

Analysis of Students' Errors and Writing Flow in Opinion Paragraphs Written by the First Semester Students of English Education Department at University of Mataram Academic Year 2024/2025

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Abstract: This research analyses grammatical errors and the writing flow in opinion paragraphs written by first-semester English Education students at the University of Mataram in the 2024/2025 academic year. The main objectives of this study are to identify the types of errors, investigate the causes of these errors from the students' perspective, and assess whether the writing flow of the opinion paragraphs is appropriate. Utilising a mixed-method approach, data were collected through document analysis of students' opinion paragraphs and in-depth interviews with purposively selected participants. The research findings reveal four main types of errors based on Dulay's taxonomy: misformation (51.43%), omission (40.00%), misordering (5.71%), and addition (2.86%). These errors are primarily caused by first language (L1) interference, specifically through the literal translation process from Indonesian to English, as well as factors such as carelessness and a lack of self-editing by the students. Although numerous errors were found at the micro-linguistic level, the students' writing flow generally demonstrates a sound macro-structure. The constructed paragraphs met the criteria for opinion paragraph structure, consisting of clear topic sentences, relevant supporting details, and concluding sentences that reinforce the arguments. The results of this study are expected to provide insights for educators to focus on students' areas of weakness to improve the accuracy and coherence of their academic writing.

Keywords: Grammatical Errors; Opinion Paragraph Writing; Dulay's Taxonomy; L1 Interference; Writing Coherence

INTRODUCTION

Writing is a complex language skill that requires learners to integrate grammatical knowledge, vocabulary mastery, and the ability to organize ideas coherently. For students learning English as a foreign language (EFL), writing often becomes one of the most challenging skills to master, particularly at the early stages of higher education. First semester university students are expected to adapt quickly to academic writing demands, despite still developing their fundamental linguistic competence.

In EFL contexts, grammatical accuracy plays a crucial role in conveying meaning effectively. Errors in grammar may lead to ambiguity, misinterpretation, and reduced clarity of ideas. According to Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982), errors are systematic deviations that reflect learners' developing language system. Therefore, analyzing students' errors provides valuable insights into their interlanguage development and learning difficulties.

In addition to grammatical accuracy, writing flow is an essential aspect of effective writing. Writing flow refers to the smooth progression of ideas within a paragraph, supported by logical organization and appropriate use of cohesive devices. Opinion paragraphs, in particular, require students to present a clear stance, provide supporting reasons, and maintain coherence throughout the paragraph. However, many EFL students struggle not only with grammatical forms but also with organizing their ideas logically.

Previous studies have examined grammatical errors in students' writing and identified common error types such as omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. Other

studies have also highlighted issues related to coherence and cohesion in students' written texts. Nevertheless, research that simultaneously examines grammatical errors and writing flow, especially among first semester university students, remains limited. Understanding both aspects is important because grammatical accuracy and writing flow are interrelated components of effective writing.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the types of grammatical errors found in opinion paragraphs written by first semester students of the English Department at the University of Mataram, investigate the causes of these errors from students' perspectives, and evaluate the quality of writing flow in their paragraphs. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to English writing pedagogy by providing insights for lecturers in designing more effective instructional strategies for beginner-level university students.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-method research design as proposed by Creswell (2018), combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to obtain a comprehensive understanding of students' grammatical errors and writing flow.

Setting and Participants

The participants of this study were first semester students of the English Department at the University of Mataram in the academic year 2024/2025. A total of students were selected using purposive sampling, considering that they

had completed basic writing instruction and were assigned to write opinion paragraphs as part of their coursework.

Data Collection

The primary data were collected from students' written opinion paragraphs. These texts were analyzed quantitatively to identify and classify grammatical errors based on the surface strategy taxonomy by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982), which includes omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. Qualitative data were obtained through questionnaires distributed to the students to explore their perceptions regarding the causes of grammatical errors and difficulties in writing flow.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in several steps. First, students' writings were carefully examined to identify grammatical errors. Each error was categorized into one of the four error types and calculated to determine frequency and percentage. Second, students' responses from the questionnaires were analyzed thematically to identify common factors contributing to errors and writing flow problems. Finally, the quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated to provide an in-depth interpretation of the results.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Types of Errors

The analysis revealed four types of grammatical errors in students' opinion paragraphs: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. A total of 36 grammatical errors were identified from the analyzed opinion paragraphs, indicating that grammatical inaccuracy remains a salient issue among first semester EFL students.

Among these, misformation errors were the most dominant, accounting for more than half of the total errors. Omission errors were the second most frequent type, followed by misordering and addition errors.

