ANALYZING THE PROPORTION OF STUDENTS' ERROR IN ESSAY WRITING AT TERTIARY LEVEL: A DESCRIPTIVE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

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Article Information	Abstract
	The purpose of this study was to identify the frequency and percentage of the four types committed by the students in writing comparison and constrast essay. The method is descriptive qualitative. The participant of this study was four semester students of English education department of UIN Raden Intan Lampung. There were 19 students who took essay writing subject. They learnt comparison/contrast essay. The writer collected the data through students' essay. The procedure of this study was the students' essay were collected, then identified, classified, and analyzed based on surface strategy taxonomy (omission, addition, misformation, and misordering). The result showed that there were 414 items of students' error that consisted of omission (33 items, 8%), then addition (60 items, 15%), misformation (312 items, 75%), and misordering (9 items, 2%). The findings show that misformation errors are the most frequent, indicating that students struggle with using correct grammatical forms. This suggests that while students may understand the need for certain grammatical elements, they have not yet mastered their proper usage. In addition, the lecturers are encouraged to integrate explicit grammar instruction with writing activities, particularly focusing on the most frequent error types such as misformation. They should also provide regular and constructive feedback on students' writing to help them notice and correct their errors effectively. **Keywords: Error analysis; Types of error; Comparison and contrast essay**

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Introduction

To really learn English, you need to be able to write well in English, especially at tertiary level. This is even more important for students pursuing English education because writing is not just a way to express yourself in words, but also a way to learn. However, this skill is not easy to acquire and presents significant challenges for students due to its complexity. Consequently, the majority of students consider writing to be the most challenging skill due to the numerous obstacles encountered (Nik et al., 2010;Divsar & Heydari, 2017; Aunurrahman et al., 2017; Royani & Sadiah, 2019; Alfaruqy et al., 2022; Syamsu et al., 2024). Writing essays is one of the writing skills that requires a lot of English learning. This task needs more than just a good understanding of grammar, vocabulary, and discourse structure. It also needs critical thinking, analytical skills, and the ability to put ideas together in a way that makes sense. Comparison and contrast essays are a type of academic writing that tests students' abilities to systematically and clearly compare and contrast two or more ideas or things.

However, many students still struggle to write this kind of essay well, especially with grammar. Grammatical errors are a major problem that make it hard to understand and convey ideas clearly. These issues show that even if students have learned about various types of essays, they still need to pay special attention to how to use them in their writing, especially to improve their language accuracy and grammar comprehension. Mastering grammar is a good way to tell how good your writing skills are; when students have trouble with grammar, the quality of the writing produced tends to be poor and ineffective in conveying the message (Syvak, 2018; Agustin & Wulandari, 2022; Bagacina, 2024). In addition, grammatical is essential in the writing process (Aaqil et al., 2022).

Errors in grammatical structures not only make the sentence less accurate, but they also change how the reader thinks about the writing as a whole. In line with this, (Zale et al., 2010) states that technical Writing Guidelines indicate that mechanical errors, including incorrect language acquisition, spelling, punctuation, and structure, will convey an unprofessional impression to the reader. It means that accuracy in the use of language structure is a key element in improving writing ability. Therefore, grammatical errors that are still frequently encountered in essay writing, especially comparison and contrast essays, are a challenge that needs serious attention in the process of learning academic writing.

Making errors is a natural and inevitable aspect of the English learning process. Various types of errors occur when students write due to their inadequate mastery of English structure, resulting in challenges in producing coherent and accurate compositions in English. Writing errors are an inevitable component of the language acquisition process, but error analysis can be a useful technique for identifying areas of weakness that need to be addressed. Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) established the Surface Strategy Taxonomy, which is an effective technique to analysing language errors. This taxonomy classifies errors into four types depending on their surface: omission (the absence of a necessary element), addition (the inclusion of an unneeded element), misformation (the use of a wrong form), and misordering (the misordering of a sequence). Through this approach, the specific error patterns and understand the language strategies used by learners in producing written texts can be identified.

