

An Error Analysis of 4th Semester Students' Argumentative Essay

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to examine the English language errors made by students in writing argumentative essays. The researcher concentrates on errors in grammar. This research involved five students who were selected from the fourth semester of English language classes at the Methodist University of Indonesia as the subjects of the study. The data was gathered through observation and record-keeping. According to the findings from the data analysis, several errors have been identified in the student's argumentative essay, they are: word choice with 12 errors (34.29%), Subject-Verb Agreement [SVA] with no error (0%), sentence structures with 1 error (2.85%), articles with 7 errors (20%), tenses with 1 error (2.85%), Singular/Plural with no error (0%), Spelling with 2 errors (5.71%), and Punctuation with 12 errors (34.29%).

INTRODUCTION

One of the most important aspects of learning a language is writing. Students can communicate knowledge and thoughts in the written text through writing. Their writing performance may help them to think critically and express their thoughts more clearly. They often only learn their true thoughts and emotions about people, concepts, challenges, and events via the act of writing. Writing is also a learning tool that can aid them in coming up with ideas and remembering information. In some areas, written language is more successful than spoken language because writing can sometimes reach a bigger audience than speech goods can.

As long as you possess ideas and the ability to express them, writing can be an enjoyable experience. Nonetheless, composing text is a challenging endeavor; simply possessing thoughts or concepts does not automatically lead to effective writing. According to Heaton (1974), writing is a difficult and complex ability to acquire and instruct. For students, composing an argumentative essay is one example of a challenging endeavor. Students in their fourth semester of language study are required to compose an argumentative essay as part of their English composition coursework.

Some studies about an error analysis of argumentative essay have been conducted. Fenny (2013) analyzed the students' errors in writing argumentative essay. The study by Rasyidah & Firza (2019) investigated common English language errors made by fourth semester students. Nur Kholiza et al (2023) examined the type of grammatical error by using categories of surface strategy taxonomy written by the fifth semester students in their academic essays. Agusti (2024) analyzed the students' errors in writing argumentative essays and what caused them. Tiffanie et al (2024) investigated writing errors among university students in Palembang.

LITERATURE REVIEW

An argumentative essay is a type of writing that presents the writer's stance, whether in agreement or disagreement, regarding various issues. According to Ramadhani and Ahmad (2022), this form of essay involves a challenging process where the writer articulates their viewpoint on a subject while offering credible evidence and facts to back up their stance. Additionally, in an argumentative essay, writers not only give reasons to support their views but also engage with and counter the arguments made by the opposing side. Countering involves identifying weaknesses in the opposing side's reasoning to demonstrate that their perspective is flawed. To sum up, an argumentative essay addresses the writer's perspective on a specific issue while dismantling the validity of the opposing viewpoint.

In order to identify and analyze the errors made by language learners in their written or spoken communication, error analysis is utilized. In the realm of students' argumentative writing, conducting an error analysis entails discovering and examining any errors or inaccuracies present in the students' application of grammar and various language elements. One method for performing an error analysis on students' argumentative writing would be to begin by reviewing the student's text and pinpointing any mistakes.

Subsequently, the mistakes may be examined more thoroughly to identify the root reason for the error. For instance, a mistake in grammar may arise from not fully grasping a specific grammar rule.

In "Understanding and Using English Grammar" (1989), Betty Schramper Azar states that error analysis in English grammar can be divided into various categories based on the particular grammatical elements that students frequently misuse. These categories encompass errors involving singular and plural forms, word forms, verb tenses, selection of words, the inclusion or exclusion of words, word order, sentence completeness, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, articles, and run-on sentences. The explanation of these categories are provided as follows:

