

## SOLVING THE STUDENTS' ERRORS DURING THEIR LEARNING OF ESSAY WRITING IN A HYBRID SETTING

Lestari Setyowati<sup>1</sup>, Sony Sukmawan<sup>2</sup>, Ana Ahsana El-Sulukiyyah<sup>3</sup>, Putri Ayu Lestari<sup>4</sup>, and Barotun Mabaroh<sup>5</sup>

Universitas PGRI Wiranegara<sup>1,3,4,5</sup>; Universitas Brawijaya<sup>2</sup>

*lestari.setyowati@yahoo.co.id; sony\_sukmawan@ub.ac.id; aahsana3@gmail.com;*

*palestari05@gmail.com; barotunmabaroh@yahoo.com*

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**Abstract:** The teaching of writing during the pandemic of COVID 19 is very much different from the typical way of teaching and learning before the outbreak. Thus, the conventional way is blended with the online learning. The purposes of this study are 1) to investigate the students' grammatical errors when writing an essay, and 2) to describe the solution to minimize the errors when writing. The study used a case study design. The subjects of the study were 38 students and one writing lecturer of English education study program, Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology, University of PGRI Wiranegara. The students' errors were analyzed based on Surface Strategy Taxonomy (Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982) which covers omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. The instruments were documentation and interview. The data collection took two months from June-July 2020. The finding shows that, in total, there were 80 errors in writing expository essays. Most errors are of omission category with 55 errors (69%). The second is misformation with 18 errors (23%), followed by misordering with 5 errors (6%), and the last, addition, with only 2 errors (2%). To minimize the students' errors, the lecturer used a process-writing approach and taught the students to use writing tool applications, such as Grammarly and U\_Dictionary. The implication of the study is discussed.

**Keywords:** *analysis, error, essay, hybrid, surface strategy*

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### INTRODUCTION

The teaching and learning process in schools and universities has undergone a drastic change during the outbreak of COVID 19. The classroom face to face interaction can no longer be done because the government issued orders to work and learn from home. This is the point where the model of hybrid learning comes into play. Hybrid learning is also known as blended learning (Allen, Seaman, & Garrett, 2007; Idris, 2018) which means mixed learning or integrated learning. Hybrid learning is a combination of face-to-face learning (conventional learning) and internet-based learning (Allen et al., 2007; Bonk & Graham, 2005). The use of a hybrid learning model is not something new. It has been implemented since the invention of the internet (Idris, 2018). However, it is becoming more common nowadays, especially during the outbreak of COVID 19.

One of the subjects that university students majoring in English Education must learn is essay writing. Teaching writing in a conventional setting is not easy, let alone doing it in a hybrid setting. Yet, as the subject is compulsory, the students need to learn it regardless of the difficult situation.

Writing skill is important, but it not easy to master. It is a productive skill in which a person must be able to express his/her ideas and ideas in a written mode (Aydogan & Akbarov, 2014). Writing is often seen as the most difficult skill, even for native speakers. This is because writing activities not only involve a graphical representation of speech in written form but also involve the development and presentation of thoughts in a structured, logical, and meaningful way. If students can write in English, they will be better prepared to compete in the global era.

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Students who are learning to write must realize that writing is a process. The first aspect of the process is identifying the steps required to produce good writing. According to Fachrurrazy (2011), these stages are pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. The second aspect is learning the macro and micro-skills involved (Brown, 2007). According to Brown (2007), the macro and micro-skills are the skills to use the right choice of words, use acceptable grammar, and use correct mechanics such as capitalization, spelling, and punctuation. Because writing is a complex activity to master, learning these skills requires a winding road.

In addition to content and organization, grammar is an important element in making good writing. Hossain (2015) emphasizes the importance of learning grammar. A discourse starts from words to sentences, sentences to paragraphs, and paragraphs to an essay. To have good writing, one needs to have the ability to combine words and sentences which are meaningful and understandable to express the thought and ideas. Therefore, the students need to have sufficient linguistics competence and performance to be able to put them on the paper. Because writing is such a complex skill, students who are learning to write in a foreign language often make errors in their writing.

