

## ERROR ANALYSIS IN WRITTEN PRODUCTION: GRAMMATICAL ERRORS AND THEIR SOURCES IN INDONESIAN LEARNERS OF ENGLISH

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### ABSTRAK

*Keterampilan menulis telah dianggap sebagai bagian yang paling menantang dalam pembelajaran bahasa asing (Agbay & Reyes, 2019). Situasi ini mungkin karena keterampilan menulis bukan kemampuan bawaan dan membutuhkan keterampilan kognitif peserta didik. Saat menulis, pembelajar harus mampu melakukan aktivitas yang berbeda secara bersamaan (Flynn & Stainthorp, 2006). Analisis kesalahan pembelajar telah banyak diteliti karena peneliti ingin menemukan penyebab masalah menulis dan membantu pembelajar dalam meningkatkan keterampilan menulis mereka. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis jenis kesalahan pembelajar yang dihasilkan oleh pembelajar bahasa kedua (L2) dewasa dan menelusuri sumber kesalahan tersebut. Temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan kesalahan tata bahasa yang paling sering dilakukan oleh pembelajar bahasa kedua (L2) dewasa dalam keterampilan menulis mereka. Ini mungkin karena L1 mereka mengganggu proses produksi L2 dan pengetahuan tata bahasa L2 mereka terbatas dan tidak lengkap. Penulis menyarankan memiliki sampel yang lebih besar untuk studi lebih lanjut dengan tingkat kemahiran L2 yang sama atau berbeda untuk menyelidiki apakah mereka mempengaruhi kesalahan yang dihasilkan oleh peserta didik. Selain itu, elaborasi pada setiap kategori kesalahan dan sumbernya harus diberikan untuk lebih berkontribusi pada dampak pedagogis dari penelitian ini.*

**Kata kunci:** *penulisan bahasa kedua, analisis kesalahan, kesalahan gramatikal, sumber kesalahan, pemerolehan bahasa kedua*

### ABSTRACT

Writing skill has been considered the most challenging part of foreign language learning (Agbay & Reyes, 2019). This situation may be because writing skill is not innate and requires the cognitive skills of learners. While writing, learners must be able to perform different activities simultaneously (Flynn & Stainthorp, 2006). The area of learners' errors has been heavily researched because many would like to find the causes of writing problems and help learners in improving their writing skills. Hence, the present study aims to analyze the types of learners' errors generated by adult Indonesian L2 learners and trace the sources of the errors. The findings of the present study indicate grammatical errors were most frequently committed by adult L2 learners in their writing skills. This may be due to the fact that their L1 interfered in the process of L2 production and that their knowledge of L2 grammar was limited as well as incomplete. The author suggests having a bigger sample for further studies with the same or different L2 proficiency levels in order to investigate whether they influence errors produced by learners. In addition, elaboration on each error category and its sources should be provided to further contribute to the pedagogical impact of the study.

**Keywords:** L2 writing, error analysis, grammatical errors, error sources, SLA

## INTRODUCTION

Among the four aspects of language skills, writing may be considered as one of the most challenging language skills in learning a second language (Agbay & Reyes, 2019). This is not only true for non-native speakers, but also for native speakers (Al-Gharabally, 2015; Husin & Nurbayani, 2017; Ho & Thuy, 2009). As opposed to receptive skills, writing is included in the productive skills that refer to the ability to create or produce languages. The challenge of mastering second language (L2) writing skills may derive from the characteristic that writing is not innate and requires the cognitive skills of learners. While writing, learners must be able to perform different activities simultaneously (Flynn & Stainthorp, 2006). Because of this complex process, it is often found that L2 learners make many errors in their writing. Learners' errors have been a major research topic in second language development in order to find the causes of writing problems and help learners in improving their writing skills (Corder, 1967). Additionally, categorizing learners' errors could make students aware of which areas to be improved. Different learners may commit different errors, thus, by analyzing learners' errors, L2 learners could potentially correct the errors quickly and precisely, leading them to avoid making similar mistakes in the future written production.

