WRITING ERRORS BASED ON SURFACE STRUCTURE TAXONOMY: A CASE OF INDONESIAN EFL STUDENTS' PERSONAL LETTERS

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ABSTRACT

Students' errors in writing could indicate that the students are unaware of the existence of distinctive rules in using English, particularly in the written form. Making errors is, somehow, a fundamental part of learning new language. In this sense, the teachers may utilize the information from the errors as an authentic source to evaluate students' writing proficiency. Moreover, identifying students' writing problems paves the way for the teachers to unfold the appropriate solutions to overcome the problems. Considering those, this research was conducted to discover students' writing errors, classify them to the surface structure taxonomy proposed by Dulay, Burt, Krashen (1982) and James (2013), and further identify most dominant type of error. The experts classify the error into four elements: omission, addition, misformation and misordering. The participants involved in this research were 22 EFL students from one of the senior high schools in Cianjur. Qualitative research method was chosen to conduct this research students' writing of personal letters as the main source of the data. The findings showed that from the total of 68 data of the errors, a total of 25 (36.76%) data belonged to addition which is the most dominant error type, 20 (29.41%) data belonged to omission, 19 (27.94%) data belonged to misformation, and only 4 (5.88%) data belonged to misordering errors.

Keywords: Writing Errors, Error Analysis, Surface Structure Taxonomy, Second Language Acquisition

INTRODUCTION

One of the important yet challenging skills for language productions is writing. In EFL classroom, writing skill is categorized as productive skill since it is related to outputs or products produced by students. Nunan (1989) cited in Fareed, Ashraf, & Bilal (2016), claims that writing is an extremely difficult cognitive activity which requires the learner to have control to numerous factors coming from the academic background and personal interest towards various psychological, linguistic and cognitive phenomena. However, written language, according to Brown (2000), is simply a graphic representation of spoken language, and that written performance is much like oral performance. The only difference is lying in graphic instead of auditory signals. The different structures in the first language and the second language potentially generate error in writing. Hence, as a difficult skill to master, it is common to discover some errors in students' writing.

Errors in writing by students may mean that students are not aware of the distinctive rules when using English (especially in the written form). However, making error is essential for learning new language, and it is also a source of information for teachers to evaluate students' writing skills. Furthermore, it also makes teachers easier to identify their students' writing problems. The result of the identification aims at providing useful information as well as finding solutions towards the problems the students might face. Errors occur not only when children learn a new language but also while they acquire their first language (Jabeen, Kazemian, & Shahbaz Mustafai, 2015). As Corder (1967) cited in Saville-Troike, (2006), errors cannot be defined as a bad habit. In fact, errors provide evidence of the language system used by the learner at any particular point in the L2 development process, as well as evidence of the strategy or process used by the learner in his language discovery. In this sense, error is a lens to the language learner's

mind. Henceforth, error analysis (EA), as one of the second language acquisition (SLA) divisions, can be undertaken to reveal and discuss students' language errors profoundly.

Error analysis, in language teaching and learning, is 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, 2008). Richards (1971) as stated in Khansir (2012) explained that the error analysis area can be described as discussing the discrepancies in how people learn the language and how adult language native speakers use it.

There have been so many studies done before which focused on error analysis. The research done by Hamzah (2012), for instance, focuses on providing explanation on the taxonomy of the grammatical errors made by the university students in the English writing. The results show that the errors can be grouped into fifteen categories ranging from severe errors to mild errors. In addition, Putri and Dewanti (2014) conducted a research focusing on identifying the types of grammatical errors based on Ho's (2005) theory of grammatical errors taxonomy. They attempted to reveal which type of errors is the most dominant one done by the second semester students at the diploma program of English department in Airlangga University. Moreover, Abdel-fattah, Abuleil, and Habis (2018) conducted a case study to reveal reasons behind the writing problems of three Saudi EFL university students. They undertook error analysis on students' writings as their research samples. Last but not least, a research conducted by Puspita (2019) focused on exploring learners' language especially the errors performed by the English learners. The subjects of this study are two adult students who have been learning English since their early age.

