

## Grammatical Errors Made by Students in Writing English Descriptive Paragraph: A Study at English Department at Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Kerinci

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### ABSTRACT

This study aimed at describing the types of grammatical errors made by the in writing English descriptive text. The participants of the study consisted of 47 students of English department at Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Kerinci. The data were collected from the students' compositions. The data were analyzed by using Error Analysis (EA). The grammatical errors in the students' compositions were identified and classified. Each grammatical error was counted and calculated into percentage for frequency. The results revealed that the grammatical errors made by the students fell into seven categories: errors in using verb tense, singular and plural form, articles, prepositions, pronouns, word order (disordering/inversion of subject and verb) and word choice. The number of the errors in each type was apparently different. The most dominant errors were the errors in the use of preposition. There were 23 errors related to the use of preposition (33.3 % of the total errors). Compared to the total errors made by the students, there was only 1 error (1.4 %) in the use of pronouns.

**Keywords:** Error Analysis, Grammatical Errors, Descriptive Paragraph

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## INTRODUCTION

In the English language teaching, we recognize there are four language skills. They are speaking, listening, writing and reading skill (Mursia, 2001). Among the four skills, writing is very important of students where the students can apply their knowledge and experience. Writing is one of skills that have to be mastered by students in learning English (Wikipedia, 2019). The students need a lot of practice in order to be able to write effectively and meaning fully in writing activities. Furthermore it is considered that writing is the most difficult subject in english learning. We must be able to understand of the language in writing so we can get idea what they written. The English teacher or lecturer in teaching writing must give more attention some elements of writing so the students can write English paragraph well.

Writing is one of skills that have to be mastered by students in learning english. The students need a lot of practice in order to be able to write effectively and meaning fully in writing activities. Furthermore it is considered that writing is the most difficult subject in

english learning. Generally, writing is considered as a complex process it is because in writing activity, students need a lot of ideas, able to use correct grammatical, and able to organize ideas in a coherent fashion. It can be said that knowledge is the main key in order to be able to write well (Haris, 1999).

Based the explanation above, in writing, the students must effort to increase their skill in grammar too. If the students are able in understanding grammar, so the students can be good researcher. But to be good researcher the students must be able to choose relevant method or strategies in developing idea of paragraph. One of some method in writing is the understanding about topic, organizing of the sentence, and relating sentence by sentence to be good paragraph.

In recent years, there has been a growing awareness of the importance of the English writing skill at English departments in Indonesia. The writing skill is part of the English syllabus at colleges/universities. Writing an English paragraph is a main activity as a result of the writing lesson in the tenth form. Hence it is very important for students to be taught how to write a paragraph.

However, while teaching English at English department of Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Kerinci, we find that most of the students have difficulties in writing English paragraph. Some of these difficulties are problems related to grammar and vocabulary at sentence level. Many difficulties on writing lead students to be more susceptible to producing errors.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1. Grammatical Error

Error is defined as a thing done wrongly (Hornby, 1995). Errors is a portion of competence in target language (English), and it will cause by lack of knowledge about the target language (English) or the student has not mastered yet the rules of the target language and mistake that refer to performance. It is as a faulty representation of competence caused by psychological restriction, such as memory lapses, confusion, hesitation, slips and carelessness and the students will be able to recognize it immediately and correct it after word.

Errors are viewed as an integral part of the language learning, process and they are very significant. They should be treated as the forms of information to the learner as well as the teachers.

Error occur if the learner do not master the system completely yet. They probably do some errors once then twice, and they cannot correct them by themselves. Furthermore, errors is a portion of competence in the target language (English), and it will cause by lack of knowledge about target language (English) or the students has not mastered the rules of the target language and mistake that refer to performance.

Errors are evidence of failure of in effective teaching or lack of control. If material is well chosen, graded and presented with meticulous care, there should never be any errors. The errors that students made in learning English as the target language can be classified into same causes of errors.

