

## ERROR ANALYSIS IN WRITING A JOB APPLICATION LETTER

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### Abstrak

Tujuan dari studi ini adalah untuk menganalisa kesalahan-kesalahan yang dibuat oleh siswa-siswa dari jurusan Perhotelan Politeknik NSC Surabaya dalam menulis sebuah surat lamaran kerja, sehingga dosen dapat mengenali pentingnya kesalahan-kesalahan dan dapat menentukan area yang membutuhkan pengayaan dalam pengajaran. Hasil-hasil dari studi ini menunjukkan bahwa mayoritas kesalahan-kesalahan yang dilakukan oleh siswa-siswa adalah tata bahasa, ejaan, penggunaan huruf besar dan pemilihan kata-kata. Siswa-siswa juga lemah dalam memahami format dari surat lamaran kerja dan curriculum vitae.

**Kata kunci:** analisa kesalahan, menulis, surat.

### Introduction

Writing a job application letter is very important, because a job application letter is needed for applying a vacancy. Someone can get an opportunity to have a job in a company through a job application letter. Therefore, the students of Hotel Department of NSC Surabaya Polytechnic are taught to write a job application letter, so that they can apply for a vacancy. Taylor (2004) gives some points of guidance in writing a job application letter, they are: 1) the purpose of an application letter is not to get the job but to get an interview, 2) the application letter should look attractive and neatly presented, 3) it should be brief and give all the relevant information in as few words as possible, 4) it should be written sincerely, in a friendly tone, but without being familiar, 5) it should not make exaggerated claims or sound boastful, but it should show a proper appreciation of applicant's abilities, 6) it should not imply that an applicant is applying for the job because the applicant is bored with the present job, 7) If the applicant's main interest is the salary, the applicant should not state the figure, 8) The applicant should not enclose originals of testimonials, but the applicant could send copies with the application letter. Taylor (2004) also adds that curriculum vitae which is sometimes called resume should give all personal details, together with education, qualifications and working experience. The performance of curriculum vitae should be attractive so that all

the information can be seen at glance, and should not extend to more than 2 pages.

In writing a job application letter, students sometimes make errors, and errors sometimes cannot be avoided because they are as a part of the language learning process. Corder (1981) states that errors are important in the process of language learning because first, the teacher making a systematic analysis can know how far towards the goal that the students have progressed, and what remains for the teacher to learn. Second, errors give to the researcher evidence of how language is mastered, what strategies or procedures the students are employing in their discovery of the language. Thirdly, the making of errors can be regarded as a device that the students use in order to learn. Brown (2000) also argues that second language learning is a process that is not the same as first language learning in its trial-and-error nature. Students will make errors in the process of acquisition, and that process will be obstructed if they do not make errors.

Brown (2000) states that sources of error are 1) interlingual transfer, 2) intralingual transfer, 3) context of learning, and 4) communication strategies. They are elaborated as follows: First, interlingual transfer is an important source of error for all students. The first stages of learning a second language are exposed to interlingual transfer from the native language, or interference. In these early stages, before the system of the second language is

mastered, the native language is only previous linguistic system upon which the student can obtain. Second, intralingual transfer is one of the main contributions of sources of errors that extend beyond interlingual errors in studying a second language. Researchers have discovered that the early stages of language learning are characterized by a majority of interference (interlingual transfer), but once the students have begun to master parts of the new system, more and more intralingual transfer – generalization within the target language - is presented. Third, context of learning refers to the classroom with its teacher and its materials in the case of school learning. In a classroom context the teacher or the textbook can guide the student to produce incorrect hypotheses about the language. Students often produce errors because of a misleading explanation from the teacher, incorrect presentation of a structure or word in a textbook. Fourth, communication strategies are identified and related to learning styles. Students obviously apply production strategies in order to increase getting their messages across, but at times these techniques can themselves become a source of error. On the other hand, according to Edge (1989), causes for errors are the influence of the first language, misunderstanding a rule, a decision to communicate as best one can, lack of concentration, and a mixture of these and other factors.