According to Dulay et al. (1982), there are four taxonomies to analyze the students' linguistics errors. They are the linguistic category taxonomy, surface strategy taxonomy, comparative analysis taxonomy, and communicative effect taxonomy. Each of these taxonomy sees errors from a different point of view. The linguistic category sees errors from the linguistics components, such as phonology, syntax, semantics and lexicon, and discourse. The surface strategy taxonomy, on the other hand, sees errors from the surface structure of the sentences, whether the learner omits necessary items or add unnecessary ones. Comparative Taxonomy sees errors from the comparison between the target language and the first language or the mother tongue-based on certain types of construction. Finally, the communicative effect taxonomy sees how errors give effect to the listeners or readers. The latter type of error covers global and local errors in a discourse.

Linguists believe that analyzing language errors has many benefits from a theoretical and pedagogical or practical point of view (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). First, from a pedagogical point of view, analyzing student language errors is useful for teachers to know that their students have not mastered a certain form of grammar but have been able to correct their own mistakes (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). Furthermore, Brown (2007) also states that language errors help teachers to understand the language acquisition process. In line with this, Richards and Renandya (2002) say that language errors contain valuable information about the strategies students use to acquire and master a new language. Gass and Silinker (2001) also state that language errors are signs that provide evidence of students' knowledge of the new language they are learning. Realizing that making errors cannot be avoided in the process of learning to master a new language, teachers must pay attention to these errors. They can help students to avoid making the same errors, or at least, minimize them. From a theoretical standpoint, analyzing the students' errors can provide more information and enrich the data about the process of acquiring a second or foreign language in Indonesian context.

Previous research on language errors at the university level has been carried out in the context of learning English as a foreign language in Indonesia. Alfiyani (2013) analyzed the language errors of the second-semester students majoring in English education at Yogyakarta State University when writing an essay. The study used the surface strategy taxonomy proposed by Dulay et al. (1982). The researcher found that the most frequent errors in student essays were

omission totaling 281 items or 47.22%, followed by misinformation of 189 items or 31.76%, addition 19 times (19.98%), and misordering 6 times or 1.00%.

Second, Miko (2018) analyzed the language errors of students in semester 3 at UIN Ar-raniry State Islamic University. In this study, the error classification used is the one proposed by Corder (1973), namely omission, addition, selection, and ordering. The results showed that the highest percentage of errors was selection with 144 items (42.72%), and others such as omissions with 107 items (31.75%), addition with 68 items (20.17%), and ordering with 18 items (5.34%).

A newer study was conducted by Aisyah and Rahmawati (2019) who analyzed language errors in argumentative essays written by college-level students in STKIP PGRI Pasuruan. The errors were analyzed using Keshavarz's (2012) error classification which consists of nine categories. They are errors in the use of time markers (tenses), to-infinitive, gerunds, prepositions, active and passive sentences, agreement, word order, article, and capitalization. The results showed that there were a total of 623 language error items in the student argumentative essays. The three most common language errors are the use of the article (a/an/the) with 162 items (26.08%), time markers with 161 items (25, 92%), and the use of gerunds and prepositions with 60 items each (9.6 %).

The present study is unique because it is done during the outbreak of COVID 19. When teaching and learning are mostly done from home, the writing lecturers need to find ways to teach essay writing while at the same time helping the students to achieve their best in mastering the writing skill and the target language. Much of the previous research focuses solely on the students' errors when writing paragraphs and essays. Yet, analyzing the errors only without offering solutions would not give much help to the students' progress in mastering the target language. Furthermore, not many researchers and practitioners have investigated the solutions to minimize language errors through the use of technology. Thus, this study is intended to

- 1) investigate the students' grammatical errors when writing an essay, and
- 2) describe the solution to minimize the errors when writing an essay.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

### Mistakes and Errors

Mistakes are often related to knowledge of grammar in a language. Lack of language knowledge can be one of the causes of errors. Linguists define errors differently. Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) state that from a grammatical point of view, errors can be defined as "breach of the rule of the code" (violation of language rules). Meanwhile, Dulay et al. (1982) define errors as a deviation of an acceptable norm or mature language performance in parts of conversation or composition which usually occurs subconsciously.

