language. The study of error analysis, according to Khansir (2012), is a linguistic study focusing on learners' errors in producing the target language having the comparison of the target language and the language produced by second language learners. Boss (2005) stated that a reason for a second language learner to produce errors is due to the meddling of their mother tongue competence. This can be positive as well as negative language transfers, where the positive language transfer is from the similarity of mother and target language, whereas negative language transfer is from the difference of language forms between mother and target language (Boss, 2005). Both these learners experience a state where they construct their language competence, by making errors and mistakes, due to the absence of connection within their brain, and that this can be overcome by practicing. Conditions that a language learner is learning can scaffold their future ability in language, such as the repetition that they can deliver may form fossilizing on language knowledge that could be produced onwards in the future. Thus, avoiding making errors in language discourse is important, as Dulay et al. (1982) have emphasized that errors are the uttered language of an individual without the awareness of the language learner breaking the rules of the language itself and that this is a process that cannot be prevented at all.

The importance of investigating errors in language learning hence becomes the foundation that researchers ought to find solutions to grammatical issues or errors, or at



least to minimize such errors in the target language, namely English. Further, syllabuses, curriculum design, and lesson plans can be designed in accordance with the needs of the research that has been done on error analysis to avoid repetition of errors and giving correct language production. Dulay et al. (1982) have also stated that these studies have helped with curriculum design to better the abilities of second language learners. Dulay et al. (1982) formulated the common errors that have been uttered by second language learners as follows.

1. **Omitting grammatical morphemes:** The language learner unsuccessfully produces a word that does not specifically change the meaning of the intended utterance.
2. **Double marking:** This refers to when an individual utters a grammar feature more than once.
3. **Regularizing:** This refers to the situation when a grammar rule is put into regular grammar rule. For example, “womens” when it should be “women”.
4. **Using archiforms:** This happens when a person cannot differentiate the use of “him” and “he” and therefore mixes them.
5. **Using two or more forms in random alternation**
6. **Misordering:** This refers to when words are jumbled in spoken or written form.

There are aspects that play a role in the success of language utterance. Chomsky (1965) underlined that two factors can hinder the creation and production of correct language function: the first factor is “performance” where it is a physique aspect of language production being neglected due to fatigue and disruptions from being attentive and the second factor is “competence” which the learner of the language is unaware on the mistakes of not delivering correct grammar rules in their speech or written production. Corder (1967) differentiated between errors and mistakes in language production. Errors are defined as learner’s development throughout their language learning in second language acquisition whilst mistakes are language dysfunctions produced by the negligence of an individual’s learned language functions (Corder, 1967). Finding the significance of the errors and mistakes can be a challenge as it can be difficult to uncover and that deep investigation is needed to identify such differences (Dulay et al, 1982). This investigation in particular will focus on errors as a whole, not being specific to errors nor mistakes. Dulay et al (1982) have categorized three different errors produced by second language learners, namely developmental, interlingual, and ambiguous errors.

## METHOD

### *Research Method*

This study was a content analysis. Ary, Jacobs, and Razavieh (2002) stated that within a content analysis, identification of items, such as themes and categories are presented. Likewise, objectives that play part in such analysis may include the limitation of tendencies, partiality or prejudice; categorizing the different types of errors and lack of awareness in students’ writing pieces; the explanation of the current state of practice; and to describe the relevance of importance and interest in a topic assigned as their written production. This study focused on students’ grammatical errors in their written reflections.

### *Research Setting*

The research was conducted at Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, and the data consisted of 10 students’ writing products. The students were completing their

Master's study in English Language Education and the writing pieces were taken from a course called Teaching English as a Lingua Franca. In the course, the students were assigned to their reflections in understanding and interacting with digital media throughout their lifetime.

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### Data Analysis

The analysis of data within research is the main essence and the body of the research itself (Flick, 2014). This step within the study has been designed to achieve the results. The data were the writing products of part of the course that had been assigned by the investigators and then the data were analyzed using Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's surface structure taxonomy of different types of errors.

