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An Error Analysis of Students' Cover Letter Writing Assignments

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Abstract. The objective of this descriptive study was to analyze students' grammatical errors in writing assignments, in this case writing a cover letter for second-semester Computer Science students at the University of Semarang. The target population included 21 Computer Science students enrolled in a Business English class chosen randomly from a pool of 50 participants. They were asked to write an application letter in English. Then, using the surface approach taxonomy, the researcher examined the students' writing for the following errors: 1. Omission Errors; 2. Addition Errors; 3. Misinformation Errors; and 4. Misordering Errors. The findings of this study show that student errors range from the most common to the least common, with a total of 67 phrases: (1) Omission 38.8%, (2) Misinformation on Sub-Alternating Forms 23.8%, (3) Addition on sub-Simple Addition 22.3%, (4) Misinformation on sub-Alternating Forms 8.9%, (5) Addition to sub double markings 2.9%, (6) Misinformation to sub regularization 2.9%. The errors in the Addition type (sub-regularization) and Misinformation categories do not appear at all (0%). According to the data above, pupils still do not comprehend how to employ basic English grammar structures or how the first language (L1) affects how sentences are formed in English.

Keywords: grammatical errors, sentences, writing, and cover letter

Introduction

The growth of information technology and the handling of big data are two key concerns that are included in the Strategic Plan Roadmap for Research in the Leading Field of Information and Communication Technology at the University of Semarang for 2021–2025. This problem results in the rapid expansion and development of different types of information on different platforms, which creates

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a need for quick and effective data processing. System engineering, mapping, and data processing methods must be developed and used in research.

In accordance with the aforementioned strategic goal, the Business English Course is one way to help Semarang University students—in this case, Computer Science majors—improve their capacity to compete internationally in terms of writing in English, in this case writing cover letters in English.

The four main skills in English are reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Writing is widely regarded as one of the most challenging skills for students learning a foreign language. "ESL teachers include writing skills in the curriculum because this skill is critical to academic success." (2008) (Kellogg). Because writing helps to i) strengthen grammatical structures, ii) expand vocabulary, and iii) support other language skills like reading, listening, and speaking.

The majority of English for Specific Purpose (ESP) courses place a strong emphasis on writing talents as a means of enhancing student performance. Practice with other abilities, notably reading skills, is typically linked with writing practice. Its goal is to help students improve their writing abilities. This activity begins with simple sentences and progresses to complex sentences, compounds, complexes, paragraphs, and finally essays.

"The real goal is not what level of writing skill acquisition students have, but rather their ability to recognize the arrangement of sentences into paragraphs and essays, as well as sentence connectors or sequence signals to demonstrate cohesion in expression." Aladrus, Abubakar, and colleagues (2012): ix.

Writing is typically composed of paragraphs. While paragraphs are usually 150-word-long papers that begin with a topic sentence/main thought and are followed by a series of sentences that support that point. To produce good writing, students must understand grammatical structures and vocabulary. If students do not understand how to write correct sentences based on existing grammar rules and how to understand their meaning, they will struggle in school. This study aims to examine grammatical errors in cover letters written by second-semester Communication Science students enrolled in the English for Business course.

Business English (English for Business) is a course offered to all students at the University of Semarang with the goal of preparing them to compete in the recruitment of workers after they have completed their studies. As a result, they must be trained to write cover letters and curriculum vitae, as well as to practice job interviews in English. However, the focus of this study is solely on error analysis in cover letter writing.

Research on Error Analysis has been conducted by many researchers. Suhono (2016) did an error analysis on compositions written by EFL Students of IAIM NU Metro based on James's Surface taxonomy (1998): omission, addition, misinformation, misordering, and blending. The subject of his research was students from different grade semesters: second, sixth, and eighth. Whereas, the purpose of his study was to describe: 1. The types of grammatical errors that frequently appear in students' written composition, 2. The frequency of grammatical errors appears based on the grade semesters, and 3. The sources of errors. The result shows that the total number of errors from the three groups was 268 error sentences and the omission error got the highest number of 131 (48.9%) sentences. Referring to the second research question, the second-semester students produced the highest number of errors with a total of 124 (46.8%)

sentences. While concerning the sources of errors in this research (third research question), the sources of errors in this research were mother-tongue influences (Interlingual errors). The errors in the production of the target language were greatly influenced by their native language/mother tongue, which interferes with target language learning. The second was Intralingual errors, such as misanalysis (wrong hypothesis), and incomplete rule applications.