This study aims to analyze the proportion (frequency and percentage) of students' error in writing comparison/constrast essay. The topic of this essay was the advantages and disadvantages of having a job while studying university. By analyzing students' essay using surface strategy taxonomy, this not only identifies the proportion types of errors but also attempts to uncover the causal factors behind these errors. Previous studies have highlighted various types of errors in EFL students' writing (Sarfraz, 2011; Darus & Subramaniam, 2009; Khansir, 2012), but there are still limitations in the application of specific taxonomic frameworks such as the surface strategy taxonomy. Furthermore, research focusing on the comparative essay genre in the context of Indonesian students is also limited. Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap by providing an in-depth analysis of students' writing errors and offering pedagogical insights that can be utilized in teaching academic writing in EFL classrooms. Finally, the objective of this study is to identify the frequency and percentage of the four types committed by the

students in writing comparison and constrast essay, in accordance with this objective, this study intends to answer the following research questions: What the frequency and percentage of the four types committed by the students in writing comparison and constrast essay?

Methods

This study related to the error analysis and it was designed as mixed-method research. This research design observed students' error in essay writing based on surface strategy taxonomy that consist omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. The participant of this study was four semester students of English education department of UIN Raden Intan Lampung. There were 19 students (2 male and 17 female) who took the essay writing subject. They learnt how to write a comparison/contrast essay. Each student was required to write a comparison/contrast essay on the advantages and disadvantages of working while studying at university. The essay must consist of at least four paragraphs. Each paragraph consists of five to seven sentences. The students were given 60 minutes to complete their essays. The essay was done in class. Various student errors in writing essays related to tenses were counted in this study.

Corder (citied in Nur Rixha et al., 2021) states that the procedures of error analysis were elaborated through five stages: first, data collection. The writer collected data from students' worksheets and documents for a comparison/contrast essay. Second, error identification. In this stage, the writer identified the errors by underlining those errors. Third, error classification. After identified the students' errors, the writer classified them into types of errors (omission, addition, misformation, and misordering). Fourth, error calculation. After classifying the students' errors, the writer calculated the percentage of each error type by using the following formula (Sudjiono, 2008).

$$S = \frac{R}{N} \times SM$$

Description:

S : The Presentation of Errors
R : The Total Number of Errors
N : The Total Number of Students' Writing
SM : Standard Mark (%)

Figure 1. Errors Percentage Calculation Formula

Findings and Discussion

This section includes data on the number of frequent errors made by students in essay writing based on surface strategy taxonomy. The proportions are presented as frequencies and percentages of each error category in relation to the total number of errors examined. This presentation introduces a numerical analysis of the dominant error types and their relative contributions compared to other error categories. The students' essays were analysed, and a total of 414 linguistic errors were identified. These errors were categorised into four primary categories according to Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's (1982) Surface Strategy taxonomy: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. By reviewing the students' writing results. A total of 33 items (8%) were identified as omission errors, while addition errors accounted for 60 items (15%). Misformation errors comprised 312 items (75%), while misordering errors totalled nine items (2%). The proportion of error is depicted in Figures 1 and 2 as follows.

Proportions of Error
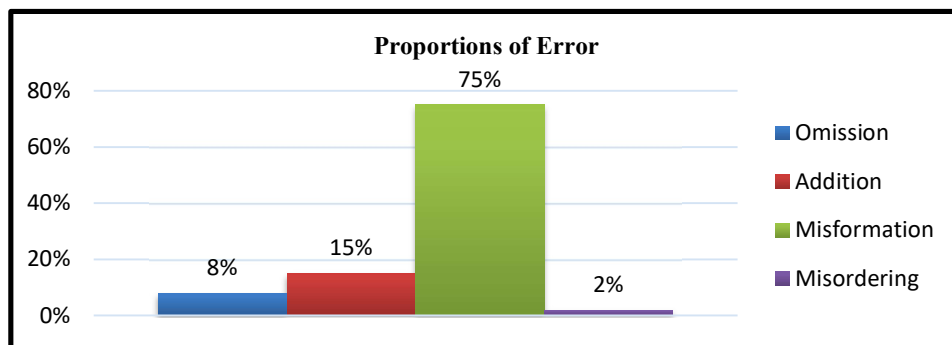
Figure 2. The Proportion of Error

