

Syntactical Analysis of Students' Writing Error

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Abstract

This analysis examines the various types of grammatical errors found in a set of sentences, with the goal of assessing the writer's proficiency in constructing proper English sentence structure and syntax. The errors identified include incomplete sentences/sentence fragments, subject-verb agreement issues, missing verbs, redundant or incorrect verb usage, pronoun usage errors, and problems with missing words and improper word order. A detailed examination of these error types from a syntactical perspective reveals a fundamental lack of understanding of the basic components and rules required for building grammatically correct sentences in English. The incomplete sentences and sentence fragments indicate a deficiency in applying the subject-verb-object structure, while the subject-verb agreement issues, missing verbs, and improper verb usage point to gaps in comprehending verb conjugation and incorporation within the sentence. Additionally, the pronoun usage errors demonstrate a lack of knowledge about anaphoric reference, and the missing words and incorrect word order reveal a poor grasp of the relationships between sentence elements. Collectively, these findings lead to the conclusion that the writer has a deep-seated problem with mastering English grammar and syntax at the most fundamental level, and significant remedial work would be required to strengthen their foundational knowledge and application of these core linguistic principles, with targeted instruction and practice in sentence structure and syntax being essential for improving their written and verbal communication skills.

Keywords: Communication skills; Grammatical errors; Linguistic proficiency; Sentence structure; Syntax

1. Introduction

At the core of effective writing is the ability to draw upon one's knowledge base, whether that knowledge stems from academic study, personal experience, or external research. The writer must thoughtfully select and synthesise relevant information to construct a cohesive argument or narrative. This requires not only a broad base of knowledge, but also the critical thinking skills to evaluate and integrate that information in a purposeful way ("CONTINGENT LABOR, WRITING STUDIES, AND WRITING ABOUT WRITING," p. 76).

Equally important is the skill of organising this content into a clear and logical flow (Eaton & Parnter, 2022, p. 298). The writer must consider the overall structure of the essay, strategically arranging ideas, examples, and supporting evidence in a manner that guides the reader through the text. This could involve techniques such as the use of transitional phrases, topic sentences, and well-developed paragraphs, all working together to create a sense of coherence and direction.

Beyond the conceptual and structural elements, skilled writing also requires a command of language (Sharipbay, 2024, p. 134). The writer must carefully choose words,

phrases, and sentence structures that convey meaning precisely and elegantly. Attention to grammar, syntax, and style can elevate the quality and impact of the written work, rendering it more accessible and impactful for the reader. This linguistic dexterity allows the writer to communicate complex ideas with clarity and eloquence.

Underpinning these various writing skills is the ability to engage in reflective, recursive processes. Skilled writers do not simply generate text in a linear fashion, but rather continually review, revise, and refine their work (Sharipbay, 2024, p. 211). This iterative approach allows them to identify weaknesses, strengthen arguments, and polish the overall composition.

In essence, effective writing is a multifaceted endeavour that demands the integration of substantive knowledge, organisational acumen, linguistic proficiency, and metacognitive awareness. It is a complex skill that is developed and refined through dedicated practice, exposure to exemplary models, and thoughtful feedback.

Writing for non-English speaking students at the university level presents a significant challenge. These students must navigate not only the rigours of academic discourse, but also the complexities of communicating in a foreign language.

At the core of this challenge is the need for non-English students to develop proficiency in the linguistic and rhetorical conventions of academic writing (Sharipbay, 2024, p. 99). This involves mastering a range of skills, from vocabulary and grammar to the organisation and structure of essays and research papers. These students must learn to express complex ideas, marshal evidence, and construct logical arguments, all while contending with the nuances and idiosyncrasies of the English language.

In addition to the linguistic demands, non-English students must also adapt to the cultural and educational norms of the university setting (Trang, 2021, p. 110). Academic writing often requires familiarity with disciplinary knowledge, familiarity with citation styles, and an understanding of the expectations and conventions of the Western academic tradition. For students whose educational backgrounds may differ significantly, bridging this cultural gap can be a formidable obstacle.

