

## **Error Analysis in Writing Argumentative Essay**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The main purpose of this study is to find the most dominant type of errors made by the second year students of English Department of Padang State University in writing argumentative essay. Besides, the writer also gives correction to those errors and hopes that the students can prevent committing errors when they write an argumentative essay in the future. This research was conducted to 34-second year students of English Department of Padang State University. The writer chose them as subjects of the research because they have already taken writing subject concerning with writing argumentative essay in the previous semester. This error analysis uses theory proposed by John Langan in his book entitled "College Writing Skills with Readings" which was published 1997. This analysis refers to the four bases in writing essay; they are unity, support, coherence, and sentence skill.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In international communication, English language is the most dominantly used. In order to be able to communicate in English language, undoubtedly, a person must master four basic skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Reading and writing used written expression, while speaking and listening are conducted through oral expression.

It is not surprising that the students normally assume writing to be a solitary, individual act. Most of them feel that when they set out to put pen to paper, they work best alone. However, the solitude they may

require for this one limited aspect of writing—putting pen to paper—has led them to misunderstand the process of writing as a whole.

Historically, writing allowed people to isolate themselves, for convenience or any other reason. Writing is an ancient technological advance that lets people converse with one another even though they are separated. Before writing was invented, people had to be in the same place together, face to face, in order to converse. Writing lets conversation go on in spite of the fact that people taking part in it were thousands of miles away. Writing frees us from having to converse only with our immediate neighbours, people in the room with us or just down the street. Through writing we can take part in a conversation going on among human beings throughout the world, a conversation that has gone on for thousands of years and that will continue to go on, with any luck at all, for thousand more. Writing even lets people converse with the dead in a limited but valuable way.

One of the forms of writing is essay. Essay is a kind of scientific writing. Many of the written tests will be in the form of essay. Furthermore, the basic structure of an essay will help in career-related writing, from a job application letter to the memos and reports. It provides valuable purposes. It will make the student who writes an essay a better reader; it will make him/her a better thinker; and it will give him/her practice in the process of clear and logical reasoning.

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that essay writing is a skill that every student especially university student must master. Writing essay is also a process. In order to produce a good writing there is a series of process that should be followed. Meyers (1992:8) points out that the composing process is the method by which a writer discovers and expresses new ideas. Therefore, in a process, there must be some errors or mistakes completed by the students. These errors may be in the form of composition skill and grammar skill.

Gorrell and Laird (1967) says that writing grows from expression and is intended to communicate; good writing says something, and develops from clear thinking. Writing also improves more readily through understanding than through correction. Some correction is essential, but many so-called errors diminish when the student learns to construct a sentence or a paragraph. Based on this statement, it is essential to do some correction on the students' errors in writing an essay. How to write essay is taught only for university students because through learning to write essay, they can prepare themselves to write more scientific writing, which is called a theses. That's why to correct their

errors in writing essays gives invaluable contribution to them, especially in guiding him to write a theses.

In evaluating essay, some teachers tend to focus on the use of grammar in the essay. This happens because most of theories in evaluating essay put much attention on the grammar skill. Actually, if the purpose of the evaluation is the students' ability in grammar, the essay is not the best instrument; instead, the written test will be much better. It is due to the fact that an essay is the combination of words and words which are tied up together under one general idea. The problem of developing and organizing idea is very important. Langan's (1997) model of evaluating essay is quite different from other models. Langan's model evaluates essay form two sides: composition skill and grammatical skill. That's why the writer is interested in using Langan's model as the main theory of his research.

### ARGUMENTATIVE ESSAY

A good writing should have specific direction or purpose or objective to be achieved. Based on the objective of writing, an essay, according to Langan, J. (1997) is divided into four traditional types namely description, narration, exposition, and argumentation. Langan, J (1997:121) says "A description is a verbal picture of a person, place, or thing. In narration, a writer tells the story of something that happened." Baker and Phillips (1979:84) say, "Exposition is a kind of writing that explains, informs, defines, or interprets". It can be concluded that the main purpose of these three types of essays is primarily to explain or analyze, such as in expository, narrative, and descriptive essay. Argumentative essay, on the other hand, has a different purpose: to convince or to persuade. In argumentative essay, as Langan, J (1997:121) said, "a writer attempts to support a controversial point or defend a position on which there is a difference of opinion".

Generally, an argument exists when two persons or groups disagree about something. One person gives an opinion offering reason in support of it and the other person gives a different opinion offering reason in support of his or her stand. However, Jacobus (1998:101) said that there is no argument about incontrovertible facts. For example, clean air is healthier than polluted air; Indonesia is larger than Singapore, cancer is a killer, and so on. It can also be said that an argument happens

when there is a vague explanation. When something is very clear and everybody knows it, there will be no longer an argument.