Below are the four main categories, together with their subcategories, of second language discourse variety according to Dulay et al. (1982):

- 3 MISSION
- ADDITION
  - Double-marking
  - Regularization
  - Simple addition
- MISINFORMATION
  - Regularization
  - Archiforms
  - Alternating forms
- MISORDERING

The categories were then adapted and codes were suggested for the research, as presented in the table below:

Category	Sub-category	Code
OMISSION		e1-a
ADDITION	Double-marking	e2-a
	Regularization	e2-b
	Simple addition	e2-c
MISINFORMATION	Regularization	e3-a
	Archiforms	e3-b
	Alternating forms	e3-c
MISORDERING		e4-a
OTHERS	Verbs of tense	e5-a
	Punctuation	e5-b
	Preposition	e5-c

The categories above assisted the researchers in sorting out the essential findings of the study. After formulating the codes for the texts of the students, the analysis would be conducted by filtering the common errors that have been labelled as omission, addition, misinformation, misordering, and others. The errors would be tallied as the source of data in which it would then be taken as a conclusion by a descriptive data presentation.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis, the researchers identified the grammatical errors made by the participants in their reflective writing pieces which consisted of one to two pages. The data were once again analyzed using the guidelines of error variables proposed by Dulay et al. (1982).

In the writing products which were examined, most of the errors made by the participants were in the category of OTHERS, amounting up to 23 errors. It was then followed by the errors of OMISSION, where the participants missed using the word “the” to complete a noun, with 6 errors, then 5 errors of ADDITION, 4 errors in MISINFORMATION and lastly 3 errors of MISORDERING. In total, the researchers identified 41 errors in all eight writing products. To exemplify the students’ grammatical errors, the researchers provided two examples of each category. First, the examples of OTHERS were “... my friend told me ... so I pay more attention ...” (verb of tense problem: told [past tense] and pay [present tense]) and “... for example learning theories ...” (missing a comma [punctuation] after the word ‘example’). Second, the examples of OMISSION were “... made use of internet ...” (missing ‘the’ before ‘internet’) and “... I made presentation ...” (missing ‘a’ before ‘presentation’). Third, the examples of ADDITION were “... education is could not be separated ...” (the addition of unnecessary “is”) and “... where are our friends have lunch ...” (the addition of unnecessary “are”). Fourth, the examples of MISINFORMATION were “... impact for learning ...” (“on” should replace “for”) and “... to be attentive of the convenience ...” (“to” should replace “of”). Fifth, the examples of MISORDERING were “There is no limitation where are the resources from ...” (“are” should appear after “resources”) and “Almost of all tasks ...” (“of” should appear after “all” and “the” should be added before “tasks”).

The surface structure taxonomy (Dulay et al., 1982) was divided into four different types of errors, namely the omission, addition, misinformation, and misordering. An omission is where language production has an absence of vocabulary although this may not change the meaning being conveyed by the speaker or writer. Addition is a language error where a word is added to a sentence making addition toward a well-functioning phrase, this includes double-marking, regularization, and simple addition. Misinformation is where morpheme and structure are incorrect, which also has the subcategories, namely regularization, archi-forms, and alternating forms. Lastly, misordering is the error that produces improper vocabulary placement of morpheme or morphemes in a sentence.

All in all, there was evidence that students were still not completely aware of the errors that they made during their writing session, especially within this group of students when reflective writing. Many common errors play a role in expressing their thoughts on the topic of “Digital Media Use”. Although this may be so, the errors made were mostly from the category of OTHERS. The researchers considered these mistakes as common mistakes. This may be because the subjects, as Corder (1967) stated, were being unaware of the mistakes made, and that these are not errors. The reason for the statement before was that the students were graduate students of the English Education Master’s Program, who were expected to comprehend all the grammar rules of English as they would become educators of English in the future. Nevertheless, students had expressed their ideas through creative writing and reflective writing.

## CONCLUSION



Based on the analysis results, in total 41 grammatical errors were identified in the students' writing products. Specifically, there existed 23 errors of others, six omission errors, five addition errors, four misinformation errors, and three misordering errors. In conclusion, more work needs to be done to improve the grammar competence of the students who would become English educators in the future. However, the researchers analyzed a relatively small size of data and have not included factors that can affect the production of the subjects, such as external and internal factors. Therefore, further studies should be conducted to cover more data to achieve more conclusive solutions in solving these grammatical errors in creative and reflective writing products.

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