Another research on Error Analysis was conducted by Setyorini, Tri Jampi, et.al. (2020) The study concentrated on identifying the many grammatical mistakes that students made on their essay assessments. The participants were 20 third-semester students from Purworejo Muhammadiyah University in Indonesia. Keshavarz's theory (omission, addition, substitution, and permutation) was used to analyze the results of essay tests. According to the analysis's findings, the percentages for each type of error are omission (34.06%), addition (7.25%), substitution (57.97%), and subtraction (0.72%) (permutation). In this study, the most dominant error produced by students is substitution (57.97%).

The researchers have taken two previous studies about error analysis in two different cases. The first analyzed errors in students' compositions in different grades second, sixth, and eighth by using Carl's surface taxonomy (omission, addition, misinformation, mis ordering, and blending). While the second analyzed the compositions of 20 third-semester students from Purworejo Muhammadiyah University by using Keshavarz's theory (omission, addition, substitution, and permutation). In this study, the researchers examine all types of grammatical errors found in students' essays in order to determine how much students know about the target language. They anticipate that English lecturers will be able to spot students' language-learning challenges, gauge their proficiency in the target language, give feedback to reduce mistakes, change the target language materials, and choose the best teaching approach, medium, or strategy to help students improve their language skills. The researchers analyze types of errors using James's surface taxonomy (1998) and Keshavarz's theory (2012). The differences between this research and the two previous research are the use of the cover letters as data and surface taxonomy by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's theory (1982) as the method of analysis

Based on the research background, the formulation of the problem in this study are: (1) What errors occur most frequently in writing assignments (cover letters) and (2) What errors occur most rarely in writing assignments (cover letters). The goal of this study is to identify the types of errors that frequently appear in the assignment of writing cover letters in English, as well as the types of errors that occur most rarely and frequently in the assignment of writing student cover letters. Meanwhile, this study is expected to increase knowledge about the types of errors that students frequently make when writing in English, as well as alternative solutions to improve students' ability to detect errors in writing assignments in English.

Method

Types and Research Method

The data in this study is descriptive qualitative data because it is presented as words, phrases, or sentences. According to (Bogdan, 2007, pp.30), "descriptive research is a characteristic of qualitative research, meaning that the data obtained is mostly in the form of language or images rather than numbers." Descriptive data that is explicitly representative and more informative can be produced via research methodologies.

This is qualitative research. This research is called qualitative research because it uses words to analyze it. Wahid Murni (2017) said that qualitative research is a method used to answer research problems related to data in the form of narratives originating from interviews, observations, and document

Twenty-five writing assignments were assigned at random to 50 Computer Science students at the University of Semarang who were enrolled in English for Business classes. The student assignments were then examined using Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's (in Alfiyanti, 2013) four descriptive classifications in the superficial strategy taxonomy to analyze errors: omission, addition, misinformation, and misordering.

Data and Data Source

The data in this study were collected at random from the task of writing cover letters (application letters) of 21 Communication Science students from the University of Semarang who took the English for Business course out of a total of 50 participants.

Research Instruments

The instrument used in this study is the superficial taxonomy strategy developed by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (in Alfiyani, 2013: 24-28), in which data from students will be analyzed based on four aspects of error analysis: (1) omission errors, (2) addition errors, (3) misinformation errors, and (4) misordering errors.

According to Erdogan (2005: 263), "Error Analysis" is related to student performance in terms of cognitive processes. They use recognition or coding to recognize or code target language input. As a result, evidence provided by learners' errors with knowledge of the fundamental processes of second language acquisition has become a major focus of error analysis.

According to Brown (2014), "the mistake analysis highlights the relevance of the error in the learner's interlanguage system. This kind of linguistic analysis concentrates on the errors that pupils make. as a procedure for spotting, classifying, and assessing departures from the second language's rules before disclosing the learner's system."