Smalley and Ruetten (1986:320) said that an argumentative essay is one that attempts to change the reader's mind, to convince the reader to agree with the point of view or opinion of the writer. Therefore, a successful argumentative essay must be able to ensure the readers to whatever stated in it. In addition, Reid, M.J. (1988:88) said:

"Written argumentative essay is sometimes more difficult because the reader does not see your facial expression, hear your voice, or experience your presence. For this reason, writing argumentative essay demands careful planning, analysis of your audience, and sufficient evidence to prove your reader that your opinion is valid: that is, your opinion is worthwhile and should be considered."

Thus, to argue our opinion orally is easier than those are written. In oral communication, the audience can see us; experience our presence; and see our gesture. Therefore, it can help us to ensure them to whatever we have said. But in argumentative essay, the audience can only read our argumentation through writing, we cannot ensure them through our gesture.

Smalley and Ruetten (1986:334) said that a good argumentative essay should contain the following characteristics:

- a. The argumentative essay should introduce and explain the issue or case. This point is very obvious; that is, the writer must understand the issue that he or she is going to argue about. Furthermore, it is necessary for the writer to define any ambiguous terms that become key terms to the discussion. For example, if the writer wants to write about basic education, he or she must clearly give the difference between the primary education and basic education. Because these two terms almost have similar understanding; that is, they are the beginning of education.
- b. An argumentative essay should offer reasons and support for those reasons. It is very clear the writer must provide reasons for every statement he or she has written in the discussion. These reasons must also be supported by giving some examples, facts, and so on.
- c. An argumentative essay should refute opposing arguments. It is this characteristic that is more particular to the argumentative essay than to expository essay. Because there are two sides to the issue, and since the writer wants to convince the reader that the writer is right,

- not only must the writer prove his or her own case, but he or she also prove that the opponent is wrong, or at least his or her points are more valid or significant. Refute means to prove wrong by argument or to show that something is erroneous.
- d. If an opponent does have a valid point, the writer should concede that point. It does little good in an argumentative essay to ignore any valid points the other side may have. In other words, the writer must defend his or her points although other side has more valid points. This is aimed to make the reader sure to what has been written in his or her essay. The writer can concede them and then go on to show that his or her points are more important anyway.
  - e. The conclusion should logically follow from the argument. The conclusion can summarize the main points and reassert the thesis; in an argumentative essay, it is very common to make a demand for some action.

### **ERROR ANALYSIS**

Errors are the flawed side of learner speech or writing. They are those parts of conversation and composition that deviate from selected norm of mature language performance. People cannot learn language without first systematically committing errors. Dulay, Burt. and Krashen (1982:138) states:

“Studying learners’ errors serves two major purposes: (1) it provides data from which inferences about the nature of the language learning process can be made; and (2) it indicates to teachers and curriculum developers which part of the target language students have most difficulty producing correctly and which error types detract most from a learner’s ability to communicate effectively.”

There are some theories available for evaluating essay. However, those theories tend to focus on the grammatical structure. It is true that writing can not be separated from structure, but it is not the most important one. One question may appear “If the students can write the sentence with good grammar, does it mean that they are certainly able to write as well?” Everybody agrees to negate this question. Theory of evaluation proposed by Langan, J (1997) is quite representative for evaluating essay because it covers both composition skill and grammar skill.

Langan, J (1997:95) states that there are four standards or bases in evaluating the students' essays. These bases which lead the students to make errors in their essay writing. Therefore, the errors of the students will be analyzed based on these formulas:

Table 1: Four Bases in Evaluating Essay

No	Four Bases	Types of Errors
1	UNITY	Announcements Rather Than Statements
		Statements That Are Too Broad
		Statements That Are Too Narrow
		Statements That Contain More Than One Idea
2	SUPPORT	Support
3	COHERENCE	Common Methods of Organization
		Transitions
		Other Connecting Words
4	SENTENCE SKILL	Writing fragments than complete sentence
		Writing run-ons
		The use of incorrect verb
		Subject and verb are not in agreement
		Faulty parallelism
		Faulty modifiers
		The use of incorrect forms of pronoun
		Using capital letters incorrectly
		Using punctuation incorrectly
		Wordiness
		Choosing words incorrectly
Spelling errors		

#### METHOD OF RESEARCH

This research is conducted by using a descriptive design. The population of this research are the second-year students of the English Department of UNP. They are students of 2003/2004 academic year. They are chosen because all of them have already taken writing subject concerning with writing argumentative essay. The technique of sampling used in this research is cluster sampling. In this technique, the writer will choose one class randomly then include all the students in this class in the

sample. There are two instruments used in this research. One of them is an explanation about argumentative essay. Another instrument is the test. To ease the analysis of types of errors in the students' essays, the writer will use some symbols for each type of errors. They are:

- # : Announcements Rather Than Statements
- \* : Statements That Are Too Broad
- S : Statements That Are Too Narrow
- @ : Statements That Contain More Than One Idea
- ~ : Support
- || : Common Methods of Organization
- = : Transitions
- \\ : Other Connecting Words
- ^ : Writing fragments than complete sentence
- < : Writing run-ons
- > : The use of incorrect verb
- [] : Subject and verb are not in agreement
- ! : Faulty parallelism
- ? : Faulty modifiers
- & : The use of incorrect forms of pronoun
- % : Using capital letters incorrectly
- { } : Using punctuation incorrectly
- + : Wordiness
- () : Choosing words incorrectly
- √ : Spelling errors