Furthermore, non-English students may face challenges related to time management, access to resources, and adjusting to the pace and rigour of university-level coursework. The need to balance language learning with the demands of their academic program can place significant strain on these students, potentially compromising their ability to effectively engage with and produce high-quality written work.

Addressing the writing challenges faced by non-English students at the university level requires a multifaceted approach (Trang, 2021, p. 243). This may involve the provision of targeted language and writing support, the integration of scaffolding techniques within coursework, and the fostering of inclusive classroom environments that recognize and accommodate the diverse needs of these students.

Ultimately, the ability of non-English students to succeed in university-level writing is a crucial indicator of their overall academic achievement and integration into the broader scholarly community. By recognizing and addressing the unique challenges these students

face, educational institutions can better support their success and contribute to the diversity and richness of the academic landscape.

Utilising a set of writing tasks drawn from the Level B1 of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) can be a strategically sound approach when working with non-English students at the university level (Kee & Hj Iksan, 2019, p. 311).

Students were asked to write down two tasks. Task 1: Holiday Competition

For this task, students were asked to write a short paragraph of 70-100 words about a holiday destination they would like to visit. They were instructed to include the following information:

- Where they want to go
- Who they would take with them
- Why they want to go to that particular place

This task allows students to let their imagination and travel aspirations shine through as they describe their ideal holiday experience and the reasons behind their choice of destination.

Task 2: Writing a Letter

The second task required students to write a letter of 100-120 words describing their favourite day and suggesting an activity they could do together with the letter recipient.

This more open-ended writing prompt encourages students to reflect on a memorable personal experience and then propose a shared activity or outing that they think the letter's recipient would enjoy. The letter format allows students to practice their letter-writing skills while also showcasing their ability to make thoughtful recommendations for a shared experience.

The CEFR provides a well-established framework for describing and assessing language proficiency across a range of skills, including writing (Harsch & Seyferth, 2020, p. 71). At the B1 level, learners are expected to demonstrate the ability to "write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest." This level of proficiency aligns well with the expectations and demands of university-level writing, where students are often required to compose coherent essays, reports, and other forms of academic discourse.

By selecting writing tasks from the CEFR B1 level, the writer can ensure that the activities and expectations are appropriately scaffolded to support the language development and writing skills of the non-English students. These tasks may include, for example, writing personal letters, describing experiences, or summarising information from various sources.

The use of CEFR-aligned writing tasks can offer several benefits for non-English students navigating the challenges of university-level writing (Jeh-do et al., 2024, p. 98). First, it provides a clear and internationally recognized benchmark for assessing and tracking the students' progress in developing their writing abilities. This can help inform instructional strategies and identify areas where additional support or intervention may be necessary.

Moreover, the CEFR framework emphasises the importance of building communicative competence, which encompasses not only grammatical accuracy but also the ability to engage

in meaningful and contextually appropriate written discourse. By aligning writing tasks with the B1 level, the writer can help students develop a more holistic set of writing skills that are directly applicable to the academic demands they face.

Importantly, the use of CEFR-based writing tasks should be accompanied by a larger pedagogical approach that addresses the multifaceted nature of academic writing (Manchón, 2017, p. 299). This may include, for example, explicit instruction in research and citation practices, the development of critical thinking skills, and the cultivation of metacognitive awareness regarding the writing process.

By strategically incorporating CEFR-aligned writing tasks into their instructional repertoire, educators can provide non-English students with a scaffolded pathway to develop the essential writing skills required for success in the university setting. This targeted approach can contribute to the overall academic achievement and integration of these learners within the broader academic community.

Focusing this research on the errors that appear in the writing of non-English students at the university level and analysing them through the lens of English syntax is a well-conceived approach.

Examining the specific linguistic errors that these students make can provide valuable insights into the challenges they face and the areas where targeted support and instruction may be most beneficial. By analysing the errors through the framework of English syntax, the researcher can gain a deeper understanding of the underlying grammatical and structural issues that contribute to the students' writing difficulties.