People sometimes think that mistakes and errors are the same. In fact, they are very different. According to Erdogan (2005), mistakes can be interpreted as a result of the habit of the mother tongue in a new language. Erdogan (2005) further explains that mistakes can be corrected by the students themselves when they are seriously considered and scrutinized, while errors occur because students do not know what is right so that they cannot correct the errors themselves. In line with this, Dulay et al. (1982) say that mistakes and errors have different meanings in the acquisition of a second language. A mistake is a "slip of the tongue" (Dulay et al., 1982). If a student makes a mistake, he is aware that he made an error, and he can correct the mistake himself. An error, on the other hand, is a subconscious process. The students are not aware that he made an error because the pattern of a new language pattern is in the process of

internalizing. In short, errors occur because learners are not aware that they are making mistakes due to lack of knowledge.

Error analysis is defined as a technique for identifying, classifying, and systematically interpreting forms that are not accepted by language rules and those produced by foreign language learners (Karim, Mohamed, Ismail, Shahed, Rahman, & Haque, 2018). Second language or foreign language learners often make mistakes and errors in writing. This cannot be avoided because native speakers sometimes do the same thing. Thus, error analysis is often used to analyze the grammatical quality of the students' writing who are learning a foreign language. Identifying students' errors is often a challenge because it is difficult to distinguish between mistakes and errors in writing.

### Classification of Language Errors

Linguists, or those involved in acquiring a second language, classify the types of language errors differently. Because there is no common opinion regarding the categories and classifications of language errors among experts, it is difficult to carry out comparative studies, to check, and to validate the results of the same language error data (Dulay et al, 1982). From the many classifications of language errors, the one based on Surface Strategy Taxonomy, formulated by Dulay et al. (1982) is most widely used to analyze students' language errors. Surface Strategy Taxonomy has four categories and several subcategories to analyze grammatical errors in students' writing, namely: (1) omission; (2) addition (double marking, regularization, and simple addition); (3) misformation (regularization, archi form, and alternating form); and (4) misordering.

An *omission* is one type of error that is defined as the absence of an item that should appear in acceptable speech/writing (Dulay et al., 1982). Items that are omitted are words or morphemes from nouns, verbs, adjectives, or adverbs (Dulay et al., 1982). This type of error usually occurs during the early stages of acquiring a second language. *Addition* errors are the opposite of omission. Students add morphemes or words that should not be added in certain sentences or utterances. Dulay et al. (1982) characterize *misformation* errors as the use of incorrect morphemes or structures. Meanwhile, *misordering* is marked by the wrong placement of morphemes or groups of morphemes in the utterance/sentence.

### Writing Tools Technology

The use of technology in language teaching is not something new. Dahlstrom (2019) states that the way people write in the modern era is changing. One of the rapidly developing technology is the writing tools application which can be downloaded and used freely on the internet. The use of digital writing technology is essential for students in education (Azah, 2019). Digitalization has brought increased opportunities to choose among digital writing resources. It means teachers need to improve learning strategies in terms of supporting the writing needs required by students through the use of technology opportunities. One example is the use of available writing tool applications.

The assistance of modern technology is essential to improve EFL students' writing skills. Parra and Calero (2019) state that the improvement of the writing skill with the help of modern computer programs has gained considerable attention in EFL writing. According to Warschauer and Grimes (2008), one of the new implementations of technology in learning to write is automated writing evaluation (AWE), which has provided exceptional support to meet different needs, from the needs of diagnostic feedback to the needs of summative assessment on writing aspects. Thus, the use of technology in writing is a tool that provides benefits to assist students to solve their writing difficulties and to evaluate the quality of their writing seen from the language

point of view. According to Wang, Shang, and Briody (2013), the consistency and objectivity with which this tool evaluates the students' writing performance make the learners improve the writing mechanics and accuracy. Furthermore, Wang et al. (2013) state that this program helps to improve learners' writing quality due to its fast and individualized feedback with explanations of grammar, spelling, sentence, and word usage. Understanding these errors can support the development of the students' learning autonomy (Wang et al., 2013).