By taking specific genre of personal letters, this current research was undertaken to discover writing errors made by the students as well as classify them based on the surface structure taxonomy from Dulay, Burt, Krashen (1982) and Tizazu (2014). This theory leads the study to also identify the most dominant type of errors in students' personal letters. It is hoped that this study will be a valuable source for the teachers to identify and evaluate students' challenges in written work, especially writing personal letter.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS
Second Language Acquisition
Second language is a language other than one's mother-tongue used for a special purpose, e.g. for education, government, and many more (Crystal, 2008). Crystal (2008) also defines the process or result of learning (acquiring) a particular aspect of a language, and ultimately the language as a whole as acquisition. Second language acquisition (SLA) refers both to the study of individuals and groups who acquire a language after acquiring their first language as young children and to the language learning process (Saville-Troike, 2006). In short, SLA is a subconscious study through which a person acquires L2 or additional languages (Khasinah, 2014).

Error
Errors are known as structural anomalies of students who have yet to learn the L2. According to Zawahreh (2012), errors are significant in three different ways. Firstly, they tell the teacher when he undertakes a systematic analysis, how far toward the goals the learner have progressed, and what remains for him to learn. Secondly, they give researchers evidence of how language is learned and what strategies and procedures the learners are employing in their discovery of the language. Thirdly, they are unavoidable to the learner himself, because we can consider the process of making of errors as a device the learners use in order to learn. Many factors cause the learners of English as a foreign language make errors and sometimes first language interference also becomes one of the causes (Kumala, Aimah, & Ifadah, 2018).

Error Analysis (EA)
Based on James (2013), error analysis is the process of determining the incidence, nature, causes and consequences of unsuccessful language. A group of people who share the same mother tongue when they study a second or a foreign language initiates a scientific study of errors, namely error analysis (Hamzah, 2012). Fauziati (2014) stated that the primary focus of EA is on learners' errors

and the evidence of how learners' errors could provide an understanding of the underlying processes of second language learning (SLL) or SLA. Another definition of error analysis is given by Brown (2000) as stated in Amara (2015). He defined error analysis as the process of observing, examining and classifying deviations from the second language rules, and then disclosing the learner's systems.

In conducting an error analysis, there are several stages that should be passed by the researchers in order to get the authentic results. The set of procedures for conducting EA was originally proposed by Corder (1978) as cited in Fauziati (2014). The procedure basically consists of three major stages: recognition, description, and explanation of errors. Sridhar (1980) subsequently elaborated these stages into some steps. The first step is the collection of data (either from free compositions by students on a given theme or from examination answers). The second phase is the identification of errors. In this stage, the errors are labelled by varying degrees of precision. It is depending on the linguistic sophistication brought to bear on the task with respect to the exact nature of the deviation, e.g., dangling prepositions, anomalous sequences of tenses, etc. Classifying into error types comes next, such as errors of agreement, articles, verb forms, etc. The other essential steps in conducting error analysis are statement of relative frequency of error types, identification of the areas of difficulty in the target language, and lastly, therapy or remedial lessons.

Surface Structure Taxonomy
Analysing errors by way of surface strategy might offer us a glimpse of the students' cognitive process that underlies their constructions of a target language system (Aziz, Fitriani, & Amalina, 2020). Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) classify four types of grammatical errors commonly used to describe the descriptive classification of errors. They are linguistic category taxonomy, surface strategy taxonomy, comparative taxonomy, and communicative taxonomy. Nevertheless, this research is merely going to focus on the surface structure taxonomy. The taxonomy of the surface structure focuses solely on how the mechanisms of the linguistic organizations are altered (Maniam & Rajagopal, 2016). Dulay et al., (1982) claimed that a surface structure taxonomy highlights the way surface structure are altered. Learners may omit necessary items or add unnecessary ones. They also may misform items or misorder them.

Omission occurs when the linguistic item that is required in the sentence is omitted, e.g., *He go to school. Here the morpheme "es" is omitted that was required for the correct construction of the sentence (Jabeen et al., 2015). Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) cited in James (2013) state that addition error is the result of all-too-faithful use of certain rules. According to Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982), misformation error is characterized by the use of the wrong form of the morpheme or structure. Maniam and Rajagopal (2016) stated that usually in misformation errors, the learners supply some incorrect utterances. Misordering is often the result of the learners relying on carrying out 'word-for-word translations of native language surface structures' when producing written or spoken utterances in the TL (James, 2013).

