

**AN ANALYSIS OF GRAMMATICAL ERRORS MADE BY THIRD  
YEAR STUDENTS OF ENGLISH STUDY PROGRAM  
UNIVERSITAS RIAU IN WRITING AN  
ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY**

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**Abstract:** *This descriptive study aims to find out the grammatical errors, and the most frequent error made by the third year students of English study program Universitas Riau in writing an argumentative essay. The population of this study was the third year students of English study program Universitas Riau in the academic year 2017/2018. The third semester students were consisted of 90 as the population in this research. Thirty (30) students were taken as the sample. The method used in this research is a descriptive method. The data were collected using a written test, and were analyzed by using Error Analysis Technique. The research findings reveal that the grammatical errors occurred were Subject verb agreement, Verb tense and form, Word order, Plurality, Preposition, Articles, Passive voice, and Auxiliary; the most frequent error was in Subject-Verb Agreement with 127 (29%) frequency.*

**Keywords:** *Grammar, Error, Errors Analysis, Argumentative Essay*

# ANALISIS KESALAHAN GRAMMATIK YANG DIBUAT OLEH SISWA KETIGA PROGRAM STUDI INGGRIS UNIVERSITAS RIAU MENULIS SEBUAH ESAI ARGUMENTATIF

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**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui kesalahan tata bahasa dan kesalahan yang paling sering dibuat oleh mahasiswa tahun ketiga program studi Bahasa Inggris Universitas Riau dalam menulis esai argumentatif. Populasi penelitian ini adalah siswa tahun ketiga program studi Bahasa Inggris Universitas Riau pada tahun akademik 2017/2018. Siswa semester ketiga terdiri dari 90 sebagai populasi dalam penelitian ini. Tiga puluh (30) mahasiswa dipilih sebagai sampel. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan tes tertulis, dan dianalisis dengan menggunakan Teknik Analisis Kesalahan. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan kesalahan tata bahasa yang terjadi adalah *Subject verb agreement, Verb tense and form, Word order, Plurality, Preposition, Articles, Passive voice, and Auxiliary*; kesalahan yang paling sering muncul adalah *subject-verb agreement* dengan frekuensi 127 (29%).

**Kata Kunci:** Kesalahan Grammatik, Kesalahan, Analisis Kesalahan, Esai Argumentatif

## INTRODUCTION

Writing is a complex task; it is the “most difficult of the language abilities and skills to acquire” (Allen & Corder, 1974). It contains many language aspects, including grammar. Because of the complexity, many language learners find difficulties in mastering writing skill. Most EFL learners tend to make errors in writing regardless of a long period of their English study (Wee, Sim, and Jusoff, 2009).

Writing is a crucial component of language performance. English writing in both educational and professional area is increasingly important in countries of non-native speakers of English (Leki, 2001). Most university students are required to write a variety genres of writing, including business writing, papers, research proposal, and essays. A good writing requires a text with complexity of syntax and morphology, a wide range of vocabulary, and a good command over conventional forms and over the means of signaling the relation of the texts (Cumming, 2001). With all these details, the foreign language students find English writing is a difficult assignment. It is hard not to make errors in writing.

It is not for students easy to write any different types of writing. They may find different difficulties in every process of writing. Errors in writing an essay may occur as the effect of small number of English vocabularies and grammar rules, and seldom put that knowledge into practical use. In some cases, the majority of students are still translating words, phrases, and sentences from their mother tongue to English with often very strange results. Writing is a skill that is not only tested in every valid language examination, but also a skill that learners should possess and demonstrate in academic contexts.

Errors according to Brown (2007) are the result of one’s systematic competence. An error reveals a portion of one’s competence in the target language. Myles (2002) mentions that foreign-language students might produce errors. In fact, even in their last writing class, many students still have problems concerning Basic English grammar. So, it might be useful for learners to find out how to compose grammatically-correct sentences. An evidence of the growing need to master essay writing has become increasingly important in Indonesia. The students need to master how to transfer the knowledge of grammatical concepts to their written work, so that they will not commit many grammatical errors in writing.