### Grammar Checker

In writing, the use of grammar and spelling checker is needed to edit and correct errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling, style, and sentence structure. Grammar checkers can identify mistakes and errors in writing by making use of natural language processing and grammatical rules. As summarized by Ghufron and Rosyida (2018), there are some benefits of spelling and grammar checker software. The benefits, among others, are: 1) it can identify mistakes and make corrections of both grammar and spelling; 2) it is effective to reduce errors, and 3) it helps to make a good quality text for people who are not experts with spelling and grammar. Besides checking grammatical errors and confusing words, a grammar checker also provides style and vocabulary feedback (Nur, 2019). Even though style is hard to check, but the software raises a flag to show, for example, the misuse of passive voice or the overused ones. In short, a grammar checker is useful for students. The *Grammarly* checker tool can help improve the students' writing. The tool enhances the students' proficiency in grammar by correcting grammar errors so that their writing is more readable and clearer.

### METHOD

This research is a qualitative case study. The case study is chosen because of its uniqueness. Firstly, the process of teaching and learning was done during the pandemic of COVID 19. This forced the lecturer and the students to do the instructional activities from home. The situation was new for both parties since they were in a hybrid setting. They had never experienced this type of interaction before. Secondly, the students participating in this study were also involved as participants in another study conducted by a different lecturer in the institution which also concerned the writing skill. Therefore, it is interesting to see how the result of the present study might relate to other studies of other researchers.

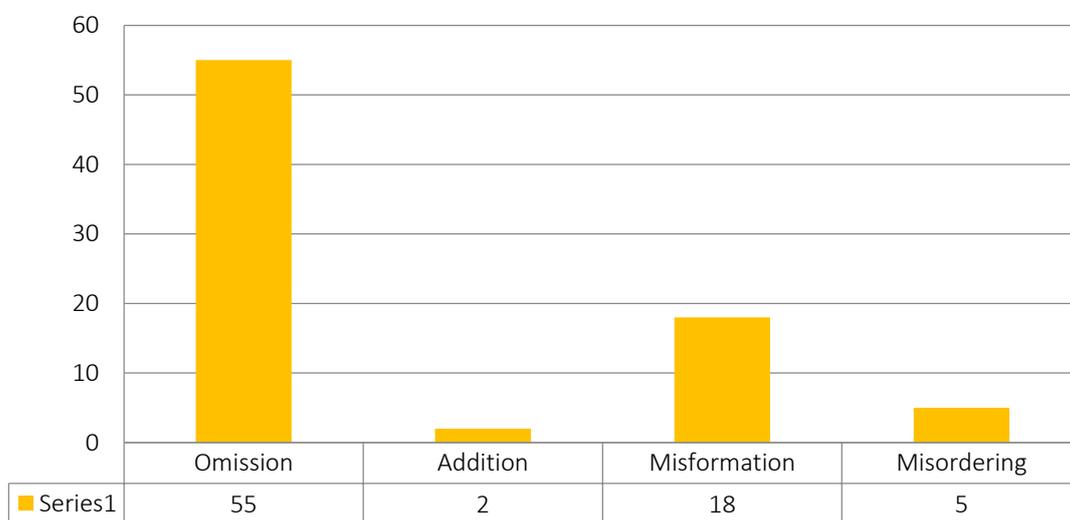
The instruments in the study were documentation and interview. The researchers documented the students' drafts, the revisions, and the final product of the essay. The researchers also documented the chats both from the students and the lecturers. The subject of this research was 38 fourth-semester students who took an Essay writing class in the English Education study program, Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology, University of PGRI Wiranegara, Pasuruan. At the time of the data collection, the students wrote expository essays on the theme of poverty. Before writing, the lecturer presented authentic materials for the students to read. After reading and discussing the authentic materials, the students were required to give their views and opinion on how to solve the problem of poverty in Indonesia. The students checked their essays with the writing apps available for free on the Internet. The results of students' essays were analyzed using Dulay et al's (1982) surface strategy taxonomy. The steps for the data analysis are: 1) identifying language errors, 2) classifying errors, 3) calculating language errors, 4) and analyzing/describing the errors. Language errors according to Dulay et al. (1982) are classified into four categories, that is, *omission*, *addition*, *misformation*, and *misordering*. The researchers also used simple codification to categorize and analyze the data.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Students' Errors