There are four main ways in which learners alter target forms (Tizazu, 2014). The first thing is the addition errors. Such errors refer to the presence of an element or form which must not appear in a well-formed utterance. Addition errors are sub-categorized into: regularization, i.e., applying rules used to produce the regular ones to those exceptions to the rules; double-marking, a kind of addition error in which one feature is marked at two levels; simple additions are those which are neither regularizations nor double-markings. The second way is the omission errors, the absence of an item that must appear in a well-formed utterance. Misordering errors are caused by incorrect placement of a morpheme or group of morphemes in a given utterance. Misformation errors refer to the use of a wrong form of a morpheme or a structure in an utterance. Three types of misformation errors commonly found in the learners' errors are regularization (a regular marker is used for an irregular one), archi-forms (the selection of one member of a class of forms to represent others in the class), alternative forms (free alternation of various members of a class with each other).

METHOD
This study employed descriptive qualitative method since the goal was to reveal or explain types of error based on surface structure taxonomy and the type that is frequently appeared. The phrase qualitative methodology, as stated by Taylor, Bogdan, and DeVault (2016), refers to the broadest sense to research that produces descriptive data—people's own written or spoken words and observable behaviour. Qualitative methods rely on text and image data, have unique steps in data analysis, and draw on diverse designs (Creswell, 2018). Moreover, the authors used the framework of surface structure taxonomy proposed by Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1984) and Tizazu (2014) which categorized errors into four types. The first type is omission with two subtypes namely, grammatical morphemes and content morphemes. Secondly is the addition which is categorized into three types namely, simple addition errors, double-marking errors, and regularization errors. Misformation, as the third type, consists of three sub-types such as regularization, archi-form, and alternative form. Then, misordering type which is categorized into seven such as misplacement of verbs, misplacement of objects, misplacement of adverbs, misordering in question formation, wrong placement of modifiers, wrong placement of *not*, and misplacement of items/constituents in a structure.

In order to get representative data, twenty-two second graders from natural science class in one of senior high schools in Cianjur were selected as the participants of this study. In addition, the aim of selecting these participants was because they had studied about types of texts in previous semester. It took 2 months to collect and analyse the data.

The data for this research were collected from the document, which was acquired from an assignment given by the teacher during the English subject. From the data, the authors obtained the fact that students committed errors in their personal letter writing. The writing they produced reach 50-150 words or more. The teachers limited the theme of the writing into fan letter, pen pal letter, family letter, and love letter. This was done in order to get variative data without having to minimize the students' creativity.

In analysing the data the authors adopted the six stages proposed by Sridhar (1980) in Fauziati (2014). The first stage is collection of data that has been explained beforehand. The second stage is identification of errors that starts with labelling and moving the errors utterance into a table. Classification into error types was the third stage the authors have done. In this stage, the teacher classified the errors into their types, by marking 'x' on each category in the table. The fourth stage is statement of relative frequency of error types. Thereafter, the teacher identified the areas of difficulty in the target language. Finally, as a response to the errors made by the students, the teacher gave them direct feedback through comment feature of learning management system (LMS) used at that time.

In calculating the number and frequency of errors, the teacher employed the statistical calculation by Walizer and Wiener (1990) as cited in Aziz et al. (2020), as follows:

$P = \frac{f}{N} \times 100\%$

Where
P is the percentage of errors
F is the frequency of errors
N is the total number of samples

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
In this chapter, the result of this study is presented and discussed based on the theory of errors proposed by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) and the theory of surface structure taxonomy by Tizazu (2014). These theories lead the discussion of the types of errors the students commit in writing personal letter and the calculation of their frequency.
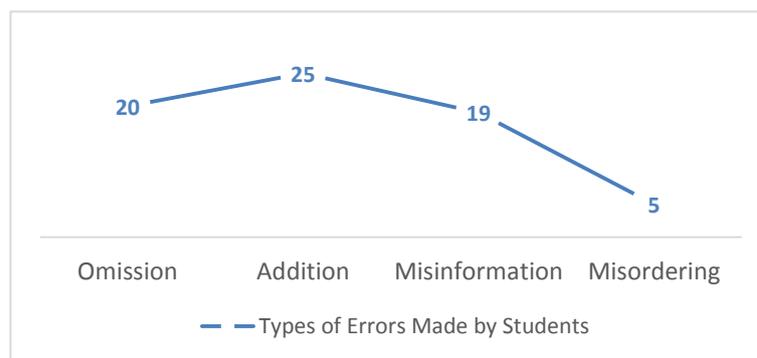
Figure 1. The Types of Errors Made by Students

After collecting and analyzing the data, the authors found 68 errors made by the students in writing personal letter. As seen in Figure 1, the addition error was the most dominant student error, with 25-time occurrences. The omission error was put thereafter with 20 cases. The misformation and misordering errors, then, occurred with 19 and 4 cases respectively. Table 1 below shows the details of the error category, number, and percentage.