There are four descriptive categories for assessing errors, according to Dulay, Burt, and Krashen: linguistic taxonomy errors, surface strategy taxonomy errors, comparative analysis taxonomy errors, and communicative effects errors. (In Alfiyani, 2013, pages 24-28) However, this study only analyzes the surface strategy taxonomy's four categories of errors, which are as follows:

- a. *Omission Errors*

The absence of an item that should appear in a properly formed utterance is defined as an omission error. Two types of morphemes are more frequently omitted than the others. Content morphemes and grammatical morphemes are the two types of morphemes. Content words are the words that carry the majority of a sentence's referential meaning, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and so on. Grammatical or function words are small words that play only a minor role in conveying a sentence's meaning. Noun and verb inflections (-s, ed, ing), articles (a, an, the), auxiliary verbs (is, will, may, can, and so on), and prepositions are among them (in, on, at, etc).

b. *Addition Errors*

Addition errors are indicated by the presence of items that should not be in the correct/well-formed utterance. This generally occurs at a later stage of the L2 acquisition or learning process i.e. when the learner has acquired some rules of the target language.

There are three types of addition errors:

1) *Double Markings*

This error occurs when certain items that are required in some linguistic constructs are not deleted. The examples are: **she didn't went/goed back** instead of **she didn't go back**.

2) *Regularization*

This error occurs when a marker that is normally added to a linguistic item is mistakenly added to a word of a different class that does not use that marker. For example: **offsprings** instead of **offspring**, **vocabularies** instead of **vocabulary** (because the two words belong to uncountable nouns which cannot be pluralized)

3) *Simple addition*

All addition errors are characterized by the simple addition error. They refer to the use of items that should not be included in the properly formed speech. For example, Tono **must brings** his books. Instead of Tono **must bring** his books.

c. *Misformation errors*

Misformation errors are distinguished by the use of incorrect morphemes or structures. They occur when a student writes something incorrectly. Formation faults are classified into three types:

1) *Regularization Errors*

Regularization errors that fall under the misformation category are errors in which regular markers are used instead of irregular markers. e.g., **runned** instead of **run**, **womans** instead of **women**, **phenomenons** instead of **phenomena**

2) *Archi-forms Archi-forms errors*

The incorrect use of certain formats/terms as pronouns for others for example **Her** danced with my brother instead of “**She** danced with my brother.”

3) *Alternating forms Alternating forms error*

Errors caused by students' development/addition of vocabulary and grammar.

Example: We will eat at the break time **when we are study**

instead of

We will eat at the break time **after studying**

d. *Misordering errors*

Sequencing errors are characterized by the incorrect placement of morphemes or groups of morphemes in an utterance. This occurs systematically for both L1 and L2 students in the constructs obtained.

For example: He is **all the time** late → **all the time** is in the wrong position

The sentence should be: He is late **all the time**

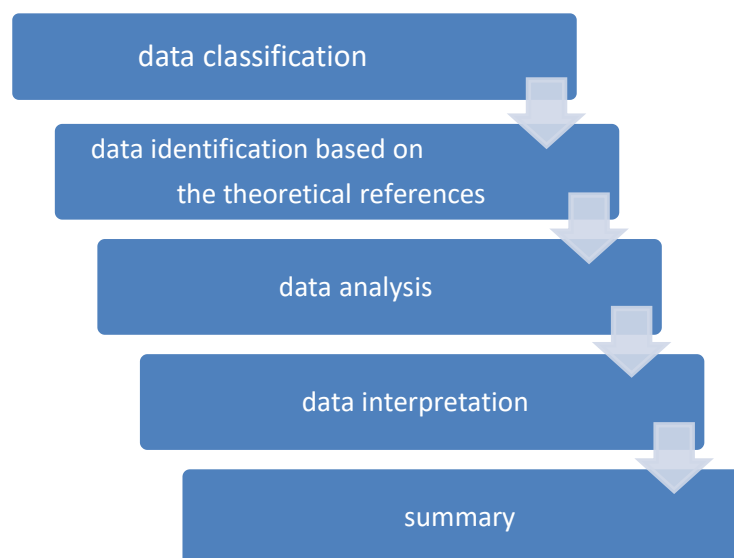
Data Collection Technique

This study's data collection techniques included documentation studies. According to Chaer (2019), data collection is terminated when the data is sufficient to explain the study's focus or answer the research questions, at which point a theory, rule, or provision is developed. The documents examined in this study were cover letters written by 21 Communication Science students enrolled in the English for Business course.

Data Analysis Technique

The table below depicts the technical flow of data analysis performed by the researchers and team during the implementation of this research.