Errors are the parts or process which cannot be separated from the language learning especially English as foreign language. It means that the students’ errors are not the failure of the language learning process. Furthermore, the errors are signs that the students’ really learn the foreign language, because when they make errors, after that the teacher will give an explanation more to correct the errors and it can also improve their knowledge. Students who do not make errors in learning a language automatically do not need to be treated and the teacher will never be able to improve it. The teachers are aware that the students’ errors as the process of learning in understanding the lesson and it needs to be analyzed carefully in order to increase the students’ capability. The analysis of errors is badly needed to explore and to get the conclusion in this research. It may be concluded that error analysis is one of fields included in the language learning. Error is the process or parts which cannot be separated of the language learning especially in writing as the crucial subject for the students in writing an argumentative essay.

Errors that the students make are not bad, because learning is fundamentally a process that involves making of mistakes and errors. Making errors is a natural and unavoidable part of the process of learning English. Errors should not be seen as issues to overcome, but rather as normal and inevitable features indicating the strategies that learners use. If a regular pattern of errors could be observed in the performance of all learners in a given situation and if learners were seen to progress through this pattern, their errors could be taken as evidence not of failure but of success and achievement in learning.

Nowadays, Indonesian people tend to commit error in writing. Error is different from mistake. Without deep understanding, people usually tend to see the errors and mistakes similarly. Brown (2007) gave the explanation about mistake that all native speakers make mistakes, or have a "performance lapse". He also stated that a mistake refers to a performance error that is either a random guess or a "slip", in that it is a failure to utilize a known system correctly. Brown added that all people make mistakes in both natives and second language situation. Therefore, whether they are native speakers or second language learners, they probably could make mistakes in producing the language. Mistakes occur because the learners know the system but they fail to use it. Meanwhile, errors according to Brown (2007) are the result of one's systematic competence. An error reveals a portion of one's competence in the target language.

Therefore, an analysis is needed to analyze mistakes and errors. It is called error analysis. Taringan (1988) states that error analysis is needed to know the sources of the errors, to revise the errors and to prevent the same kinds of errors, so that the students can use the language properly.

This research is conducted based on the phenomena and theories above. The writer wants to make a research to analyze errors in students' writing skill. The writer chooses Argumentative Essay as the writing task to be done by the Sixth Semester Students of The English study program of The Teachers' Training and Education Faculty, Universitas Riau. Furthermore, the writer hopes the result of this research will be beneficial and useful for teaching and learning and gives some contribution to reduce the difficulties in learning English.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The data of this research were all forms of linguistic errors produced by the third year students in English Department of Teacher Training and Education Faculty Universitas Riau. The research was held on May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2018 in Faculty of Teachers Training and Education, Universitas Riau. The method used in this research is a descriptive method. Descriptive method can be defined as a "research including surveys and fact-finding enquiries of different kinds. The major purpose of a descriptive research is a description of the state of affairs as it exists at present" (Kothari, 2004).

In this study, the population of this research was the third year students of English study program of Universitas Riau in academic year 2017/2018. Where the sixth-semester consists of three classes and each class consists of 30 students so the population was 90 students of English department Universitas Riau.

This research used written test as the instrument. In this test, the participants were asked to write an argumentative essay based on the title given. They were provided with three different topics as follows.

1. *Group assignment is better than individual assignment*
2. *Students should be allowed to use mobile phones at school.*
3. *English lecturer should speak English in teaching.*

The participants were given 100 minutes to finish their essay. They chose one of the titles and they must write the essay based on the title they chose. The data collected from written test were analyzed by using error analysis technique. The error analysis of this research consists of several common steps of error analysis adopted from Corder (1974) in Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005). There are five steps in conducting error analysis; collecting the data, identification of errors, description of errors, explanation of errors, and error evaluation.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this study, the writer found eight common grammatical errors as stated by Hourani (2008). They were Passive Voice, Verb Tense and Form, Subject-Verb Agreement, Word Order, Prepositions, Articles, Plurality, and Auxiliary. Table 4.1 shows the analysis of grammatical errors based on type of error, number of errors and percentage of errors committed by the students.