The researchers analyzed the students' errors based on the Surface Strategy Taxonomy proposed by Dulay et al. (1982). Dulay et al. (1982) argue that surface strategies promise a great deal of information for researchers relating to the identification of the cognitive processes underlying the reconstruction of new languages by learners. The researchers did not consider the language errors in terms of spelling, vocabulary, diction and punctuation because they are not parts of the surface strategy taxonomy. The result of the analysis shows that there were a total of 80 errors in the students' expository essays on the theme of poverty. Most of the errors are of omission category with 55 errors (69%). The second most common error is *misformation* with 18 errors (23%), followed by *misordering* with 5 errors (6%). The least common error is addition, with only 2 errors (2%). Figure 1 illustrates the categories and frequency of the students' errors.

### The Students' Errors



**Figure 1.** Categories and frequency of students' errors based on surface strategy taxonomy (Dulay et al., 1982)

*Omission* errors are errors that occur because of the absence of an acceptable word (s) / morpheme (s) in English grammar. In the study, the omission occurs in the absence of apostrophe which shows possession, the absence of *s / es* plural form, the absence of articles and prepositions, and the absence of noun as a subject in a sentence.

*There are also some young men in my village who did not complete their education. Now are unemployed\** (AR/18A) (omission error)

The sentence "*Now are unemployed*" belongs to the *omission* error because the noun which functions as a subject is missing. The correct sentence should be "*Now they are unemployed.*" The second example of *omission* error occurs in the following sentence.

*Some possible solution to reduce poverty are to wisely buy goods and not be too dependent on other countries\** (SA/18A) (omission error)

The sentence above misses the word '*to*' to produce a correct sentence. The right sentence should be '*Some possible solutions to reduce the poverty are to wisely buy goods and not to be too dependent on other countries.* *Omission* is the type of mistakes that most of the students

made. They tended to make sentences in which there were missing morphemes / words needed to make a correct sentence. This is in line with the results of the previous studies which found that omission is a type of language errors commonly made by learners of English as a foreign language. *Omission* errors tend to take the first or second place in terms of student language errors. In Alfiyani's (2013) research *omission* occupied the first position as the most frequently made errors, and in Miko's research (2018) *omission* took the second highest position.

The second type of error is *addition*. Addition is the presence of an item that must not appear in a well-formed sentence (Dulay et al., 1982). An example of addition error is presented in the following excerpt.

*For the example, most of the poor in my neighbourhood get some of financial aids from the government, it is called PKH (NK/18A) (addition error)*

The student added an unnecessary article '*the*' and an unnecessary preposition '*of*' to the sentence. The correct sentence should be '*For example, most of the poor in my neighborhood get some financial aids from the government*'. To be specific, the type of *addition* error found here is *simple addition*. Dulay et al. (1982) state that *simple addition* is a type of addition error which does not belong to *double markings* and *regularization*.

The next type of error is *misformation*. Dulay et al. (1982) state that a *misformation* error is characterized by the use of the wrong form of the morpheme or structure. The following is an example of the misformation error.

*They does not have a job (NK/18A) (misformation error)*

*Misformation* error is sometimes confused with *omission* error. Yet, both types of errors are completely different. In *omission* errors the item is not supplied at all, while in *misformation* errors the learner supplies something though it is incorrect. Referring to the incorrect sentence made by NK/18A, the student supplies wrong auxiliary (*does*) for the subject (*they*). The correct sentence should be '*They do not have a job*'.

The last type of error found in the students' essay is *misordering* error. According to Dulay et al. (1982), *misordering* error is characterized by the incorrect placement of a morpheme or group of morphemes in an utterance. An example of *misordering* error is shown below.

*Minimum facilities they have to survive\* (H/18A) (misordering error)*

*The government local provides a free educational program\* (NJ/18B) (misordering error)*

The students misplaced (misorder) the words in the sentences. The correct versions should be '*They have minimum facilities to survive*', and '*The local government...*' *Misordering* errors tend to be ignored by students because they do not understand the problem with their sentences. This is probably because they use the Indonesian structure to form their sentence in English. Even though only very few students made *misordering* errors in their essays, they need to know that the Indonesian and the English structures are different in the sentence formation.