1. Singular and Plural Forms: Mistakes in applying the appropriate singular or plural version of nouns, particularly when it is necessary for alignment with verbs.
2. Word Form: Errors in employing the appropriate inflectional or derivational form of a word (for instance, utilizing the incorrect verb tense or the inaccurate part of speech).
3. Verb Tense: Mistakes in choosing and applying the proper verb tense to show when an action or condition occurs.
4. Selection of Words: Selecting an incorrect term from a group of similar options, frequently arising from a limited vocabulary or a lack of understanding of subtle differences.
5. Incorporating an Additional Term: Inserting superfluous words into a sentence.
6. Excluding a Word: Not including essential words in a sentence.
7. Sentence Structure: Improper sequence of words within a sentence.
8. Incomplete Sentence: Creating sentence fragments that do not include a subject, verb, or other important components.
9. Spelling: Errors in the written form of words.
10. Punctuation: Errors related to the use of punctuation marks, such as commas, periods, and semicolons.
11. Capitalization: Incorrect application of uppercase letters.
12. Article: Mistakes in the use of articles (a, an, the).
13. Run-on Sentence: Combining two or more complete sentences without appropriate punctuation or connecting words.

METHODOLOGY

The sample population involved in this study was 5 students of the fourth semester of English language classes at the Methodist University of Indonesia. They were asked to write an argumentative essay entitled Should Indonesia make English the Official National Language? Their essays were collected and frequency errors for each essay was counted and tabulated. The researcher then identified the type of errors according to eight categories: 1. Word Choice. 2. Subject-Verb Agreement [SVA]. 3. Sentence structures. 4. Articles. 5. Tenses. 6. Singular/Plural. 7. Spelling, and 8. Punctuation. Finally, the frequencies with which each error occurred were converted into percentages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Types of Errors Committed by Fourth Semester Students

This research sought to identify the errors in the essay writing of fourth-semester students. Five argumentative essays were created by students in their fourth semester. Following the gathering of data from the students, the researcher examined, identified, and categorized the error types exhibited in the students' essays according to the linguistic categories established in the theory of Burt, Krashen, and Dulay (1982). It encompasses errors related to phonology (pronunciation), syntax and morphology (grammar), semantics and lexicon (meaning and vocabulary), as well as discourse (style), based on either the language component or the specific linguistic element that is impacted by the error. The researcher then only identified the type of errors based the grammar category and applied eight categories which frequencies were converted into percentages. The categories are: 1. Word Choice. 2. Subject-Verb Agreement [SVA]. 3. Sentence structures. 4. Articles. 5. Tenses. 6. Singular/Plural. 7. Spelling, and 8. Punctuation. The frequencies of each error category were converted into percentages. The distribution of errors is shown in the following table:

Table 1. Frequency of Errors

STD	Word Choice	SVA	Sentence Structure	Articles	Tenses	S/P	Spelling	Punctuation	
1	3			1				3	
2	3			2				2	
3	2			3	1		1	1	
4	3							6	
5	1		1	1			1		
Total	12	0	1	7	1	0	2	12	35
%	34.29	0	2.85	20	2.85	0	5.71	34.29	100%

The tables below show several examples of errors in six of eight categories, taken from the student essays. There are no tables for the categories of Subject-Verb Agreement and Singular/Plural since no errors occurred in the subjects' essays in these categories.

Table 2. Examples of Inappropriate Word Choice

No	Sentences with inappropriate Word Choice	Appropriate Word Choice
1	In the end , I believe making English an official nation language...	conclusion
2	... language in Indonesia isn't really necessary	delete
3	... and making English as the official national language...	delete
4	... or don't have money for lessons.	have the money
5	... not only about words, but about identity.	words but also

6	However, the reality is the opposite making it the official ...	delete
7	However, actually , we can still keep Bahasa Indonesia ...	delete
8	... because they can keep their culture ...	are able to
9	They argue that English can actually be a tool ...	delete
10	If imposed, this policy could cause confusion in public ...	confuse
11	... this argument on the grounds that official status ...	because
12	... that it would enhance Indonesia's global standing and economic ...	international