**Table 1 Grammatical errors made by English students**

|   | <b>Grammatical Error Items</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage</b> | <b>Number of Participants Made Errors</b> |
|---|--------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|---|
| 1 | Passive Voice                  | 21               | 5%                | 23  |
| 2 | Verb Tense and Form            | 100              | 23%               | 28  |
| 3 | Subject-Verb Agreement         | 127              | 29%               | 28  |
| 4 | Word Order                     | 59               | 13%               | 28  |
| 5 | Preposition                    | 37               | 8%                | 28  |
| 6 | Article                        | 35               | 8%                | 26  |
| 7 | Plurality                      | 41               | 9%                | 27  |
| 8 | Auxiliary                      | 18               | 4%                | 23  |
|   | <b>Total</b>                   | <b>438</b>       | <b>100%</b>       |   |

The table shows the result of grammatical errors in writing an argumentative errors made by 28 participants of this study. The participants made 438 errors in writing their essays. There are 21 errors (5%) in passive voice, 100 errors (23%) in verb tense and form, 127 errors (29%) in subject-verb agreement, 59 errors (13%) in word order, 37 errors (8%) in preposition, 35 errors (8%) in articles, 41 errors (9%) in plurality, and 18 error (4%) in auxiliary.

Table 1 shows the most frequent errors made by the students in writing an argumentative essay. The most frequent errors made by the third year students in writing an argumentative essay were Subject-Verb agreement (29%) followed by Verb

tense and Form (23%) and word order (13%), Plurality (9%), article and preposition with 8% each, passive voice (5%), and the last one Auxiliary (4%).

## **Interpretation and Discussion of the Research Findings**

In table 1, the writer make a list of grammatical errors made by the third year students of English Study Program Universitas Riau based on the percenatage of each error as follows.

1. Subject verb agreement (29%)
2. Verb tense and form (23%)
3. Word order (13%)
4. Plurality (9%)
5. Preposition (8%)
6. Articles (8%)
7. Passive voice (5%)
8. Auxiliary (4%)

### **1. Interpretation of Results**

#### **a. Subject-Verb Agreement**

Subjects and verbs must agree with one another in number (singular or plural). Thus, if a subject (the person or thing doing the action) is singular, its verb (the word representing the action) must also be singular; if a subject is plural, its verb must also be plural.

The most common type of error made by students in the study group is subject verb agreement. In this case, the subject and the verb phrase in the English sentence should agree in number and person. This was the area with the highest sampling with a total of 127 attempts. It is evident that this item had the highest percentage of errors (29%) in this study. Although the students still make errors, they do lack a basic understanding of subject-verb agreement.

Examples of errors in Subject-Verb Agreement:

“it *make* students become addicted”

“in order to prevent and *solved*...”

In Bahasa, there is no such subject-verb agreement. A possible explanation why students tend to add –s after plural, and omit –s after singular may due to overgeneralization of the rule. Students overgeneralize the plural by adding the plural –s to the verb that follows and omit the –s in the verb if the subject is singular. Most English students are confused to differentiate between the third person singular (–s) and the plural (-s). They tend to add –s to the verb if the subject is plural and omit –s if the subject is singular. Handrickson (1979) in his study found out that the most common errors were resulted from subject-verb agreement.

## b. Verb Tense and Form

Errors of wrong tense or wrong verb occur when a learner uses the wrong verb tense in a certain sentence. The results of this study reveal that the participants were not aware of applying the correct tense to the verb in the sentences.