According to Richards, “the sources of errors in studying a language might be derived from the interference of the learners’ mother tongue and the general characteristics of the rule learning (Haryanto, 2007). The errors that are caused by the general characteristics of the rule learning are also called the intralanguage errors. And the errors caused by the interference of the learners’ mother tongue are called the interlanguage errors.”

On the basis of the level of language, one of the classifications of the error is the “grammatical error”. A grammatical error is a term used in prescriptive grammar for an instance of faulty, unconventional, or controversial usage, such as a comma splice or misplaced modifier, etc. (Nordquist, 2019) Grammatical error is the breaking of grammatical rules or systems. For examples:

*\*She cans dance very well*

(The grammatical error in the use of tense marker in modal verb)

*\* Five childrens were playing there.*

(The grammatical error in the use of plural morpheme)

Contrast *grammatical error* with correctness. The expression “grammatical error” sounds, and is, in a sense, paradoxical, for the reason that a form can not be grammatical and erroneous at the same time. One would not say *musical discord*. Because of the apparent contradiction of terms, the form *grammatical error* should be avoided and “error in construction”, or “error in English”, etc., be used in its stead. Of course one should never say, “good grammar” or ‘bad grammar.

The common grammatical errors are as follow: subject-verb agreements, pronoun agreement, dangling participles, parallel lists, article agreements, dangling prepositions, run-on sentences and incomplete sentences or fragments, double negatives, contractions, tense shifts (Cynthia, 2007). Understanding the most common grammatical errors can help you improve your writing. When you know which errors to look for, it's easier to act as your own editor. One of the examples of grammatical errors is error in using pronouns. Pronoun errors occur when pronouns do not agree in number with the nouns to which they refer. If the noun is singular, the pronoun must be singular. If the noun is plural, however, the pronoun must be plural as well.

## 2. Descriptive Paragraph

### a. The Nature of Descriptive Paragraph

Descriptive type of paragraphs is written in such a way that the reader is able to imagine the scene, object, person, etc. (MGMP Bahasa Inggris, 2018). It aims to show rather than tell the reader what something/someone is like. Descriptive paragraph can be also be defined as a paragraph that contains a description about a topic described. It is used in all forms of writing to create a vivid impression of a person, place, object or event (Wikipedia, 2018). It is used to describe a special place and explain why it is special, and describe the most important person in your life. Besides, it is also usually used to help a researcher develop an aspect of their work, e.g. to create a particular mood, atmosphere or describe a place so that the reader can create vivid pictures of characters, places, objects etc. It gives a description about what a person or thing is like. Series of detailed

observations are recorded, using sensory language. Descriptions are like narrative paragraphs, with visual characteristics unfolding in a *dramatic* way. The main objective of a description is to move the story ahead.

Moreover, in a descriptive text, a reader also can find certain language features used that relevant for describing a thing, person, or other objects such as the use of adjectives, and noun/pronouns. Specifically, the language features used in a descriptive text is as follows:

- a. Using attributive and identifying process.
- b. Using adjectives and classifiers in nominal group.
- c. Using simple present tense.

Djuharie states that the purpose of descriptive text is to describe or reveal a particular person, place, or thing. It organized by the following stages (Djuharie, 20017):

- a. Identification (Mention of the participant of the text described).
- b. Description (Mention the part, quality and characteristics of a subject being described).

#### **b. Classification of Descriptive Paragraph**

As the function of a descriptive paragraph is to describe about what something is like, this type of paragraph is also can be developed in order to describe a person, place, or thing:

##### a. Description of person

In this type of descriptive paragraph, a reader can find about the description about what a person is like such as description of one's physical or characters.

##### b. Description of place

This type of descriptive paragraph provides a reader some information or description about the real picture of the place described such as location, situation, and others.

##### c. Description of things or objects

This type of description is composed to give description about how a thing is like. It includes the description about physical description, features, and the characteristics of a thing to be described.