Some key aspects of this syntactic analysis (Kostusiak, 2020, p. 39) may include:

1. **Sentence Structure:** Identifying errors in word order, subject-verb agreement, and the formation of simple, compound, and complex sentences. This can shed light on the students' grasp of fundamental English sentence patterns.
2. **Parts of Speech:** Examining misuse or confusion of nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and other parts of speech, which can reveal gaps in the students' lexical knowledge and their ability to apply grammatical categories correctly.
3. **Phrase Structure:** Analysing errors in the construction of noun phrases, verb phrases, prepositional phrases, and other syntactic constituents. This can highlight areas where students struggle with the internal structure and modification of these linguistic building blocks.
4. **Clause Structure:** Investigating issues with the formation and integration of independent and dependent clauses, including the use of conjunctions, relative pronouns, and other subordinating elements. This can illuminate the students' understanding of clausal relationships and their ability to construct more sophisticated sentence structures.
5. **Tense and Aspect:** Examining errors in the use of verb tenses, aspects, and modal auxiliaries, which can provide insights into the students' grasp of temporal and aspectual distinctions in English.

By carefully documenting and categorising the types of syntactic errors made by the non-English students, the researcher can then pursue a more in-depth analysis. This may involve comparing the students' error patterns to the normative structures of English, identifying common areas of difficulty, and exploring potential sources of interference from the students' native language backgrounds.

Such a syntactic analysis can serve as a valuable foundation for developing targeted instructional strategies and interventions. By addressing the specific grammatical and structural challenges faced by these students, educators can better support their progress in mastering the writing skills required for success in the university setting.

2. Methods

Utilising a qualitative descriptive approach is a well-suited research methodology for this investigation into the writing errors of non-English students at the university level ("STUDENTS ERRORS USING SIMPLE PRESENT TENSE IN WRITING DESCRIPTIVE TEXT AT FOURTH SEMESTER OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDY PROGRAM OF KHAIRUN UNIVERSITY," 2022, p. 412).

Qualitative descriptive research is characterised by its focus on providing a comprehensive and detailed account of a particular phenomenon, rather than testing hypotheses or establishing causal relationships (Elliott & Timulak, 2015, p. 133). In the context of this study, a qualitative descriptive approach allows the researcher to:

1. Capture the Nuances of Errors: By conducting in-depth analyses of the students' written work, the researcher can document the specific linguistic errors, their frequency, and the contextual factors that contribute to their occurrence. This level of detail and nuance is better suited to a qualitative approach than a purely quantitative analysis.
2. Explore Underlying Factors: Through interviews, observations, and other qualitative data collection methods, the researcher can gain a deeper understanding of the students' language backgrounds, educational experiences, and cognitive processing during the writing process. This can shed light on the underlying reasons for the observed errors.
3. Develop Rich Descriptions: The qualitative descriptive approach enables the researcher to provide thick, contextual descriptions of the writing errors and the broader academic and linguistic challenges faced by the non-English students. These rich descriptions can inform the development of targeted interventions and instructional strategies.
4. Maintain Flexibility: Qualitative descriptive research allows for flexibility in data collection and analysis, enabling the researcher to adapt the study design as new insights emerge. This can be particularly valuable when investigating a complex and multifaceted phenomenon like academic writing for non-English students.

By adopting a qualitative descriptive approach, the researcher can delve into the nuances and complexities of the students' writing errors, rather than relying solely on statistical

analyses or predetermined frameworks. This can lead to a more holistic understanding of the challenges these students face and the factors that contribute to their writing difficulties.

Furthermore, the rich descriptions and contextual insights generated through qualitative descriptive research can inform the development of tailored instructional approaches and support services for non-English students ("Descriptive Models of the Research Impact Process," 2007, p. 223). The findings can guide educators in designing curriculum, providing targeted feedback, and fostering an inclusive learning environment that addresses the unique needs of this student population.

Conducting a case study focused on the writing errors of students in the 4th semester of the International Business Administration Study Program at Universitas Suryakencana is a well-targeted and appropriate research approach.