Table 1. The Frequency of Error Types Categorization

Errors Category (Subtypes)	Number	Percentage
Addition	**25**	**36.76%**
Simple Addition Error	21	
Double-Marking Error	4	
Omission	**20**	**29.41%**
Grammatical Morphemes	15	
Content Morphemes	5	
Misformation	**19**	**27.94%**
Form Oriented Lexical Misformation	8	
Content Oriented Lexical Misformation	4	
Verb (Types)	3	
Tense	3	
Alternating Form	1	
Misordering	**4**	**5.88%**
Misplacement of Object	2	
Misplacement of Verb	1	
Misplacement of Items/Constituents in a Structure	1	
Total Error	**68**	**99.99%**

As seen in Table 1, 36.76% from 25 data belong to addition errors as the most committed error. Simple addition error as the subtype of addition errors dominates the data with 21-time occurrences. Moreover, there is only 4 double-marking errors. The second most committed errors done by students is omission with 29.41% total cases. Grammatical and content morphemes as the subtypes of omission error occurs 15 times and 5 times respectively.

The results also show 19 misformation errors, with 27.94% total cases. The authors found 8 form oriented lexical misformation cases, 4 cases of content oriented lexical misformation, 3-time occurrences of verb (types) and tense, and one alternating form case. Lastly, misordering errors occur 4 times out of 68 cases, 5.88% out of 99.99% in percentage. There are five subtypes from this type of errors, but only three subtypes were found, consisting of misplacement of object which appeared twice, misplacement of verb, and misplacement of items/constituents in a structure that appeared one time.

The Addition Errors

Addition errors are errors caused by the presence of an element or form which must not appear in a well-formed utterance (Tizazu, 2014). Data analysis reveals that 25 out of 68 cases are categorized as addition errors. In Table 2, the authors will explain the subtypes of addition errors, the students' utterances, the suggested correction, and the total number of errors.

Table 2. Addition Errors

Addition Errors	*Data Code*	*Students' Utterance*	*Alternative Correction*	*Quantity (%)*
Simple Addition Errors	QN1	Every night I hop**ed** to God	Every night I hope to God	21
	SA4	You always **makes** people laugh	You always make people laugh	
Double-Marking Errors	DN2	Cute **cute** even though not too tall	Cute even though not too tall	4
	WM1	This is the best way **for us two**	This is the best way for us	
Total				**25 (36.76%)**

Based on the data finding, most of the subtypes of addition error was dominated by simple addition error. Error like the usage of the 3rd person singular -s was omitted. The agreement rule of English is adding -s/-es after a verb if the subject is the 3rd person. Whereas the SA4 example shows otherwise. Next, error in marking a tense can be seen in example QN1. Second subtype of addition error is double-marking error. As the DN2 example shows us, there is a repetition word 'cute' there. Another example coming from WM1, the word 'two' in the example is not necessary in that sentence.

The Omission Errors

The omission errors appeared after the addition errors. Omission errors usually occur when a compulsory element within an 'obligatory context' sentence is subject-verb agreement, preposition, article, number marker, and pronoun (Tizazu, 2014). Overall, there are 20 omission errors found. Grammatical and content morphemes as the subtypes of the omission errors appeared 15 and 5 times respectively. Table 3 will present the details.

Table 3. Omission Errors

Omission Errors	*Data Code*	*Students' Utterance*	*Alternative Correction*	*Quantity (%)*
Grammatical Morphemes	FM3	I always miss you^ presence	I always miss **your** presence	15
Content Morphemes	SSS1	Whatever your response ^	Whatever your response **is**	5
	AA8	I've been try^	I've been **trying**	
Total				**20 (29.41%)**

Based on the data finding, the omission errors were dominated by grammatical morpheme subtype. Grammatical morpheme errors usually give impact to the grammar structure of the sentence. As seen in the FM3 example, the student used word 'you' instead of 'your'. In fact, this sentence needs pronoun. In the other hand, content morphemes represented by one example 'whatever your response' shows that the student omits auxiliary verb 'is'. Secondly, as seen in the

AA8 example, the student has something to do with the main verb, 'try'. Since the sentence was written in simple present perfect continuous tense, the main verb should be followed by suffix -ing. Therefore, these two sentences can be categorized as content morpheme error.