#### **c. Error Analysis in Language Teaching**

Learning a foreign language is a step-by-step process, during which errors are to be expected during this process of learning. Errors might provide feedback; they tell the teachers something about the effectiveness of his teaching.

Simply, Error analysis is defined as the examination of those errors committed by students in both the spoken and written medium (Ridha, 2012). Error analysis is an activity to reveal errors found in writing and speaking. Error analysis is the study of errors made by the second and foreign language learners (Richard, 1973). It is the process to observe, analyze, and classify the deviations of the rules of the second language and then to reveal the systems operated by learner (Brown, 1980). It is also defined as a technique for identifying, classifying and systematically interpreting the unacceptable forms produced by someone learning a foreign language, using any of the principles and procedures provided by linguistics (Crystal, 1987). All of the definitions clarify that error analysis is an activity to identify, classify and interpreted or describe the errors made by someone in speaking or in writing and it is carried out to obtain information on common difficulties faced by

someone in speaking or in writing English sentences. The process of Error Analysis is followed by the error description process; learners' errors are usually classified in different categories (Fang & Xue-mei, 2007). Error analysis may be carried out in order to (a) find out how well someone knows a language, (b) find out how a person learns a language, and (c) obtain information on common difficulties in language learning, as an aid in teaching or in the preparation of teaching materials.

Although errors are bad things in learning English as a foreign language, error analysis is advantageous for both learners and teachers. For learners, error analysis is needed to show them in what aspect in grammar which is difficult for them, and it also seems to be important in providing insight into how far a learner has progressed in acquiring a language, and showing how much more the learner needs to learn. For teachers, it is required to evaluate themselves whether they are successful or not in teaching English (Hasyim, 2002). There are some significance of error analysis in language teaching and learning. By error analysis, teachers will get an overall knowledge about the students' errors (Fang & Xue-mei, 2007). Foreign language learning is a process of hypothesis and trial and error occurrence is inevitable. So the teacher should learn to tolerate some errors, especially some local errors. Secondly, errors can tell the teacher how far towards the goal the learner has progressed and consequently, what remains for him or her to learn. So students' errors are valuable feedbacks. We can do some remedial teaching based on their errors. Thirdly, errors are indispensable to the learners themselves, for we can regard the making of mistakes as a device the learner employs in order to learn. Finally, some errors need to be handled, otherwise, they will become fossilized.

Therefore, in order to improve teaching, the teachers need to explore the learners' psychological process in language learning so that they can enhance their understanding of learners' errors. Based on the analysis of the causes of their errors, the teachers provide their timely guide and help. In addition, while placing an emphasis on error correction in the classroom, language teachers should take the teaching objectives, students' linguistic competence, their affective factors and the effectiveness of the error correction into consideration. Consequently, we can employ more flexible strategies in error correction and make more contributions to the ESL/EFL classroom teaching and learning.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The participants of this research were 47 students of English Department at Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Kerinci. To figure out the errors made by students in this study, composition task was employed. The data were analyzed by following the steps of Error Analysis (EA) specified by Corder (1967). The steps of the data analysis were as follow (Corder, 1967): collection of sample errors, identification of errors and description of errors. The grammatical errors made by students were coded and classified into the following categories: verb tense, singular and plural forms, articles, prepositions, pronouns, word order and word choice. For the purpose of this study, only the grammatical errors are described. Then, the errors were calculated in order to know the frequency of the errors by using the following formula (Arikunto, 1996):

$$P = \frac{n1}{\Sigma N} \times 100\%$$

in which:

P = Percentage of each error

n1 = Total of the given error

ΣN = Total of the whole errors

The last step of the data analysis was drawing a conclusion based on the analysis. In this step, the researcher drew a valid conclusion in the form of a brief description of each of the errors.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Data Description