The purpose of this study is to analyze the errors made by the students of Hotel Department of NSC Surabaya Polytechnic in writing a job application letter, so that the teacher can recognize the importance of errors and can determine areas that need reinforcement in teaching. Ferris (2002, as cited in Darus & Subramaniam, 2009) states that the use of error analysis and appropriate corrective techniques can support effective learning and teaching of English. Learning English is a gradual process, and errors are expected in all stages of learning. Errors will not disappear because they have been pointed out to the students. Making errors is a natural process of learning and should be regarded as

part of cognition. Therefore, errors should be viewed positively.

### Methodology

In analyzing students' writing, there should be some criteria to be established. Sheldon (1988) states that no one cannot be sure what criteria are actually effective in ELT contexts worldwide, and materials criteria depend on the particular situation; therefore, global list of criteria cannot be applied in all different situations. Based on this consideration, criteria which were suitable for analyzing the students' writing were selected. In analyzing the application letter, some references were used, they were:

1. Cheung, A. C. M. and Munroe, E. P. (1994). *Writing Business Letters*. Baulkham Hills: Baulkhamville.
2. James, B. (1994). *Complete Letter Writer*. Singapore: Fairfield Book.
3. Love, C. and Tinervia, J. (1987). *Commercial Correspondence*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
4. McComas, D. C. and Satterwhite, M. L. (1993). *Modern Business Correspondence*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
5. Rosenthal, I. and Rudman, H.W. (1968). *Business Letter Writing Made Simple*. New York: Made Simple Books.

Based on these books, the criteria for analyzing the application letter were established. The criteria for analyzing were divided into two parts – part A for analyzing the application letter and part B for analyzing the curriculum vitae. It was aimed to make the analysis become systematic. The criteria of part A for analyzing the application letter were 1) the heading, 2) the inside address, 3) the salutation, the attention line, and the subject line, 4) the body of the letter, and 5) the complimentary closing and the signature. The criteria of part B for analyzing the curriculum vitae were 1) identifying information, 2) education, 3) experience, and 4) references. Five job application letters written by the students of Hotel Department of NSC Surabaya Polytechnic were analyzed based on these criteria. Some examples of errors found

in the five job application letters were classified based on these criteria too.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The findings and discussion of part A which is the results of analyzing the application letter and part B which is the results of analyzing the curriculum vitae are elaborated as follows:

#### **Part A : the Results of Analyzing the Application Letter**

The criteria of part A for analyzing the application letter were 1) the heading, 2) the inside address, 3) the salutation, the attention line, and the subject line, 4) the body of the letter, and 5) the complimentary closing and the signature. The results of analyzing the application letter are elaborated as follows:

##### **1) The Heading**

One student does not write the heading. Since it is a job application letter which belongs to a personal business letter, "it should be the street address on the first line; the city on the second; and the date on the third" (Love and Tinervia, 1987 : 14). Three students do not write the heading properly because they do not write their addresses, and one of them makes an error in writing the date. "Mei 30 2011" should be written "May 30, 2011". One student writes the heading correctly.

##### **2) The Inside Address**

One student does not write the inside address properly. It should not use "to:" at the inside address because "the inside address directs the letter to a particular company, a department of the company, or to a specific individual" (Love and Tinervia, 1987 : 22). One student does not write the inside address properly. "Attention To: Sukarmadi" should be placed after the inside address and before the salutation, and the way of writing should be: "Attention: Mr. Sukarmadi or ATTENTION: MR. SUKARMADI." The other three students also make the same errors.

##### **3) The Salutation, the Attention Line, and the Subject Line**

Most of the students write the salutation and the subject line correctly. Only

one student does not write the salutation properly because "Dear Sir" should not be indented. Most of the students do not write the attention line properly. They write the attention line before the inside address. Actually, "the attention line always follows the inside address and precedes the salutation (Love and Tinervia, 1987 : 33).