According to Brown's (2007) definition, an error is a noticeable change in the grammatical components of a native speaker's language, which serves as an indication of the proficiency of learners in the target language. Error analysis (EA) is an approach in second language development as an alternative to contrastive analysis (CA) because CA was unable to predict a great majority of learners' errors (Corder, 1967). EA analyses the errors made by L2 learners when they learn a language. He furthermore claimed that errors are not seen as "bad habit" that has to be eliminated, but instead they provide a reflection of learners' developments that need to be studied further. Many researchers have studied the categorization of learners' errors according to the errors features, such as omission of grammatical morphemes, double marking of semantic features, and else (Dulay, Burt, and Krashen, 1982). James (1998) proposed five categories of errors that include

grammatical errors, lexical errors, and else. To investigate learners' erroneous sentences, Hubbard et al (1996) classified them into grammatical, syntactic, substance, and lexical errors. This present study stands with this last perspective to account for learners' errors.

As previously mentioned, learners' errors could be analyzed to further improve their writing skills, for instance, Zafar (2016) conducted a research on Error Analysis as a treatment for her participants who took part in Business education. She had categorized and analyzed the type of error that the participants made, which was mostly on the use of verb tense, before she later trained her participants on the accurate use of verb tenses. After a two-month of writing training, her students showed improved results. Several other studies attempted to investigate the sources of errors because knowing the sources would be an effective way to reduce the errors produced by learners (Penny, 2001; Bennui, 2008).

In terms of EA in a writing classroom, Karim et al. (2018) identified learners' errors in writing among English as a foreign language (EFL) learners in Bangladesh. Using EA technique by Ellis (2002), the study found that learners committed grammatical errors mostly. Furthermore, the research revealed that EFL students showed a significant inclination towards having their mistakes corrected by their instructors.

These previous studies prove that errors provide major insight in L2 learners' competencies. Moreover, the categorization of errors could encourage learners to better understand their errors and avoid repeating the same errors. This analysis would eventually improve L2 learners writing skill, especially if incorporated with factors that influence the errors. The aforementioned studies focused mostly on analyzing errors committed by adolescent L2 learners and within a formal EFL situation. On the other hand, the present study lies its focus on analyzing errors committed by adult L2 learners and outside of formal classroom situation.

Apart from the categorization of learners' errors, many researchers have investigated the sources of errors generated by the learners (Richards, 1974; James, 1998; Penny, 2001), most of which summarized that there are two major sources of errors: interlingual and intralingual interferences. According to Richards (1974),

interlingual errors are caused when learners implement the rule in their L1 incorrectly when producing L2 (influenced by mother-tongue). This condition can be identified as a negative transfer. In situations where the native language and target language do not align, negative transfer can occur. This can result in challenges in acquiring the target language structure and the production of errors that reflect the structure of the native language.

On the other hand, Richards (1974) explains that intralingual errors are caused during the process of language learning. He further categorizes intralingual interference into overgeneralization, ignorance of rule, incomplete application of the rules, and false concepts.

Bumroongthai (2011) examined the errors generated by Thai learners of English and found that the major sources of the errors came from the negative transfer of the L1 and the incomplete knowledge of the L2. Other than that, according to Chen (2006) grammatical errors could be frequently found in Taiwanese EFL students' written products, more specifically for the use of articles. This is due to the fact that there is no system in Taiwanese for the use of English articles. From these findings, it could be observed that the most dominant source of L2 learners' erroneous utterance is from the interlingual interferences because of the different language systems.

Other studies within the same area were conducted by Napitupulu (2017) and Subekti (2018) on EA in Indonesian students' written productions. These studies found some major themes of errors, such as lack of grammatical and tense consistencies. Napitupulu (2017) analyzed linguistic errors in the writing of Indonesian undergraduate students and found that the majority of students committed grammatical errors. The study indicated that a significant number of errors were made by Indonesian students which can be attributed to the influence of their first language.

Similarly, Subekti (2018) identified learners' errors in complex sentences among Indonesian undergraduate students. The study found that learners' use of English lacked of tense consistency. However, this study overlooked the sources of errors. On top of that, the object of the previous research focused mostly on

adolescent L2 learners. The present study will identify not only the types of errors, but also the sources of errors committed by adult L2 learners.