### Writing Tools Solution to Minimize Errors

The solutions to minimize errors come from both the writing lecturer and the students. The lecturer used writing as a process approach when teaching essay writing. During the course, the lecturer provided feedback for the students. Besides content and organization, one of the feedbacks is in the language. The lecturer also introduced writing tool applications which are freely available in the Internet. The students thought that language becomes the hardest part in

writing English. This is because the grammar structures of English and Indonesian are different. The most striking difference is the use of time markers (tenses).

*“The hardest thing about writing is the grammar.” (YD / 18 / B)*

*“The sentence structure in English is difficult. Sometimes I write my sentences upside down, [I write] in Indonesian style. Vocabulary is also my problem”. (AI / 18 / B)*

It is undeniable that for foreign language learners, language becomes their main obstacle in expressing their ideas on paper. Many students admit that the hardest part when they write an essay is the grammar (Kumala, Aimah, & Ifadah, 2018). Fortunately, the data in the analysis showed that the number of students' language errors in the essay was under 100 items. This shows that the grammar quality of the students is quite good.

There are several factors that may contribute to the small number of the errors. The first factor may be the students' choice to use writing tool applications such as *Grammarly* and *U\_Dictionary* for essay writing assignments. Some students said that they used the *Grammarly* application to help complete essay writing assignments given by the lecturer. Figure 2 shows an example of a student's essay checking using Grammarly.

*“After I finish writing a few paragraphs, I always check the grammar in my writing by using Grammarly. I like using the Grammarly application because with this application, I can learn to understand grammar mistakes in my writing so I can correct them”. (S2 / 18 / B)*

*“If I don't know a word/sentence in English, I use a dictionary. After that, I checked with the Grammarly application on my cellphone keyboard (automatic). Grammarly app helps me to check grammar and other similar words (synonyms)”. (Mh / 18 / A)*

The second factor is, there is the possibility that the students used other writing applications to improve the quality of their essays, such as, Google Translate and online dictionaries.

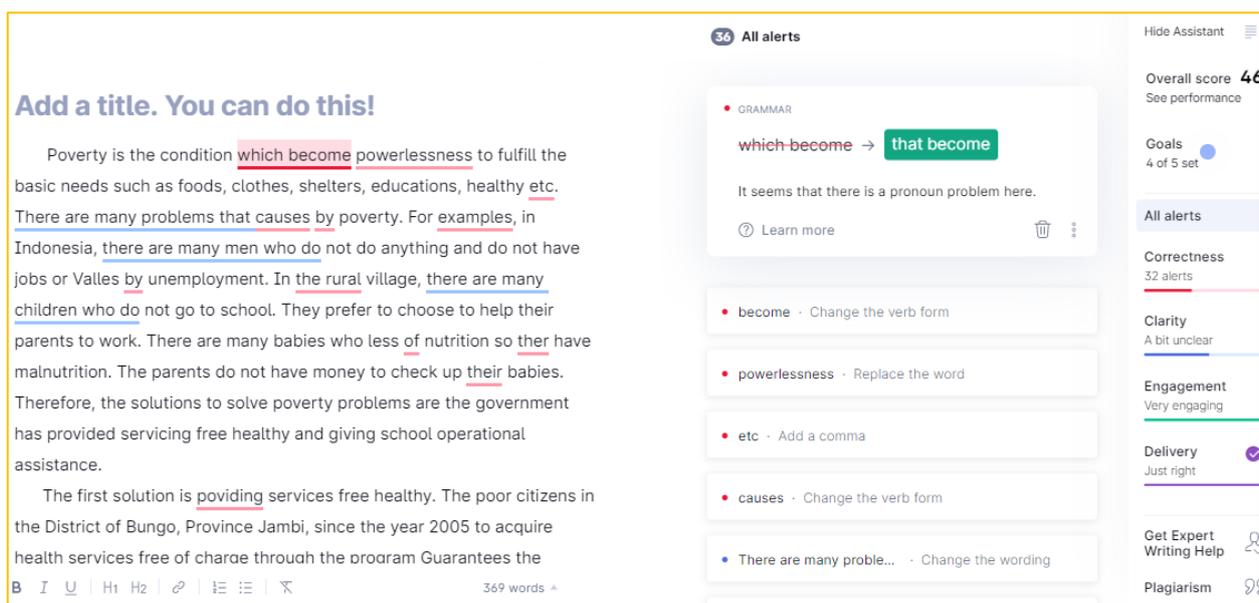


Figure 2. Essay checking using Grammarly (DFA/18B)