The use of verb tense shows that the English students still find a difficulty about when and how to use the tense and the form of the verb. There are 100 errors with rate 23% made by the students. It is the second highest error made by English students. The tenses most commonly misused were the simple past tense, future tense, past perfect and simple present. It can be justified by the incomprehensibility of the correct form and use and usage of the verb. Moreover, the 14 tenses in English are considered one of the most difficult structural points facing the students in learning English.

Some examples are as follow:

“you will *loosing* your time .....

“Many people didn't agreed....”

“Some people *said* that they *browsing* .....

In this example, the student was confused between the use of simple past and simple present. There is a kind of language interference. In Bahasa, time sequence in a sentence doesn't matter so much.

## c. Word Order

Once again, there is evidence and counter evidence of transfer in studies related to word order. Studies have focused on whether, for example, language learners carry their pattern over into the L2. It is the third highest error occurrence in the participants' papers of this study (59 errors with rate 13%), were primarily based on the intralingual transfer.

The following are some examples:

“He *always is* late”

“How we *can* limit internet?”

“should *be* internet limited?”

## d. Plurality

A noun is defined as a word that is used to name any person, animal, thing, idea, state, or quality (Russell, 1993). In this study, the percentage of errors in plurality is relatively low compared to other types of grammatical errors (9%). 41 errors were counted in the texts. Examples of errors in plurality:

“students might have several negative *impact*.....”

“*parent* also should limit the use of internet”

“Many *child* are using internet now”

## e. Preposition

A preposition is a word that shows the relationship between a noun or pronoun and other words in a sentence. It links nouns, pronouns and phrases to other words in a

sentence. The word or phrase that the preposition introduces is called the object of the preposition. A preposition usually indicates the temporal, spatial or logical relationship of its object to the rest of the sentence. Furthermore, the prepositions are used in distinctively among a variety of languages. The same preposition can convey totally different meaning from one language to another.

The great majority of the participants in this study demonstrated confusion for the right usage of prepositions as shown in the examples below

“They have to search some information that is related *with* their findings”

“*By* internet, this country can introduce their products by promoting it through the entire social website and expanding their business using it.”

English has more various prepositions compared to Bahasa. Students tend to make errors in using correct prepositions. They might look alike but different meaning and use.

## f. Articles

An article is a word that is used with a noun to indicate the type of reference being made by the noun. English has two articles: *the* and *a/an*. *The* is used to refer to specific or particular nouns; *a/an* is used to modify non-specific or non-particular nouns. It is called the *the* definite article and *a/an* the indefinite article.

Articles are believed to be a one of sources of difficulty for learners and teachers of English as a second/foreign language, especially for those whose native languages do not have articles or do have articles or article-like morphemes which are used in ways that differ from English articles (Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999).

In this study, article use is another frequent problem in students' texts. The total number of errors counted in articles is 35. They constitute 8% of the total rate of errors.

Examples of errors in the use of articles:

- 1) redundant use of the article "the" and the absence of indefinite article "a":
  - *the* smoking is bad habit. (zero article). Smoking is a bad habit.
- 2) misuse of the article "a" before words with vowel sounds:
  - if you smoke cigarettes, it cost you *a* expensive money. (an expensive)
- 3) omission of articles:
  - ..one of major problems... . (the major problems )
  - ... smoking is one of bad habit..... (the bad)

## g. Passive Voice

Passive voice is used to show an interest on the person or object that experiences an action rather than the person or object that performs the action. In other words, the person or object that performs the action is not important to mention.

There is the possibility that the type of compositions written by the students did not require the use of the passive voice, but what is shown from the analysis of the errors of those who used the passive voice is that the percentage of errors is (5%). The number of the total errors found was 21.



Example of errors in the use of the Passive Voice:  
“they are always *focus* on the computer”

In this example, it can be said the student is confused **to distinct** between active voice and passive voice. This might be due to the lack of sufficient training and drills on this rule which lead to overgeneralization of the rule.