Leveraging a case study methodology within this specific academic context offers several advantages:

1. **Depth of Analysis:** By focusing on a single university program and cohort of students, the researcher can engage in an in-depth exploration of the writing challenges faced by this particular group. This level of specificity allows for a more nuanced and contextual understanding of the phenomenon.
2. **Bounded System:** The International Business Administration Study Program at Universitas Suryakencana provides a clearly defined "bounded system" for the case study. This enables the researcher to delimit the scope of the investigation and concentrate on the unique characteristics and dynamics within this particular academic setting.
3. **Contextual Factors:** A case study approach facilitates a deep dive into the various contextual factors that may influence the writing errors of the 4th-semester students, such as their linguistic backgrounds, educational experiences, and the specific curricular and instructional approaches used in the program.
4. **Exploratory Power:** As an exploratory case study, this research can uncover previously unknown or underexplored aspects of the writing challenges faced by non-English students in this particular academic program. The findings can then inform the development of hypotheses and theories for future, larger-scale investigations.
5. **Transferability:** While the case study is focused on a specific program and cohort, the insights and lessons learned may be transferable to other similar academic contexts involving non-English students at the university level. The rich descriptions and contextual details can facilitate the application of the findings to relevant settings.

By immersing the researcher in the real-world context of the International Business Administration Study Program, the case study approach allows for a deep and nuanced understanding of the writing errors and the factors that contribute to them. This, in turn, can inform the development of targeted interventions, instructional strategies, and support services tailored to the unique needs of the students in this particular program.

Furthermore, the case study's focus on the 4th-semester students provides an opportunity to explore the writing challenges at a pivotal point in the students' academic journey, where they

may be transitioning into more advanced coursework and facing heightened demands for academic writing proficiency.

3. Results and Discussion

Data 1

"My dad really love watch movie"

Error: Subject-verb agreement (should be "loves" instead of "love")

Correct syntax: Subject ("My dad") + Adverb ("really") + Verb ("loves") + Verb Phrase ("watching movies")

Data 2

"We have not see each other"

Error: Verb form (should be "seen" instead of "see")

Correct syntax: Subject ("We") + Verb ("have") + Adverb ("not") + Verb ("seen") + Object ("each other")

Data 3

"So my dream is want to take my Dad to Japan"

Errors: Unnecessary verb ("want") and inconsistent capitalization of "Dad".

Correct syntax: Conjunction ("So") + Subject ("my dream") + Verb ("is") + Infinitive Verb Phrase ("to take my dad to Japan")

Data 4

"I will sent it to you"

Error: Verb form (should be "send" instead of "sent")

Correct syntax: Subject ("I") + Verb ("will send") + Object ("it") + Prepositional Phrase ("to you")

Data 5

"If I lucky maybe I can meet my favourite artist"

Errors: Missing verb ("am" in "If I'm lucky") and inconsistent capitalization of "favourite".

Correct syntax: Subordinate Clause ("If I'm lucky") + Adverb ("maybe") + Subject ("I") + Verb ("can meet") + Object ("my favourite artist")

Data 6

"I want meet my bias"

Type of error: Verb form error

The correct verb form should be "to meet" (infinitive) instead of just "meet".

Correct syntax: Subject ("I") + Verb ("want") + Infinitive Verb Phrase ("to meet my bias")

Data 7

"It is when I dreaming my father"

Type of error: Verb form error and missing article

The verb "dreaming" should be in the gerund form "dreaming".

The sentence is missing the article "of" before "my father".

Correct syntax: Subject ("It") + Verb ("is") + Subordinate Clause ("when I'm dreaming of my father")

Data 8

"I want learn Korean culture"

Type of error: Verb form error

The correct verb form should be "to learn" (infinitive) instead of just "learn".

Correct syntax: Subject ("I") + Verb ("want") + Infinitive Verb Phrase ("to learn Korean culture")

Data 9

"I hope you always healthy"

Type of error: Missing verb and adjective-noun agreement

The sentence is missing the verb "are" after "you".

The adjective "healthy" should be in the adverbial form "healthily" to modify the verb.