Table 3. Examples of SVA Errors

No	Sentences with SVA Errors	Correct SVA
1	-	

Table 4. Examples of Errors on Sentence Structure

No	Sentences with errors in sentence structure	Correct Structure
1	Those who advocate the topic argue that ...	[advocate for]

Table 4. Examples of Errors on Articles

No	Sentences with Article Errors	Correct Article Usage
1	Should English be made the official national language of Indonesia?	an
2	However, such argument ignores an important fact ...	such an argument
3	Instead of forcing English as a national language ...	the
4	... that Indonesia should make English the official national language ...	an
5	I believe Indonesia should make English the official ...	an
6	However, such argument ignores an important ...	such an argument
7	... making English the official national language would improve ...	an

Table 5. Examples of Errors on Tenses

No	Sentences with Errors in Tenses	Correct Tense Usage
1	... many modern materials are not yet translated ...	have ... been translated

Table 6. Examples of Errors on Singular/Plural

No	Sentences with Singular/Plural Errors	Correct Singular/Plural Usage
1	-	

Table 7. Examples of Sentences with Spelling Errors

No	Sentences with Spelling Errors	Correct Spelling
1	... many modem materials	modern
2	Indonesia Souldn't Make English...	Shouldn't

Table 8. Examples of Sentences with Punctuation Errors

No	Sentences with Punctuation Errors	Correct Punctuation
1	That's why some people have started asking; Should ...	, should
2	In many jobs now, speaking English isn't just ...	delete
3	... English isn't just a bonus, it's a must.	;
4	Look at our farmers in North Sumatra, they live ...	Sumatra; they
5	The problem isn't about language, but ...	delete
6	We don't have to choose one but we can have both.	one, but
7	... is not only a means of communication, but also ...	delete
8	... a variety of social, cultural and educational problems ...	cultural, and
9	... are better equipped and competent teachers are easier ...	equipped, and
10	... used in education, government and the media ...	government, and
11	... such as YouTube, blogs and social media ...	blogs, and
12	... the nation's identity, justice and diversity	justice, and

DISCUSSION

From the analysis provided above, the researcher identified that students made common mistakes in various aspects of English grammar: 34.29% related to word choice, 2.85% in sentence structure, 7% concerning articles, 2.85% in verb tense, 5.71% in spelling, and 34.29% for punctuation.

The findings of this examination indicate that certain mistakes were frequently observed in the essays of students in the fourth semester of their study of English language. To summarize, the writer also discovered six prevalent types of errors: word choice at 34.29%, sentence structure at 2.85%, articles at 7%, tense at 2.85%, spelling at 5.71%, and punctuation at 34.29%. Thus, the most

frequently occurring mistakes were related to word choice and punctuation, while the least frequent errors involved sentence structure.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher would like to draw the following conclusion from the data analysis: The student's argumentative essay contains a few mistakes: 12 errors in word choice (34.29%), 0 errors in Subject-Verb Agreement [SVA] (0%), 1 error in sentence structure (2.85%), 7 errors in articles (20%), 1 error in tense (2.85%), 0 errors in Singular/Plural (0%), 2 errors in spelling (5.71%), and 12 errors in punctuation (34.29%). Consequently, the most frequent mistakes among fourth semester English students occur in word choice and punctuation.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Given the findings of this study, future research is encouraged to explore the underlying causes of the most common errors – specifically in word choice and punctuation – made by fourth semester English students. Investigating whether these errors stem from limited vocabulary, lack of exposure to authentic texts, or insufficient grammar instruction could provide valuable insights for curriculum development and teaching strategies. A deeper qualitative approach, such as interviews or classroom observations, could also complement the quantitative data and offer a more comprehensive understanding of student difficulties.

Moreover, subsequent studies might consider expanding the sample size or including students from different semesters or institutions to determine whether the same error patterns persist across broader populations. Researchers could also examine the effectiveness of targeted interventions or teaching methods designed to reduce word choice and punctuation errors. By addressing these aspects, future studies can contribute significantly to improving students' writing accuracy and overall language proficiency.

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