##### **4) The Body of the Letter**

Some examples of errors at the body of the letters can be classified as follows:

###### **a. Error in Choosing a Word**

"I have an over three month experience as a technical with PT. Glory Motor and W Hotel Seminyak as an engineering." Technical is "connected with the practical use of machinery, methods, etc" (Hornby, 2004 : 1813), while technician is "a person whose job is keeping a particular type of equipment or machinery in good condition" (Hornby, 2004 :1814). Engineering is a noun which means "the activity of applying scientific knowledge to the design, building and control of machines, roads, bridges, electrical equipment, etc" (Hornby, 2004 : 564), while engineer is a noun which means "a person whose job involves designing and building engines, machines, roads, bridges, etc" (Hornby, 2004 : 564). Therefore, this sentence should be "I have an over three month experience as a technician with PT. Glory Motor and W Hotel Seminyak as an engineer."

###### **b. Error in Modifier**

"Reading to your advertisement in Jawa Pos on 29 May 2011, that your firm is looking for waitress (WT)." This sentence contains a dangling modifier because "an introductory modifier must modify the subject of the sentence. If it doesn't, the result is a dangling modifier" (Nadell, McMeniman, and Langan, 2003 : 676). It should be better if the student writes "Reading to your advertisement in Jawa Pos on 29 May 2011, I know that your firm is looking for waitress (WT)." So, "I" in this sentence becomes the subject of the sentence.

###### **c. Error in Tenses & Capitalization**

"I graduate from Hotel Department of NSC surabaya Polytechnic in 2011 with GPA

3,06.” The student uses “simple present tense”, in this case “simple past tense” should be used. Besides that, “surabaya” should be capitalized. Ehrlich (1977 : 120) states that “the proper name of all organizations, religions, races, nationalities, and so on are capitalized.” NSC Surabaya Polytechnic is a proper noun. Therefore, the sentence should be written “ I graduated from Hotel Department of NSC Surabaya Polytechnic in 2011 with GPA 3,06.” Another example is “I am enclosing my resume for your consideration and would appreciate for the opportunity of interview at your convenience.” The student uses “simple present continuous tense”, in this case “simple present tense” should be used. Therefore, the sentence should be written “I enclose my resume for your consideration and would appreciate for the opportunity of interview at your convenience.”

#### **d. Error in Making a Sentence**

“Your organization an excellent reputation; therefore, it makes the position of Engineering Staff more attractive.” There is no verb in the first sentence. Swan (1996 : xxvii) states that “a sentence consists of one or more clauses, and usually has at least one subject and verb.” Besides that “Engineering Staff” should not be capitalized because “Engineering Staff” is not proper noun. Therefore, it should be written “Your organization has an excellent reputation; therefore, it makes the position of engineering staff more attractive.”

#### **e. Error in Parallelism**

“I am a 21 years old female, graduated from a reputable polytechnic, have a good command of English, and can also operate a computer. Nadell, McMeniman, and Langan (2003 : 660) state that “words in a pair or in a series should be placed in parallel (matching) grammatical structures. If they’re not, the result is faulty parallelism.” It should be better if this sentence is broken down into three sentences – “I am 21 years old. I graduated from a reputable polytechnic. I have a good command of English, and I can also operate a computer. Another example is “My name is Lukmanul Hakim, 19 years old, male, single,

energetic and healthy.” It should be better if the student writes “My name is Lukmanul Hakim. I am 19 years old, male, single, energetic, and healthy.”

#### **f. Error in Passive Voice**

“I was graduated from Hotel Department of NSC Surabaya Polytechnic with GPA 3,23.” The use of passive voice in this sentence is not appropriate. It should use active voice, so the sentence should be written “I graduated from Hotel Department of NSC Surabaya Polytechnic with GPA 3,23.” Another example is “I will be appreciated if you could give an opportunity to work in your company.” The use of passive voice in this sentence is also not appropriate. It should use active voice, so the sentence should be written “I will appreciate if you could give an opportunity to work in your company.”