Example of errors in the use of the Passive Voice:  
“the habit which *called* internet browsing”

In this example, the student tried to over-generalize the rule as there is no verb to be in Bahasa. According to Richards (2002), the errors mentioned above could **be derived** from “faulty comprehension of distinctions in the target language.” He added that these were sometimes due to poor gradation of teaching items whereby the form was maybe “interpreted as a marker of the past tense.”

## **h. Auxiliary**

The following examples revealed how the students had constructed the use of the auxiliary verbs in a wrong manner. There are four errors which showed the inappropriate use of the auxiliary verbs in the examples. In sentence (1) instead of writing ‘The person who *are*...’ the student should have written ‘The person who is...’ In sentence (2), the student should have written ‘Their internet usage is’.., In sentence (3), it should be written as ‘Based on the graph, there is..’ and in Sentence (4), ‘The technology in their country is..’. The student should understand that when using the auxiliary verbs in the report writing, there are no actions shown in the examples given. These words talk about the action or the state of any noun or subject. This means that verbs show what the subject is doing or what is the state or situation of the subject.

- 1) The person who *are* in scholl access internet every day.
- 2) Their internet usage *are* more better...
- 3) Based on the graph, there *are* a huge different of percentage
- 4) The technology in their country *are* more develop than in Asia...

## **2. Discussion of the Results**

Based on the research findings, the writer found some errors from 28 essays made by the third year students of English Study Program Universitas Riau. The writer analyzed the data by error analysis adopted from Corder (1974), consisting of collecting the data, identification of errors, description of errors, explanation of errors, and error evaluation. This research has given an account of the main errors made by the third year students of English Study Program Universitas Riau in their written work. Based on the interpretation and examples given, it could be concluded that the students in this research committed eight grammatical errors: passive voice, verb tense and from, subject-verb agreement, word order, prepositions, articles, plurality, and auxiliaries. The highest error frequency is subject verb agreement. The students did not make some subject-verb in the same number.

Selinker (1974: 120) states five different strategies adopted by learners in interlanguage building as potential sources of errors, but related to this study, the writer would like to focus on two types of errors: First, if errors occur as a result of the native language, the process is called "language transfer" or interlingual transfer. These errors could systematically be found at the beginning of second language learning. Since the learners are a beginner, they tend to rely on a transfer from his mother language. Second, if they can be proved to be a result of "a clear overgeneralization of TL rules and semantic features, then we are dealing with the overgeneralization of TL linguistic material." These are a case of negative intralingual transfer might commit later in the learning process.

The errors performed by the students were caused by several factors which happened in their learning process. Those errors were caused by the influence of the first language and the second language. Errors caused by the influence of the first language came from the first language interfering the target language, so it occurred when the students try to transfer the structure of Bahasa Indonesia into target language of English. A study made by Tandikombong, M., Haryanto Atmowardoyo, and Sukardi Weda (2016) also found that grammatical errors happen because of poor grammar knowledge and interference from the first language. Students who performed errors because of this source generally brought their native language behavior. They translated directly from their first language into English. For example, "He *always is* late". This transfer structure was got from analogy of the grammatical structure of Bahasa Indonesia. The student put "*always*" before be "*is*". Whereas, based on the rule of English the adverb "*always*" must be after "*is*".

The other factor that influenced the learners' errors was the second language itself. Brown (1980) defines these causes as intralingual errors. According to Richards (1984), intralingual interference refers to items produced by the learners which do not reflect the structure of mother tongue, but generalizations based on partial exposure to the target language.

Based on the analysis of students writing essays, English students in Universitas Riau still make some errors of various types particularly grammar errors and consequently, their writing is below the expected ambition of teachers. Lack of writing activities may lead to weakness in the writing skill as a result a lot of errors in students essays will occur. It is obvious that lack of continuous writing activities may lead to committing more errors in the writing process. This provides a clear answer that third year English students in Universitas Riau are still weak in the English writing skill.