The Number of Error Types
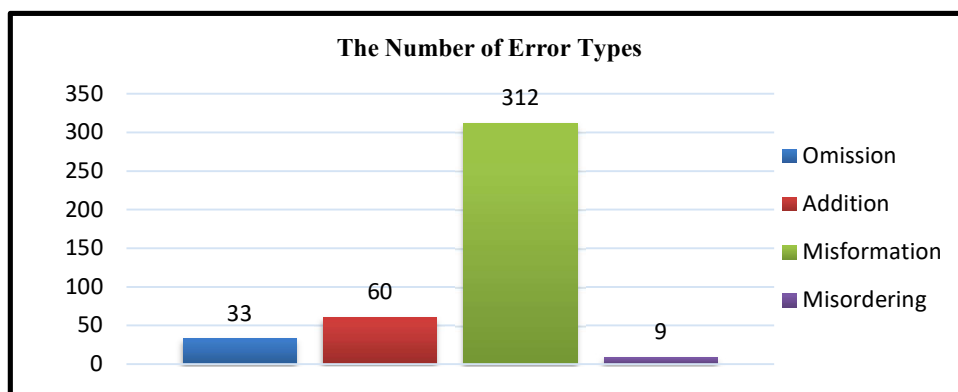
Figure 3. The Number of Error Types

Omission Error

One of the most prominent types of errors in student essays is omission errors, which occur when students omit one or more essential elements of a sentence structure. Omission errors occur when students omit essential grammatical components of a sentence, resulting in an incomplete structure. Among the 414 analysed errors, 33 were omission errors, accounting for 8% of the total. The absence of these elements results in sentences that are structurally and semantically incomplete, thereby disrupting the clarity of the intended message. Here is an example of a student's error.

1. Working part-time beneficial for university students. It should be Working part-time is beneficial for university students.
2. Although both options have pros and cons, having a job while studying is difficult. It should be noted that, although both options have pros and cons, having a job while studying is difficult.

From the students' sentences above, it was found that they omitted a necessary item in their writing. According to Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982), omission errors are a common type of developmental error among second language learners, in which certain structures are not yet fully mastered or consistently used. They categorize these errors as part of the surface strategy taxonomy, namely errors that arise from the way learners construct surface sentence structures. Furthermore, Corder (1974) stated that these errors reflect an incomplete internalization of the second language system. In this case, students tend to ignore elements that are not present in the structure of their first language (in this case, Indonesian), which lacks articles or auxiliary verbs as mandatory parts of sentence structure. In addition, Ellis (1997) notes that omission errors can be caused by limited linguistic input, a lack of structured writing practice, and minimal teacher

feedback. If not identified and addressed, these errors can become recurring habits in written language production.

Addition Errors

Besides omission errors, another common type of error found in student writing is addition errors. These errors occur when learners add linguistic elements that are not actually needed in a sentence structure. As a result, the sentence becomes ungrammatical due to the excess form or structure that does not conform to English rules. Addition errors occur when students add linguistic elements that are unnecessary to the sentence structure. Sixty addition errors were recorded, or 15% of the total errors. Here are the examples of students' writing

1. Having a part-time job while studying is gives students more responsibility. It should be Having a part-time job while studying gives students more responsibility.
2. A part-time job can help students pay tuition. A part-time job can help the students to pay tuition.

From the students' sentences above, it was found that they added an unnecessary item in their writing. Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) classify addition errors as surface strategy errors, specifically the addition section, which includes errors such as double marking, regularization, and simple addition. These errors often occur because learners overgeneralize grammatical rules or assume that the more complex a sentence structure, the more grammatically correct it is. Corder (1974) explains that this type of error arises from learners' strategy of forming "safe" sentences by adding language elements they believe are necessary, even if they don't align with the rules. This can be linked to overcorrection, where learners are overly cautious and end up adding unnecessary structures. Ellis (1997) adds that additions can occur due to negative transfer from the first language, in which learners apply native-language patterns to the target language, even though the structures are different. In Indonesian, for example, the use of articles is not as common as in English, so when students try to use them consistently, they often misplace or overuse them.