From the data that have been collected by the researcher, the researcher found that the students of English department at Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Kerinci tended to make grammatical errors in writing English descriptive paragraph. There were 69 grammatical errors were identified by the researcher. The errors were classified by the researcher into 7 classifications as follows: errors in using verb tense, errors in using singular and plural form, errors in the use of articles, errors in the use of prepositions, errors in the use of pronouns, errors in word order (disordering/inversion of subject and verb), and errors in word choice. The frequency and percentage of the grammatical errors made by the students in writing English descriptive paragraph can be seen as represented in the following table:

Table 1. Grammatical Errors Made by the Students

N o.	Error Classification	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Verb Tense	17	24.6
2.	Singular and Plural Form	9	13.0
3.	The Use of Articles	13	18.8
4.	The Use of Prepositions	23	33.3
5.	The Use of Pronouns	1	1.4
6.	Word Order (Disordering/Inversion of subject and verb)	2	2.9
7.	Word Choice	4	5.8
<b>Total Number of Errors</b>		69	100.0

Based on the data represented in the table above, it can be seen that there were seven classifications of errors made by the students of English department at Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Kerinci in writing English descriptive paragraph. Each classification or type of the errors has different frequency or occurrence. According to the data, the most dominant errors made by the students were the errors in the use of preposition. There were

23 errors (33.3 % of the total errors) made by the students related to this classification of error. Compared to the total errors made by the students, only 1 error (1.4 % of the total errors) related to the use of pronouns.

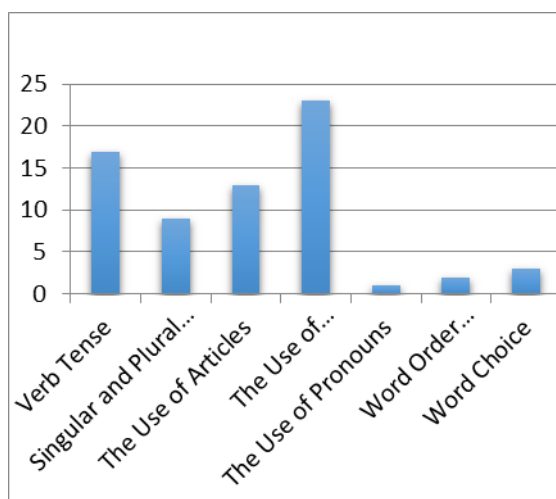


Figure 1. Frequency of Errors by Classification

## 2. Discussion

This section means to represent the grammatical errors made by students of English department at Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Kerinci in writing English descriptive paragraph. A grammatical error is a term used in prescriptive grammar for an instance of faulty, unconventional, or controversial usage, such as a comma splice or misplaced modifier, etc. (Nordquist, 2019). A grammatical error is a term used in prescriptive grammar for an instance of faulty, unconventional, or controversial usage, such as a comma splice or misplaced modifier, etc.

Based on the data that have been collected, there were 69 grammatical errors from the English descriptive paragraph written by the students. The researcher found out the grammatical errors that were made by the students were as follow: *errors in using verb tense, errors in using singular and plural form, errors in the use of articles, errors in the use of prepositions, errors in the use of pronouns, errors in word order (disordering/inversion of subject and verb), and errors in word choice*. The findings of this study seem to be similar to those of the research conducted by Haryanto (2007).

According to Haryanto, the students tend to make error in verb tense (Haryanto, 2007). The data of this study showed that wrong application of the verb tense can be seen when the students did not apply the correct tense to the verb in the sentences. The students used V-1 when they write the sentences in the past tense. They did not use the correct forms of verb in the past tense. From the total number of the errors made by the students in writing English descriptive paragraph, there were 17 errors in *using verb tense*, so the percentage of frequency of this kind of error is 24.6 % of the total errors made by the students. Besides, there were 9 errors (13.0 % of the total error) in *using singular and plural form* found by the researcher. Also, there were 13 errors (18.8 % of the total errors) in *the use of articles*. There were 23 errors (33.3 % of the total errors) in *the use of prepositions*. There was only 1 error (1.4 % of the total errors ) in *the use of pronouns*. There were 2 errors (2.9 %

of the total errors) in the form of *word order*. There were 4 errors (5.8 % of the total errors) in *word choice*. According to the data, it can be seen that the most dominant errors were the errors in the use of preposition. There were 23 errors made by the students related to the use of preposition in writing the English descriptive paragraph (33.3 % of the total errors). Compared to the total errors made by the students, there was only 1 error (1.4 %) in *the use of pronouns* made by the students.