Figure 1. Data Analysis Chart



The researcher looks over and analyzes the data after it has all been gathered. These processes involve checking and analyzing data. First, create a table with a classification of the 21 Communication Science students' Mid Test Cover letter assignment data (cover letter). Format data codes and text titles to identify common data elements. Second, identify the errors in student cover letter assignments and include them in the table of the correct types of errors based on the reference theory, namely the superficial taxonomy. Third, look into the data. The data is analyzed by calculating the percentage of errors that occur from student assignments, ranging from the most common to those that do not occur frequently and even those that never occur. The fourth step is to interpret the data that has

been analyzed. In this case, interpreting the data aims to identify errors that frequently, infrequently, and never appear in the assignment of creating student cover letters and to determine what causes these errors to appear or

Findings and Discussion

Findings

Based on the data collected for this study, namely data on writing cover letter assignments (cover letters in English) of students, the following errors were identified (Error Analysis) based on surface strategy taxonomy: 1. Omission Errors., 2. Addition Errors., 3. Misinformation Errors., 4. Misordering Errors.

According to the findings of this data analysis, there were 67 phrase/word errors in the assignment of writing Cover Letters for 21 students majoring in Communication Studies at the University of Semarang.

The following are the levels of student errors, from most common to least common:

No	Type of Errors	Occurrence Percentage
a	Misinformation on sub–Archi Forms	23,8%
b	Addition pada on sub–Simple Addition	22,3%
c	Misinformation on sub–Alternating Forms	8,9%
d	Misinformation on sub-Regularization	2,9%
e	Addition on sub-Double Markings	2,9%
f	Addition sub-Regularization	0%
g	Misinformation	0%

Regarding the study's purpose, which is to answer the questions: (1) What errors occur frequently in writing assignments (cover letters) and (2) What errors appear most rarely in writing assignments (cover letters), it can be concluded that:

- Omission is the most common error in writing assignments, accounting for 38.8% of all errors (cover letters).
- Misinformation in sub-regularization and Addition in the Double Markings sub-regularization both recorded the same occurrence, namely 2.9%, whereas in the Addition category in sub-regularization and Misinformation - no errors appeared (0%).

Discussion

The following are the analysis results based on the types of incorrect phrases:

Table 1. Error Analysis Recapitulation According to Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982)

No	Error Types	Error Samples	Correct sentences	Analysis	Total
1	<i>Omission</i>	I also proficient I familiar	I <i>am</i> also proficient I <i>am</i> familiar	There is no to be that functions as a main verb (main verb	2

In maintain ...	In <i>maintaining</i>	After the preposition of the verb in the gerund form (verb + ing)	1
I am recent graduate	I am <i>a</i> recent graduate	There is no article “ a ” to indicate a single subject	10
I am interest	I am interested <i>in</i>	Interest here functions as an adjective so you have to use -ed and the preposition in	1
Please find the attached file my CV	Please find the attached file <i>of my CV</i>	No preposition	1
He develop (verb)	He develops	Present Simple Verbs with Subject Singular must be added -s	1
My name Muh	My name is Muh	There is no “to be – is” in this sentence	1
Other required document	documents	The plural noun should be added “s”	1
I have experience	I have experienced	Present perfect: the verb must be in past participle form	1
... have proved	I have proved	There is no subject in this sentence	1
A job opening HR ...	A job opening <i>for</i> HR ...	There is no preposition “for”	1
I was best graduate	I was <i>the best</i> graduate ...	There is no “ <i>the</i> For superlative adjective	2
During my four month	During my four months	There is no -s ending for plural nouns	1
For the position human resources	For the position <i>of</i> human resources	There is no -of the preposition to join two nouns	1

A	Double Markers	... <i>before for</i> 3 years ...		The use of double prepositions	1
		I have proved that my work during internship	I have proven my work	That in this sentence is the same as my work , therefore one of them must be omitted	1
B	Simple Addition	Look forward to meeting with you ...	Look forward to meeting you	The preposition <i>with</i> in this sentence is not appropriate	6
		In the field of teamwork	In teamwork	The word <i>in the field</i> is not necessary for this sentence. This is a direct translation from L1 (Bahasa Indonesia)	1
		... at anytime ..	anytime	The preposition <i>at</i> is not appropriate for the word <i>anytime</i>	1
		I am finished ..	I finished	The sentence should be in active instead of passive, therefore to be is not needed	1
<hr/>					
3	<i>Mis-information</i>				
A	Regularization				
B	Archi forms	... an HR administration	... <i>a</i> HR administration	The article should be <i>a</i> instead of <i>an</i>	1
		... an staff	... a staff	The article should be <i>a</i> instead of <i>an</i>	1
C	Alternating forms	i worked	I worked	I should be in capital letter	1
		i am a friendly worker	I am a friendly worker	I should be in capital letter	1
		... my GPA is 3.88	... with a GPA of 3.88	This is a direct translation from L1 (Bahasa Indonesia)	1
		I am enclosing	I enclose	The sentence should be in Simple present instead of present continuous	1