In conclusion, errors cannot be separated from learning a language. According to Richards (1984), every learners' error provides evidence of the system of the language that he is using. It means that the teacher will know the development of language learning by analyzing errors from the students' worksheet.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Conclusion**

Most of EFL students have learned English since they were in primary school; however, their English proficiency, especially writing, is still unsatisfying. Error

analysis has been widely used as a mean to gain understanding on how writing skill is learnt. This study was an effort to systematically investigate the types of grammatical errors in writing an argumentative essay. It also explored the linguistic feature in which the students made the most errors.

The study aimed at identifying, describing, and categorizing the type of grammatical errors made in the English students' essays. As a result, a number of different grammatical errors were found in their English essays. These were limited to eight major errors: passive voice, verb tense and form, subject-verb agreement, word order, prepositions, articles, plurality and auxiliaries. The overt influences of Bahasa on the students' writing of English indicate that language teachers need to take careful stock of the transfer and interference of the students' mother tongue in their spoken or written production. Therefore, one way to highlight the influences of the mother tongues on the students' learning of English is to collect these errors and ask the students to analyze them and if they could correct them (Ridha, 2012).

The writer thinks errors in students writing can be minimized if modern techniques in teaching writing adopted. It is clear that the errors in grammar require more attention than the others. Teachers should then be more aware of these types of errors and provide the necessary follow up work to check the problem areas as discussed earlier. However, EFL teachers and researchers cannot ignore error analysis as an important tool in the learning of a foreign language. However, in dealing with errors, it is important for teachers to establish what the error is, to establish the possible sources of errors, to explain why they happen because a full knowledge of the causes of an error enables the teacher to work out a more effective teaching strategy to deal with them and finally to decide how serious the mistake is to have a remedial work. Learners of English need also to be taught about the English text awareness rather than transferring. This can be done by guiding learners to look critically and analytically at English texts written by native speakers of English which in turn supports their own writing (Hourani, 2008). Simultaneously, the learners will improve their general language proficiency by following these strategies. However, this study dealt with a limited number of the linguistic aspects involved in writing due to the limitations of space and time. Clearly, there is a great deal of work to be done in this area in the future.

## **Recommendations**

Considering the conclusions above researcher would like to offer some suggestion as follows:

1. The English lecturer should give clearer explanations about grammatical rules in English, particularly in the verb area, because based on the result of this research errors in verb area is the most frequent errors made by the students in translation because all of the students made errors in this area.
2. The lecturers are also expected to teach more effectively and should give more exercises in applying grammar not only giving the theory of grammar. In this case, the students should be encouraged in using correct grammar in English.

3. After knowing the students' difficulties in using correct grammar, the teacher is expected to be able to solve the students' difficulty by providing appropriate teaching materials.
4. It is necessary to the lecturers to give a remedial teaching on the grammatical feature to minimize the students in producing errors in writing.

For further recommendations, teachers can modify their teaching styles based on the students' needs or writing errors. The students made grammatical errors in the writing as they had inadequate grammatical knowledge. The results of this study suggest some ways for EFL teachers to enhance students' writing, specifically by providing some feedback after marking their essays and also making the students rewrite the essays after corrections. Teachers can integrate grammar instruction with writing instruction; they should use the grammar terms that make sense to the students (Chin, 2000). By incorporating grammar terms naturally into the processes of editing, revising, and proofreading, teachers can help students understand and apply grammar purposefully to their own writing. Strategies such as writing conferences, partnership writing, grammar mini lessons, and peer response groups are all valuable methods for integrating grammar into writing instruction (Chin, 2000). Although this study was undertaken on a very small scale, the results of the study are quite significant. They show the possibility of teachers employing various strategies to assist students in applying grammatical concepts to achieve their writing purpose.

Given the results of this study, a number of recommendations for further research are suggested. First, it is recommended that further research be undertaken to investigate the errors made by undergraduate students majoring in English. Second, further investigation into interlingual and intralingual errors of writers of other language is strongly recommended. Last but not least, it would be interesting to compare experiences of subjects from university for the purpose of examining the common errors produced by this groups.

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