### 3. Errors in Using Verb Tense

The use of some past tense forms showed that these participants are aware of the rules on different tenses application. The students used V-1 when they write the sentences in the past tense. They did not use the correct forms of verb in the past tense. The following is an example of the error: *She get married about 5 month ago.*

Besides, the students did not use the correct forms of verbs when the subject of the sentence is the third singular person. In this case, they did not use the verb ending with “-s”. While, in the simple present tense, if the subject is the third singular person, the verb must added by suffix “-s” or “-es”. In addition, the error was also in the form of negative sentence in the simple present tense. The student did not use the correct form of the modal auxiliary verb (do/does) for the sentence (see examples below). Besides, they also made errors in using the correct form of the verb “have” for the third singular person. The examples of the errors made by the students are as follows:

- (1) *She always care with her family.*
- (2) *She always study every night.*
- (3) *Cigarette don't hamper my brain.*
- (4) *He have 2 children.*

In using verb tense, the students used the past forms in the sentence in the form of simple present tense. They used wrong forms of the verb “be”. Besides, the student also used double “be” in the sentence.

- (5) *English was international language.*
- (6) *Everything I do is be a hobby.*

### 4. Errors in Using Singular and Plural Form

*Pluralization* is a process of adding morpheme (*s/es*) to pluralize nouns. There are many exceptional nouns that do not use adding *-s/es* to construct their plural forms. The function of *pluralization* is to show that the noun is more than one.

Based on the data that have been collected, the researcher found that some of the students did not know that the plural form using the suffix “s” must be applied to the countable plural noun. When the subject was in the singular form they applied the plural form to the noun as shown in the examples below:

- (1) *I have three brother and 1 sister.*
- (2) *My sister have three child.*
- (3) *He is one years old.*
- (4) *My old sister have three child.*



## 5. Errors in Using Articles

The use of articles is also determined by the noun whether it is countable or uncountable and whether it is singular or plural. There are two kinds of article; they are definite article (the) and indefinite articles (a/ an). The indefinite articles a/an are relatively easy to use if you know the simple rule of using “an” before words that start with a vowel sound (Taher, 2011). We use definite article “the” if the noun has been mentioned before or if the noun has been familiar. The article “the” developed historically from a word meaning “this” and still retains some of the basic meanings of the pointing demonstrative. The article “the” serves to particularize a noun. It helps to distinguish the known from the unknown. It may narrow down a class, or it may even limit the class to one. Indefinite article is used (a/ an) if the noun has not been mentioned before. The use of indefinite article also takes into account whether the noun is countable or not and whether it is singular or plural. If the noun is countable, singular and has not been mentioned before, the indefinite article must be used.

Thus, to be able to use an article properly, the students have to be sensitive in differentiating the use of definite article, indefinite article and even using no article at all. If they are not able to differentiate them, they will make errors like what the researcher found in this research. The examples of the errors are as follows

- (1) I have big family.
- (2) I am student at LAIN Kerinci.
- (3) I have the busy day.

## 6. Errors in Using Prepositions

The most problematic word class for English learners must be prepositions (Taher, 2011). There is no good way or rule on how to use prepositions; you just have to learn when and how to use them. The most common prepositional errors that the learners make are transfer errors, i.e. when the learners translate sentences directly from their mother tongue into the second language.