#### **5) The Complimentary Closing and the Signature**

One student writes the name of the city – Surabaya, and the date. Actually, it is not necessary to write the name of the city and the date in the complimentary closing. The student also writes “Thanks and Best Regards.” for the closing. Love and Tinervia (1987 : 55) state that “the complimentary closing should be chosen carefully to agree in tone and manner with the salutation. When a letter uses a formal salutation, the complimentary closing must be equally formal.” Therefore, it should be “Best Regards” only.

#### **Part B : the Results of Analyzing the Curriculum Vitae**

The criteria of part B for analyzing the curriculum vitae were 1) identifying information, 2) education, 3) experience, and 4) references. The results of analyzing the curriculum vitae are elaborated as follows:

Most of the students make error in spelling; some of the students write “CURICULLUM VITAE”, and some of the students write “CURICULUM VITAE”. It might happen because of the influence of native language. It should be “CURRICULUM VITAE”.

### 1) Identifying Information

One student writes “Address” and “Current Address” in this part. Actually, it will be better, if she writes “Home Address” and “Current Address”, so that the reader of her curriculum vitae can know clearly. Next, she makes a mistake in writing the date – “30 august 1992”. “30 august 1992” should be written “30 August 1992”, so she does not pay attention to the capitalization. Finally, she also makes a misspelling in writing “Nationally”, it should be written “Nationality”.

Another student writes “Address I”. “Address I” should be written without “I” because she has only one address. Next, she writes “Marital Status: No married”. It should be better if it is written “Marital Status: Single”. It seems that this student is influenced by the native language. Finally, she also writes the position of colon of phone which is not in line with others, and the line spacing in this part which is not tidy. The position of colon of phone should be in line with others and the line spacing should be tidy.

### 2) Education

First, one student writes “EDUCATION” on the right. “EDUCATION” should be written on the left. Second, two students write “LAST EDUCATION”. “LAST EDUCATION” should be written “EDUCATION” only because they should also give information about their study started from elementary school until polytechnic. Third, one student writes “EDUCATIONS BACKGROUND”. “EDUCATIONS BACKGROUND” should be written “EDUCATION BACKGROUND”. Finally, some students do not write from what year to what year they study at elementary school, junior high school, senior high school, and polytechnic. It should be better if they write from what year to what year they study at elementary school, junior high school, senior high school, and polytechnic, so the interviewer will know their education background clearly.

### 3) Experience

One student writes “ORGANIZATION EXPERIENCE”, “JOB TRAINNING”, and

“JOB EXPERION” on the right. Actually, these titles should be placed on the left. She also makes misspelling, “JOB TRAINNING” and “JOB EXPERION” should be written “JOB TRAINING” and “JOB EXPERIENCE”. Besides that, she writes “10 February 2011-present: Job casual in JW Marriott hotel Surabaya, be a staf Waitress in restourant”. She makes errors in spelling, capitalization, and choice of word. This sentence should be written “10 February 2011 - present: casual work in JW Marriott Hotel Surabaya, as a waitress in restaurant”. Another student writes “Job training in W Hotel Seminyak, Bali 2011 as a Engineering.” He makes errors in spelling, article, capitalization and choice of word. The sentence should be written “2011: job training in W Hotel Seminyak Bali as an engineer.”

### 4) References

One student does not write any references, but she writes the complimentary closing and her name, “Thanks & Best Regards, Humairoh.” Actually in this part, she should write some references, and should not write the complimentary closing and her name again. Another student does not write any references, but she writes “SKILL: 1) Good speaking in English and Japanese, 2) Operating Windows applications.” The sentence should be written “SKILLS: 1) Having a good command in English and Japanese, 2) Being able to operate Windows applications.

### Conclusion

The results of the study show that the majority of errors committed by the students are grammar, spelling, capitalization and choice of words. The students are also relatively weak in comprehending the format of application letter and curriculum vitae. Therefore, it can be concluded that the students have problems in writing a job application letter and curriculum vitae. Furthermore, this error analysis can help the teacher to identify in a systematic manner the specific and common language problems students have, so that the teacher can focus on

the materials in which most students make errors, can evaluate the process of teaching learning, and can improve the techniques in teaching.

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