The Misformation Errors

Misformation errors deal with the wrong use of the structure of morpheme. Basically, there are 19 errors under misformation error subtype. The authors still use the theory by Tizazu (2014). However, in this part, the author makes the subtype and category clearer. There are 19 errors under this subtype of error. There are 8 form oriented lexical misformation errors, 4 content oriented lexical misformation errors, 3 verb (types) and tense errors, and 1 error of the alternative form. Table 4 presents more specific explanation.

Table 4. Misformation Errors

Misformation Errors	Data Code	Students' Utterance	Alternative Correction	Quantity (%)
Form Oriented Lexical Misformation	WN2	I <u>have</u> you will also get a gift	I hope you will also get a gift	8
Content Oriented Lexical Misformation	AA13	Only <u>a bit friends</u> in my hostel	Only a few friends in my hostel	4
Verb (Types)	KE10	At the end of the school year, our family <u>to</u> visit our	At the end of the school year, our family will visit our	3
Tense	RS9	Since I <u>say</u> my promise to you	Since I said my promise to you	3
Alternating form	AA12	<u>In</u> my birthday	On my birthday	1
Total				**19 (27.94%)**

Based on the data finding, the misformation subtype of error was majored by form oriented lexical misformation. The characteristic of this error usually in a form of word misused as seen in WN2 example. The student used word 'have' instead of 'hope'. Content oriented lexical misformation usually deals with wrong word choice or confusion of sense relation. This characteristic can be seen in the example AA13. The student wrote 'a bit friends' instead of 'a few friends'. The next subtype of misformation is verb (types). As shown in the KE10 example, the student use 'to' instead of modal, 'will'. Then, the tense subtype error is represented by the RS9. The student chose to write 'say' rather than 'said'. However, the context of this sentence is talking about something in the past. 'Since' here means 'as from' not 'because'. Hence, the alternative verb should be 'said'. The last subtype is the alternating form as shown in AA12. The student has something to do with preposition 'in' that should be 'on'.

The Misordering Errors

The misordering errors are usually caused by incorrect placement of a morpheme or group of morphemes in a given utterance. Essentially, there are only four cases categorized as misordering errors subtype. They are misplacement of items/constituents in a structure, misplacement of verb, and misplacement of object. The following table will explain the finding on misordering error and its subtypes.

Table 5. Misordering Errors

Misordering Errors	Data Code	Students' Utterance	Alternative Correction	Quantity (%)

Misplacement of Object	WN4	Maybe that's all **can tell you I**	Maybe that's all I can tell you	2
Misplacement of Items/Constituents in a Structure	AA3	I **wasn't invited** you in my birthday party	I didn't invite you to my birthday party	1
Misplacement of Verb	AD2	Only by playing Telegram bot **can I make friend like you**	Only by playing Telegram bot I can make friend with you	1
Total				**4 (5.88%)**

Based on the finding, the misordering error was dominated by misplacement of object with two cases. It was followed by misplacement of items/constituents in a structure and misplacement of verb with only one case each. Misplacement of object is represented by WN4 that misplaced the subject 'I' and object 'you'. Moving on to the misplacement of items/constituents in a structure, AA3's case is that the student uses passive voice when it should be in active form. Lastly, the misplacement of verb in AD2's case, the student misplaced the word 'can' and 'I'.

CONCLUSION
This research focused on the type of errors and its frequency of the second graders' writing on personal letter. This research employed qualitative research method taking the data from the students' document of personal letter writing. The theory of surface structure taxonomy by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) and Tizazu (2014) categorized errors into four namely addition, omission, misformation and misordering.

According to the data finding, 25 out of 68 cases belong to addition errors as the most frequently-occurred error committed by the students, 21 simple addition errors and 4 double-marking errors. Moreover, there are 20 omission errors with 15 grammatical morpheme cases and 5 content morpheme ones. Furthermore, 19 errors belong to misformation. Specifically, eight errors belong to form oriented lexical misformation subtype, four content oriented lexical misformation errors, three errors of verb (type) and tense, and one error of alternative form. Lastly, only four errors belong to misordering; two misplacement of object and one case of misplacement of verb and misplacement of items/constituents in a structure.

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