Table 1. Types and Frequency of Errors

Types of Error	Total Cases	Percentage
Omission	14	40.00%
Addition	1	2.86%
Misformation	18	51.43%
Misordering	2	5.71%
Total	36	100%

Causes of Errors

Data from the questionnaires indicated several factors contributing to students' grammatical errors. Many students reported limited understanding of English grammar rules and difficulties in applying them during writing. First language interference was also identified as a major factor, as students often transferred Indonesian sentence structures into English. Additionally, lack of writing practice and limited feedback were perceived as contributing factors to persistent grammatical errors.

Table 2. Causes of Errors

Student Code	Translation	L1 Interference	Carelessness	Dominant Cause(s)
Student 2	✓	✓	✓	Translation + L1 Interference + Carelessness
Student 9	✓	✓	✓	Translation
Student 10	✓	✓	✓	Carelessness
Student 12	✓	✓	✓	Translation + L1 Interference
Student 15	✓	✓	✓	Carelessness

Writing Flow

Table 3. Writing Flow

Student Code	Opinion	Reason
Student 1	✓	✓
Student 2	✓	✓
Student 3	✓	✓
Student 4	✓	✓
Student 5	✓	✓
Student 6	✓	✓
Student 7	✓	✓
Student 8	✓	✓
Student 9	✓	✓
Student 10	✓	✓
Student 11	✓	✓
Student 12	✓	✓
Student 13	✓	✓
Student 14	✓	✓
Student 15	✓	✓

In terms of writing flow, the analysis showed that most students were able to express their opinions clearly. However, problems were found in the organization of ideas and the use of cohesive devices. Some paragraphs lacked logical progression, while others showed abrupt transitions between sentences. These issues indicate that students need

more explicit instruction on paragraph organization and coherence, particularly in opinion writing.

Discussion

Types of Errors

Based on the data analysis, 33 linguistic deviations were identified and classified into four error types following Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's (1982) taxonomy. Misformation emerged as the most dominant error type (18 cases; 51.43%), mainly related to tenses, pluralisation, and word choice. This was followed by omission (11 cases; 40.00%), while misordering and addition occurred only marginally.

The dominance of misformation supports Dulay et al.'s (1982) theory that early language learners tend to overgeneralize target language rules. The frequent occurrence of omission errors also indicates incomplete internalization of certain linguistic elements. Compared to Lestari et al. (2020), who found omission as the most prevalent error, the present study reveals a different pattern, possibly due to differences in learners' proficiency or instructional context. However, the findings align with Berto et al. (2022), confirming that structural errors remain a major challenge for beginning university students.

Causes of Errors

Interview data indicated that first language (L1) interference, particularly literal translation, was the primary source of grammatical errors. Students commonly formulated ideas in Indonesian and translated them word by word into English, resulting in structural mismatches where direct grammatical equivalence was absent. Carelessness, including limited self-editing and revision, also contributed to the errors.

These findings support theories by Norrish (1983) and Corder (1974) regarding interlingual transfer in second language learning and suggest that students remain at an early stage of interlanguage development. The results are consistent with Damayanti et al. (2022), who reported similar influences of mother tongue interference. Notably, this study highlights a relationship between lower academic achievement and more specific error causes, offering a contribution that has been minimally explored in previous research.

Writing Flow

Despite considerable weaknesses at the micro-linguistic level, the analysis of *writing flow* yielded generally positive results. Most students' opinion paragraphs demonstrated adequate coherence and unity, characterised by a logical structure consisting of a clear *topic sentence*, relevant supporting reasons, and a concluding sentence.

This result supports the paragraph structure model proposed by Oshima and Hogue (2006). However, it presents a minor contradiction to several previous studies that reported weak writing flow among beginning-level learners. This divergence may be attributed to the instructional emphasis at the University of Mataram, which places explicit focus on teaching paragraph coherence and organisation. Accordingly, the present study suggests that future pedagogical efforts should shift from an emphasis on macro-level organisation toward strengthening grammatical and syntactic competence at the micro level in order to reduce the dominance of *misformation* errors.

CONCLUSION

This study found that first-semester students of the English Education Study Program at the University of Mataram produced four types of grammatical errors in opinion paragraph writing: misformation, omission, addition, and misordering. Misformation was the most dominant error type (18 cases; 51.43%), indicating difficulties in applying correct grammatical forms, particularly in tenses, pluralisation, and word choice. Omission followed as the second most frequent error (14 cases; 40.00%), while misordering and addition occurred minimally.

From the students' perspectives, first language (L1) interference through literal translation was identified as the primary cause of errors, leading to structural mismatches between Indonesian and English. Carelessness, including limited self-editing and revision due to time constraints, also contributed to the errors.

Despite these micro-linguistic issues, the students' opinion paragraphs generally demonstrated adequate writing flow and organisation. Most students were able to construct logically structured paragraphs in line with Oshima and Hogue's (2006) model, suggesting that while grammatical accuracy remains a challenge, students have developed an understanding of macro-level argumentative structure.

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