Evidence suggests an interesting correlation between EA and sources of errors, more specifically in adolescent L2 learners; therefore it is desirable to further research the errors in written production among adult L2 learners. Taking into account the benefits of EA in providing an opportunity for L2 learners to improve, this present study attempts to investigate the types of errors that are frequently found in English written products of adult L2 learners. Furthermore, it aims to trace the source of these erroneous performance. To make it more specific, this study only investigates the most dominant types of learners' errors. In accordance with the finding of previous research conducted by Napitupulu (2017) and Subekti (2018) that L2 learners committed grammar inconsistencies, this present study predicts that adult Indonesian learners of English would make errors in their written products and that it could be traced back to interlingual and intralingual interferences. The research questions for the above purposes are as follows: 1) What are the types of errors committed by adult L2 learner in written production? 2) What are the sources of the errors?

Three Indonesian adults were selected in the study with similar L2 proficiency levels as represented by their overall IELTS scores of 7.0. They actively use English in their academic settings because it is used as the medium of instruction in their university. The participants were given 20 minutes to write down an essay consisting of 10-15 sentences to answer the following questions: "What is your most favorite course in your master program? What have you learned in the course?" This topic was chosen in order to elicit the use of present and past tenses from them. The essay was written manually on a piece of paper, not via computer, to prevent the participants from using spell-checker or other sources. The error classification of Hubbard's et al (1996) namely grammatical, syntactic, substance, and lexical errors were accounted for in this study. The essays were then collected and categorized according to the type of errors. The findings were visualized in the table and analyzed further to find the source of the errors whether they came from interlingual or intralingual interferences.

## DISCUSSION

Having analyzed the essay, the following results were obtained. Table 1 provides the detailed proportion of error types committed by the participants. Of the three participants, data of 43 errors were found. The most dominant one was in the form of use of tenses with 23 errors. The least dominant category was substantial errors with only one occurrence.

Table 1. Proportion of Errors Committed by Participants

Category	Sub-category	Frequency	Percentage
Grammar	Prepositions	1	2%
	Tenses	23	53%
	Articles	6	14%
Syntax	Subject verb agreement	4	9%
	Word order	2	5%
Substance	Capitalization	0	0%
	Punctuation	1	2%
	Spelling	0	0%
Lexical	Word choice	6	14%
Total		43	100%

As shown in Figure 1, grammatical errors are the most dominant with a total of 70% of errors, followed by both lexical and syntax errors with 14% of occurrences each. The least dominant was substance errors. These errors classification is further explained in the discussion section.

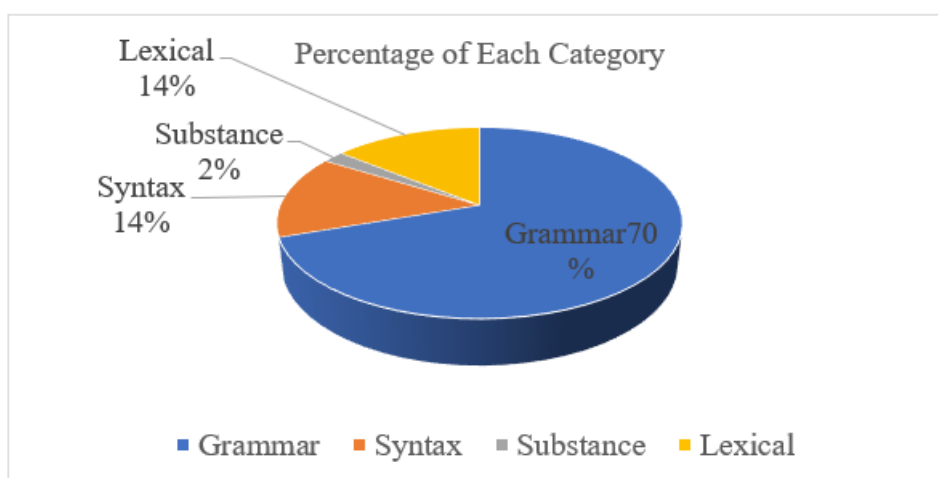


Figure 1. Percentage of Errors in Each Error Category

The most dominant type of errors committed by the participants were grammatical errors, with tenses errors which occurred the most frequently, followed by article and preposition errors. Tenses errors happen when a learner uses the wrong verb tense in a certain sentence (Napitupulu, 2017). In this case, most participants confused the use of present and simple tenses to describe an event that had happened or was happening when they wrote the essay as the following:

1. Error identification: I've been interested in Health Psychology since I'm an undergraduate student.

Correction: I've been interested in Health Psychology since I was an undergraduate student.