#### FINDINGS

The writer has collected thirty-four argumentative essays written by the second year students of English Department of Padang State University. Having read and analyzed the students' argumentative essay, the writer found that all topics offered are chosen. There are three topics offered to them: "The use of internet in study", "Teaching and learning English", and "Free sex from the point of view of religion". Among these three topics, twenty three students choose topic which is related to the use of internet, nine students choose topic related to teaching English, and the other two students choose topic which is related to free sex. This data is shown in the table below:

Errors in unity are related to the formulation of these statement. This is due to the fact that these statement will be the guidance for the students during the process of writing argumentative essay. According to Langan, J (1997) there are four common errors made by the students in writing these statement: announcements rather than statement, statements that are too broad, statements that are too narrow, and statements that contain more than one idea. Among them, only two types of them are found in this analysis. Three students write their theses statement in the form of announcement and one student has too narrow theses statement. This contribution is shown below:

Table 2.3: Errors in Unity

No	Errors in Unity	The Number of Errors	Percentage
1	Announcements rather than statement	3	75 %
2	Statements that are too broad	0	0 %
3	Statements that are too narrow	1	25 %
4	Statements that contain more than one idea	0	0 %
	Total	4	100 %

Errors in support are related to the lack of specific and adequate details. Some students have specific details for argumentative essay, but they have very few details. Others have adequate details, but their details do not have anything to do with argumentation. Some of their works are included as exposition because the details function to define or to explain something.

The third evaluation of essay is coherence. The errors in coherence are divided into three types; common method of organization, transition, and other connecting words. Three students make errors in writing chronological or emphatic order, Seven students use the incorrect transition signals, and four students fail to use other connecting words. The data is shown in the table below:

Table 2.4: Errors in Coherence

No	Errors in Coherence	The Number of Errors	Percentage
1	Common method of organization	3	21.5 %
2	Transition	7	50 %
3	Other connecting words	4	28.5%
	Total	14	100 %

Most of students have problems with grammatical structure. The writer found 264 errors that the students made are related to grammar skill. The frequent errors in grammar will decrease the readers' interest, in spite of the fact that grammar is secondary skill in composition. Langan, J (1997) has divided grammatical errors into 12 development types. The error in subject-verb agreement is the most frequent errors found in the students' essays; on the other hand, faulty parallelism is the least type of grammatical errors found in their essay. The contribution of errors in sentence skill can be seen in the table below:

Table 2.5: Errors in Sentence Skill

No	Errors in Sentence Skill	The Number of Errors	Percentage
1	Writing fragments than complete sentence	25	9.4 %
2	Writing run-ons	14	5.3 %
3	The use of incorrect verb	37	14 %
4	Subject and verb are not in agreement	47	17.8 %
5	Faulty parallelism	7	2.6 %
6	Faulty modifiers	21	8 %
7	The use of incorrect forms of pronoun	14	5.3 %
8	Using capital letters incorrectly	13	5 %
9	Using punctuation incorrectly	12	4.6 %
10	Wordiness	21	8 %
11	Choosing words incorrectly	19	7.1 %
12	Spelling errors	34	12.8 %
	Total	264	100 %

### CORRECTION OF THE ERRORS

The next step in this research is giving correction for the errors made by the second year students of English Department of Padang State University in writing argumentative essay. Here are some examples of errors made by them. There are some symbols used for each type of errors in this research. These symbols function to ease the writer to identify the type of error.

# In this essay, I try to explain some effective way in teaching English for beginner.

? In this essay, I try to explain some effective way in teaching English for beginner.

The above sentence has two types of errors. It possesses both errors in composition skill and grammatical skill. From the side of composition skill, this sentence functions as a theses statement of the essay. A theses statement must be in the form of a statement, but this sentence is a kind of announcement. According to Langan J, (1997) there are four common types of errors in writing the theses statement: Announcements Rather Than Statements, Statements that Are Too Broad, Statements that Are Too Narrow, and Statements That Contain More Than One Idea. Therefore, this sentence may become "There are some effective ways in teaching English for beginner". From the side of grammatical skill, the modifier some should be followed by plural countable noun. Therefore, the phrase "some effective way" must become "some effective ways".

|| Someone need communication with others.

When the subject is indefinite pronoun, the subject always takes singular verb. "Someone" is one of indefinite pronoun; therefore it must be followed by singular verb "needs".

\ Teaching English through group discussion is much useful to rise students' awareness in learning, to improve students' speaking and listening ability, and to build students' personality.

Pronoun can be used as a way to connect ideas while developing an essay. Using pronouns to replace the other words can help the writer avoid needless repetition in writing. Therefore, the sentence becomes "Teaching English through group discussion is much useful to rise

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