Misformation Errors

The research results show that misformation errors are the most common type of error in student essays, accounting for 312 items, or 75% of the total. This indicates that the majority of students experience difficulty selecting and using appropriate word forms or grammatical structures within the context of the sentences they write.

1. Students who choosed to work often have less time for study. It should be Students who chose to work often have less time for study.
2. The advantage is that students becomes independent. It should be The advantage is that students become independent.

From the students' sentences above, it was found that they did wrong structure in their writing. Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) classify this type of error as a surface strategy, specifically the misformation section, where the word form or structure used does not conform to the rules of the target language. This indicates that the learner understands the necessity of an element in a sentence, but does not yet know the correct form. These errors are systematic and often result from overgeneralization, where the correct rule for some words is applied to all words, including irregular ones. Ellis (1997) also explains that it can occur during the interlanguage stage when learners are developing their mental systems in the target language. At this stage, they often formulate their own grammatical hypotheses that may not conform to the norms of the target language. Therefore, systematically incorrect forms such as "drinked," "goed," or "written" frequently appear, indicating that learners are in a productive but not yet accurate phase. The high proportion of misformation errors indicates that mechanistic grammar learning (e.g., solely through practice exercises) is not fully effective in helping students understand the application of correct word forms in real-life contexts. Students tend to memorize word forms without understanding their function within sentence structure. This finding highlights the need

for a communicative, contextual teaching approach that emphasizes not only grammatical rules in isolation but also their application in authentic sentences and meaningful writing assignments.

Misordering Errors

Word-order errors (misordering errors) were the lowest-frequency error type in this study's findings, accounting for 9 items (2% of the total 414 errors identified). Despite this small number, these errors remain significant because they directly relate to students' ability to construct appropriate English syntactic structures. Misordering errors occur when elements in a sentence are arranged in an order that does not conform to English grammatical rules, resulting in unclear meaning or unnatural sentence structure. Examples of errors found include:

1. Studying and working at the same time is sometimes hard to manage. It should be Studying and working at the same time is sometimes hard to manage.
2. Students can easier compare the advantages and disadvantages. Students can more easily compare the advantages and disadvantages.

Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) classified word-order errors as part of the surface-strategy taxonomy, indicating that learners do not yet fully understand the rules of word order in the target language. In English, word order is very important and tends to be more rigid than in other languages, such as Indonesian. For example, the placement of adverbs, auxiliary verbs, and subjects in interrogative sentences or compound sentences cannot be arbitrary. Ellis (1997) states that this type of error is often the result of negative transfer from the first language (L1), in which learners tend to apply Indonesian word-order patterns to English structures. For example, in Indonesian, adverbs of time, such as "setiap pagi," are often placed at the beginning of a sentence ("Every morning he drinks coffee"), while in English, this order sounds less natural when directly translated literally. Furthermore, this error can also be caused by a lack of exposure to authentic input in the target language. Students who rarely read or are exposed to native English sentence structures (e.g., through academic reading, media, or direct interaction) tend to guess word order based on the logic of their own language. Although the number of word-order errors is relatively small, it is essential for teachers to pay special attention to this aspect, as it can affect the clarity and naturalness of sentences. Understanding proper sentence structure is essential not only in the context of exams or academic assignments, but also in written communication in general.

Conclusion

This study aimed to identify and analyze the types and proportions of grammatical errors made by students in writing comparison and contrast essays. Using a descriptive qualitative method and applying Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's (1982) Surface Strategy Taxonomy, the analysis revealed a total of 414 errors classified into four types: misformation (312 items, 75%), addition (60 items, 15%), omission (33 items, 8%), and misordering (9 items, 2%). The findings show that misformation errors are the most frequent, indicating that students struggle with using correct grammatical forms. This suggests that while students may understand the need for certain grammatical elements, they have not yet mastered their proper usage. In addition, the lecturers are encouraged to integrate explicit grammar instruction with writing activities, particularly focusing on the most frequent error types such as misformation. They should also provide regular and constructive feedback on students' writing to help them notice and correct their errors effectively. These results highlight the importance of incorporating explicit grammar instruction and corrective feedback into academic writing classes. Understanding the types of errors students make can help educators design more effective teaching strategies and provide focused support to improve students' writing accuracy and language competence.

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