Correct syntax: Subject ("I") + Verb ("hope") + Subject ("you") + Adverb ("always") + Adverb ("healthily")

Data 10

"Chilling at Han River, get my mom some flowers"

Type of error: Verb form error and missing article

The verb "get" should be in the infinitive form "to get".

The sentence is missing the article "some" before "flowers".

Correct syntax: Gerund Phrase ("Chilling at Han River"), + Infinitive Verb Phrase ("to get my mom some flowers")

After analysing all the sentences provided, the main types of errors that appeared and their frequencies are:

1. Incomplete sentences/sentence fragments - 5 instances

Sentences missing key components like subjects, verbs, or context to convey a complete thought. From a syntactical point of view, the errors observed in these sentences point to fundamental issues with sentence structure and construction. The incomplete sentences and

sentence fragments indicate a lack of understanding or application of the basic subject-verb-object sentence structure required for a complete, grammatical thought. Sentences require all the necessary components (subject, verb, object/complement) to convey a complete idea.

2. Subject-verb agreement issues - 4 instances

The subject and verb in the sentence did not agree in number (singular/plural). The subject-verb agreement issues reflect a lack of understanding of how the subject and verb must agree in number (singular/plural). Verbs need to be conjugated properly to match the subject, as the verb is the critical element that provides the action or state of being in a sentence. Without a proper verb, the sentence fails to convey a complete and grammatical thought.

3. Missing verbs - 4 instances

Sentences were missing the necessary verb.

4. Redundant/incorrect verb usage - 2 instances

Verbs were used incorrectly or redundantly in the sentence structure. The redundant or incorrect verb usage points to confusion or misunderstanding about how to properly construct verb phrases within a sentence. Verbs need to be used appropriately and without redundancy, as they are a crucial part of the sentence structure.

5. Pronoun usage errors - 1 instance

The pronoun "they" was used incorrectly. The pronoun usage errors suggest a lack of understanding of anaphoric reference, where pronouns must be used correctly to replace and refer back to specific nouns in the sentence. Improper pronoun usage disrupts the intended meaning and grammatical structure of the sentence.

6. Missing words/improper word order - 1 instance

Words were missing from the sentence and the word order was incorrect. The missing words and improper word order also highlight issues with the fundamental syntactical relationships between the components of a sentence. Word order is crucial for establishing the correct syntactic relationships, and disruptions to the intended order can disrupt the meaning and grammatical structure of the sentence.

Overall, these errors suggest a fundamental gap in the understanding and application of basic English sentence syntax and structure. Addressing these syntactical issues would be an important first step in improving the grammatical correctness of the sentences.

4. Conclusions

Based on the analysis of the various grammatical errors observed in the provided sentences, the conclusion is that the writers have a fundamental lack of understanding and proficiency in constructing proper English sentence structure and syntax.

The key findings that lead to this conclusion are:

1. Incomplete sentences and sentence fragments: This indicates a lack of knowledge of the basic subject-verb-object structure required for a complete, grammatical thought.
2. Subject-verb agreement issues: The inability to properly match the verb to the subject in terms of number (singular/plural) shows a gap in understanding of subject-verb agreement rules.
3. Missing verbs: The omission of the critical verb element that provides the action or state of being in a sentence points to a deficiency in recognizing the necessity of verbs for a complete sentence.
4. Redundant or incorrect verb usage: The improper construction of verb phrases suggests confusion about how to incorporate verbs appropriately within the sentence structure.
5. Pronoun usage errors: The misuse of pronouns to refer back to specific nouns reveals a lack of understanding of anaphoric reference and how pronoun's function within the syntax.
6. Missing words and improper word order: These issues demonstrate a fundamental gap in comprehending the importance of word order and the relationships between the components of a sentence.

Collectively, these errors point to a deep-seated problem with the writer's grasp of basic English grammar and sentence-level mechanics. Remedying this would require a concerted effort to strengthen their foundational knowledge and application of syntactic principles.

The conclusion is that significant work is needed to develop the writer's proficiency in constructing grammatically correct, coherent sentences in English. Targeted instruction and practice in sentence structure and syntax would be essential for improving their written and verbal communication skills.

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