Even though they have used the *Grammarly* application, some students still made errors in their essay. This may be because the students did not click the error notification flag in *Grammarly*, or did not correct errors as suggested by the application. Or perhaps, they did not understand the error flag as shown in *Grammarly*. Another language error that is difficult to revise is *misordering*. In *Grammarly*, *misordering* errors will usually be directed to *Grammarly* premium, where students have to pay a certain amount of money to use this application with more advanced features.

The occurrence of errors is very difficult to eliminate even impossible to eliminate in the early stages of learning a new language. Ellis (1997) states that language errors reflect gaps in students' knowledge. This happens because students do not know how to use a particular form/structure correctly. Dulay et al. (1982) add that language learners cannot learn much without first making mistakes. This implies that language errors are part of the learning process which teachers/lecturers should accept.

Several suggestions need to be conveyed to language teachers/lecturers, especially those who teach writing. First, writing teachers/lecturers need to be wise in responding to the students' errors. If making mistakes and errors are part of learning, the teacher/lecturer is expected to be tolerant of these mistakes to a certain extent and not to judge the students as incompetent in writing essays. Secondly, the teacher/lecturer needs to help the students to understand that the English structure is different from that of the first language. Third, because writing is a process, the writing teacher/lecturer can teach students how to draft, revise, and edit to make a qualified essay. In the drafting phase, lecturers can provide input both in terms of essay organization and grammar.

Next, teachers/lecturers can involve the use of technology in the process of learning to write essays. *Grammarly* is not only useful for checking mechanics, but it is also helpful for checking grammar (Stedman, 2012) and vocabulary (Nur, 2019). Thus, the students can use writing applications like *Grammarly* to help them edit and correct grammar, especially in terms of tenses, word class, articles (a/an/the), and prepositions. Ghufron and Rosyida (2018) state that the use of writing tool applications, such as, *Grammarly*, is effective to reduce learners' errors. Research also has shown that Automated Writing Evaluation Tools (AWE), such as *Grammarly*, enhanced significant aspects of the writing skill on the students' writing performance and motivate them to reformulate their errors autonomously even without the support of the teacher's feedback (Parra & Calero, 2019). Besides, online writing checkers, including tools which look at grammar, punctuation, spelling, and composition, do help potential English second language writers (Grami, 2020). In conclusion, using writing applications can help students to improve the quality of their essays in terms of grammar. By using a writing application, students can learn autonomously about grammar based on the mistakes they make in their essays.

## CONCLUSIONS

Teaching and learning writing in the EFL context during the pandemic give more challenges than usual. The minimum face to face interaction between the students and the lecturer forces the lecturer to find ways to help the students achieve their best and to gain a lot during learning. As writing in English is not easy, the students need a solution to minimize their language errors when accomplishing a writing task. The result of this study shows that the number of the students' errors checked by using Surface Strategy Taxonomy reached 80 items. The errors are *omission* (69%), *addition* (2%), *misformation* (23%), and *misordering* (6%). To minimize the students' errors, the lecturer used a process-approach to teach writing. The lecturer provided feedbacks and opportunity for revision for the students and introduced the writing tools

applications to help the students write better. In return, the students used *Grammarly* to help them write in English and to minimize their linguistics errors.

The finding of the study implies that the writing lecturers/teachers need to allow the students to use the writing tools technology to help the students become better writers. Yet, more studies need to investigate why the students still make errors when using the *Grammarly* application. Future researchers need to find out whether the students have sufficient linguistics competence to use the suggestions supplied by the *Grammarly* application. Future researchers also need to find out how EFL students write in English when using the writing tools application. All in all, incorporating writing tools technology for EFL writing class is beneficial to help students achieve better quality texts.

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