2. Error identification: I just realized that there are many things about it that I haven't know.

Correction: I just realized that there were many things about it that I hadn't known.

From these excerpts from the essays, it can be observed that in some cases the participants did not use the appropriate tenses when talking about a certain event. There were many inconsistent uses of verb and auxiliary which combined both past and present tense. The lack of tense consistency is a common occurrence with Indonesian L2 learners as previously found by Napitupulu (2017) and Subekti

(2018). When tracing to the influence of these errors, it could be observed that there is a different of time concept in English and *Bahasa Indonesia*. *Bahasa Indonesia* does not possess tenses to describe the happening or completion of an event. In Indonesian, the verbs and the conjugations do not change according to time references. Consequently, L2 learners might face difficulties in selecting an appropriate tense for a certain condition. All in all, the time concept in English might be difficult for Indonesian learners to fully acquire.

Another set of errors came from the passive forms, specifically the omission of auxiliary verbs in them, for instance:

3. Error identification: The behaviour towards illness also explained in details.  
Correction: The behaviour towards illness is also explained in details.
4. Error identification: This integrated view of theories sums up into a model.  
Correction: This integrated view of theories is summed up into a model.

From these examples, the participants omitted the auxiliary verbs required for passive forms. Looking back to *Bahasa Indonesia*, passive sentences is formed by replacing or adding a prefix to a verb as a marker. This passive formation concept is seen to be similar to that of English because it also required adding a marker in the form of auxiliary verb. Hence, it could not be said that L1 caused these omissions. So, these errors could be because of the learners' lack of understanding of passive construction.

Overall, the findings of the present study indicate grammatical errors were most frequently committed by adult L2 learners. This could be because their L1 interfered in the process of L2 production and that their knowledge of L2 grammar was limited as well as incomplete. Being adult L2 learners might mean that they have had ample time to study the structure and grammar of an L2. Additionally, they could have had more cognitive skill in understanding the materials, especially when the target language is used in their surroundings. In the current study, the participants used English in the university and society actively. Even so, it may be observed from the finding that the adult L2 learners have not fully mastered the structure of the target language, thus making erroneous utterances even when discussing familiar topics.



Other than that, Indonesian culture and context also influenced these errors, for instance with the time concept and sentence structures. These conditions are consistent with the view of Richard's (1974) who classified sources of errors to interlingual and intralingual interference. In addition, Indonesian learners might seem to depend on the mother tongue when expressing their ideas which later causes the improper word choices and sentence structures.

## CONCLUSION

This present study attempted to find the types of errors in written production by adult Indonesian learners of English and later investigated the source of these errors. The adult L2 learners with similar proficiency were asked to write an essay on a topic that elicited their use of present and past tense. The study predicted that the participants would commit grammar errors in essays. The main findings were in line with previous studies that the most dominant category for learners' errors were grammatical errors (Napitupulu 2017; Subekti 2018).

Their first language (L1) caused interference in the production of their second language (L2), and their knowledge of L2 grammar was limited and incomplete, leading to errors in their language use. Furthermore, Indonesian learners may rely on their mother tongue when expressing themselves, leading to inappropriate word choices and sentence structures.

Due to time and space constraints, the author only focused on elaborating the most dominant type of learner errors found in the study. The study also incorporated a small number of participants which consequently means that drawing a solid conclusion was rather difficult and not generalizable to a bigger population. The author suggests having a bigger sample for further studies with the same or different L2 proficiency levels in order to investigate whether they influence errors produced by learners. In addition, elaboration on each error category and its sources should be provided to further contribute to the pedagogical impact of the study.

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