Thank you for taking the time consider my application	Thank you for considering my application	This is a direct translation from L1 (Bahasa Indonesia)	1
... on time for my job a punctual person	Inappropriate term	1
I can also understand	I understand	Modal can in this sentence is not necessary	1
I am writing this letter to increase ...	I am writing this letter to show ...	Inappropriate choice of verb	1
I would love to hear back from you	I look forward to meeting you	This is a direct translation from L1 (Bahasa Indonesia)	1
.... of psychology,	... of psychology.	Incorrect punctuation: the comma should be full stop	1
i	I	I should be in capital letter	1
Can understanding	Can understand	Modal + V1	1
I would like to work ...	I would like to apply for ..	The wrong choice of verb	
During personal meeting	In an interview	This is a direct translation from L1 (Bahasa Indonesia)	

The table below describes the number of occurrences of errors based on the types of errors

Table 2 Recapitulation of the number of error occurrences by types.

Recapitulation of the number of error occurrences by types.								
Participant no	Omission	Addition			Misinformation		Mis-ordering	
		Double Markings	Regularization	Simple addition	Regularization	Archi Forms	Alternating Forms	
1	1			1				

2	4							
3	1			1				
4	1			1				
5				1				
6	1			1				
7	1			1				
8	1			1				
9	1	1						
10	2	1					3	
11	1			5		2	3	
12	4					2		
13	2				1			
14	1			1		2		
15						1		
16	3					5		
17						2		
18				1	1			
19				1				
20	1							
21	1					2		
Total	26	2	0	15	2	16	6	0
%	38,80597	2,9850746	0	22,38806	2,985075	23,8806	8,9552239	0

Research novelty

Based on the data on Cover Letter assignments, it is possible to conclude that the most common mistakes made by students are:

- a. Students' knowledge of the basic structure in English is still lacking because they frequently make mistakes in the form of missing sentence structure parts. Examples are the followings:
 - 1) Missing **to be** in a sentence, for instance: *I also proficient* should be *I am also proficient*.
 - 2) A simple present tense sentence with third person singular and missing the -s for the verb e. g: *He develop* should be *He develops*.

- 3) Missing the prepositions e.g.: *files my CV* should be *files of my CV*.
 - 4) A present perfect sentence with the wrong type of verb e.g.: *I have prove* should be *I have proven* (the verb should be in past participle form).
 - 5) Plural nouns without -s, e.g.: *During my four month* should be *during my four months*.
- b. On the other hand, there are also students who make mistakes when writing unnecessary and incorrect double phrases.
 - 1) The use of double prepositions for example: *before for 3 years*
 - 2) The use of double nouns, for example: ... *that my work...* (**that** and **my work** refer to the same thing, therefore one of them must be crossed out).
 - c. There are also students who tend to include extraneous words or phrases. For example: *Look forward to meeting with you* instead of *Look forward to meeting you* (this happens due to the influence of direct translation from L1 (Indonesian Language)).
 - d. Students lack knowledge about the differences in the use of the articles "a" and "an".
 - e. The writing of the pronoun "I" with the small "i".
 - f. Inappropriate choice of words or phrases due to the influence of direct translation from L1.

From the above description, it can be concluded that first, students continue to make numerous errors in their Writing Cover Letter assignments, particularly in removing words/sentences in English sentences (omission) or adding unnecessary words/sentences. The students then do a lot of direct translation (direct translation) from L1 (Indonesian) into English. As a result, the resulting sentences are not in proper English.

Meanwhile, the students' assignments to write Cover Letters did not contain mis-ordering and Addition (regularization) problems.

Suggestions

The findings of this analysis are expected to assist English teachers in developing materials to improve students' ability to understand sentence structure in English, particularly with lots of practice. Then, students must be taught how to properly and correctly translate sentences from Indonesian into English structurally and meaningfully.

In order to determine whether students in other majors have the same issues as the research's target population of students, this study needs to be duplicated among other students.

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