

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

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1.1 Background of the Study

Language is a system of arbitrary and conventional symbols which permits all people in a given culture or other people who have learned it to communicate or to interact. As the common system of communication, language is used as a means of understanding and expressing thought and feeling in a community. Clark and Clark (1977:3) state that language stands at the center of human affairs.

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 even lets people converse with the dead in a limited but valuable way.

Writing has the effect, therefore, of expanding enormously the geographical size of the communities that we can belong to and the number of members those communities can contain. 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.

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. As Langan (1997:10) said,

“You will become more aware of other writer’s ideas and the evidence they provide (or fail to provide) to support those ideas. Writing an essay forces you to sort out and organize your ideas and think them through clearly. You will learn to identify just what your ideas are and what support exists to back them up. Your ability to recognize ideas and to measure their validity will help you make sound decisions not just in school and your career but in all phases of your everyday life.”

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.

1.2 Problems of the Study

In the relation to the background that has been mentioned previously, the problems are formulated as follows:

1. What type of errors do the second year students of English Department of Padang State University make in writing argumentative essay?
2. What is the most dominant type of errors that the second year students of English Department of Padang State University make in writing argumentative essay?
3. What are the causes of the errors?

1.3 Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to obtain the answer to the questions mentioned in the research problem. Therefore, this study is aimed at finding out the most dominant type of errors made by the second year students of State University of Padang in writing argumentative essay. Furthermore, this study is also aimed at finding out the causes of those errors

1.4 The Scope of the Study

This study will be focused on analyzing the errors made by the second-year students of English Department of State University of Padang in writing essays.

Among four types of essays proposed by Langan, J (1997), namely narrative, descriptive, expository, and argumentative essay, the writer will focus his analysis on an argumentative essay.

1.5 Significance of the Study

It is expected that the findings of this research can give contribution and considerations to the students who learn writing argumentative essays as well as the lecturers of writing subject to know and recognize the errors that appear in the students' argumentative essays. The result of this study is also expected to be useful for them as the basis to reduce making errors in the argumentative essay. Furthermore, it is expected that the findings of this study can also be used for the lecturer to find out the teaching strategy to reduce errors in writing.