Prepositions are always followed by nouns (or pronouns). They are connective words that show the relationship between the nouns following them and one of the basic sentence elements: subject, verb, object, or complement. They usually indicate relationships, such as position, place, direction, time, manner, agent, possession, and condition, between their objects and other parts of the sentence.

Based on the result of the data analysis, the researcher found that some of the students made errors in using preposition when they write a descriptive paragraph in English. Some of examples of the errors made by the students in using preposition are as follows:

- (1) I come at campus.
- (2) I have the busy day in every day.
- (3) I cook at morning.

## 7. Errors in Using Pronouns

Pronoun is used to substitute nouns. It has many Classification; they are personal, reflexive, indefinite, relative, interrogative, demonstrative, and expletive pronouns. Based on the result of the data analysis, the researcher found that some of the students tended to make errors in in using pronouns when they write a descriptive paragraph in English. The examples of the errors made by the students are as follows:

- (1) *I enjoy about its.*

## 8. Errors in Word Order (Disordering/ Inversion of subject and verb)

The data showed that the students tended to make errors in term of word order when they researcher English sentences. In writing the English sentence, the students tended to write the sentence in wrong order of subject, predicate, and complement. The examples of the errors are as follows:

- (1) *It's good a job.*
- (2) *The activity I do everyday.*

As represented in the examples above, it can be seen that the student put the articles “a” just between the NOUN and ADJECTIVE. While, the correct order of the words is that the article “a” is placed just before the ADJECTIVE “good”. In addition, the student misplaced the OBJECT “the activity”. It should be placed just after the VERB “do”, followed by the ADVERB “everyday”.

## 9. Errors in Word Choice

In writing English paragraph, some students of English department at Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Kerinci also tended to make errors in the form of *word choice*. The students did not use the correct word in some sentences.

- (1). *Everyone in my family are kindness...*
- (2). *He is wisdom.*
- (3). *My family very like him.*

It can be seen that in the example (1) above, the student did not use the correct word, the word he used has different function and it was not suitable for the sentence. He should use “kind” for the replace of the verb “study”. In addition, in the examples (2), we can see that the students were wrong in using the NOUN “wisdom”. They should use the ADJECTIVES “wise” for the complement of the sentence. In the example (3), the student did not use the correct choice of word “very”. In English grammar, an ADJECTIVE never comes before VERB. So, the sentence should be “My family likes him very much.”

## CONCLUSION

The findings of the study indicate that in writing English descriptive paragraph, the students of English department at Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Kerinci produce different kinds of errors in their writings. Most of the students were not aware of the lexical aspects and grammatical rules of the English language. The findings of the study indicate that the students produce different kinds of errors in their writings. The students tended to

make errors in *using verb tense, singular and plural form, articles, prepositions, pronouns, word order (disordering/inversion of subject and verb), and word choice*. From the total number of errors made by the students, the frequency of errors in using verb tense is 17 (24.6 %), singular and plural form is 9 (13.0 %), articles is 13 (18.8 %), prepositions is 23 (33.3 %), pronouns is 1 (1.4 %), in word order (disordering/inversion of subject and verb) is 2 (2.9 %), and word choice is 4 (5.8 %). Accordingly, based on the data, the dominant error is error in the use of prepositions, the frequency of this kind of error is 23 (33.3 % of the total number of the errors made by the students).

The results of the study show that errors that participants committed were basically grammatical. The participants also had a relatively weak vocabulary and their sentences were sometimes incomprehensible. They committed errors in applying sentence structure rules in the English language. Hence, we can conclude that these participants have problems in acquiring normal grammatical rules in English.

This study has shed light on the manner in which students internalize the rules of the target language. It further shows that error analysis can help the teachers to identify in a systematic manner the specific and common language problems students have, so that they can focus more attention on these types of errors. Such an insight into language learning problems is useful to teachers because it provides information on common trouble-spots in language learning which can be used in the preparation of effective teaching materials. Also, by being able to predict errors to a certain extent, teachers can be well-equipped to help students minimize or overcome their learning problems.

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