

CORRECTING THE STUDENTS' ERROR IN WRITING ESSAY

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Abstract: Writing an essay is not always a simple job for the foreign language learners since writing is considered to be the advanced language skill that can be successfully achieved if they have mastered the target language rule. Besides, they don't have enough background knowledge and seldom practice it outside the class. Thus, committing error in the students' writing essay is a common phenomena. The way the teacher corrects to those errors reflects his concern for the students that can motivate them in the teaching learning process. Furthermore, the students' error is not always a bad thing in the teaching learning process. If the teacher could respond it wisely, those errors can tell the teacher about the students' development in acquiring the writing skill.

Keywords: correcting errors, writing essay

ERROR AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE IN TEACHING AND LEARNING A LANGUAGE

Brown, H. Douglas (1987) states that human learning is fundamentally a process that involves the making of mistakes. A mistake is a common phenomenon when a person learns any skills or acquiring information. By learning this mistake we can improve our weaknesses to obtain the desired goals. It also happens when we learn a language; it has the same process in terms of the appearance of mistakes produced by the learners.

Dulay et al (1982), define error to refer to any deviation from selected norm of language performance, no matter what the characteristics or causes of the deviation might be. They are those parts of conversation or composition that deviate from some selected norms of mature language performance. This statement means that error can be either spoken or written.

Brown (1987) defines error as a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, reflecting the interlingual competence of the learner. This statement means that error is something unconventional that can be easily noticeable when it is performed by an adult learner that shows the development of interlanguage competence. For example, when the student says; "I eat yesterday". This sentence is considered ungrammatical in English. It reflects the learner's insufficient knowledge of the use of past tense. Sometimes researchers distinguish errors caused by factors such as fatigue and inattention, and errors resulting from lack of knowledge rules of the language.

According to Dulay et al (1982) in some of the language literature, performance errors have been called mistakes while the term an error is reserved for the systematic deviation due to the learner's still developing knowledge of the second language rule system. Furthermore, they state that it is extremely important to make a distinction between performance error and competence error, but it is often difficult to determine the nature of a deviation without a careful analysis. In order to facilitate reference to deviation that have not yet been classified as performance or competence errors, Dulay et al do not restrict the term error to refer to any deviation from selected norm of language.

In addition, Brown (1987) states that in order to analyze the students' errors in a proper perspective, it is crucial to make a distinction between mistakes and errors, which are technically two different terminological phenomena. A mistake refers to a performance error that either a random guess or slip, in that it is a failure to utilize a known system correctly. Not only second language learners make mistakes, even first language learners still do the same thing in their process of learning. Such mistakes are easy to recognize and be corrected by the speakers for they are not the result of deficiencies in competence but the result of some sorts of breakdown or imperfection in the process of producing speech.

However, according to Brown (1987) it is not always easy to decide whether a learner commits errors or mistakes. For example, an English learner says "John can't sing," but on the other occasion he says "John can sing." It is difficult to determine whether "can't" is a mistake or an error. If, however, further examination of the learner's speech reveals such utterances as "John will go," "John may come," and so forth with very few instances of correct third-person singular usage of modal auxiliaries, we might then conclude that "can't," "may," and other such forms are errors indicating that a learner has not been able to distinguish modals and the verbs. For this reason this paper would not distinguish errors from mistakes, the writer tends to follow Dulay's opinion about error that refer to any deviation from selected norm of language performance, no matter what the characteristics or causes of the deviation might be.

Dulay et al, (1982) state that the making of errors is an evitable part of learning. People cannot learn language without first systematically making errors. According to them, studying learners' errors two major purposes: (1) it provides data from which inferences about the nature of the language learning process can be made, (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.

In addition, according to Corder (in Richards 1974) states that errors are significant in three different ways: (1) they tell the teacher how far the learner has progressed, (2) they provide the researcher evidence of how language is learned, and (3) they serve as feedback to the learner of the hypothesis they are using. After having some reviews above, it is said that errors are significant in language that tell us how the language is learned and how good is the learner's performance.

Among the four skills in English, writing is generally considered to be the most difficult one to master since it needs the students' knowledge in many aspects to master it. Thus, it is not a surprise anymore for the students if writing becomes a problem for them. There are at least three factors causes this phenomena:

They don't know what they are going to write.

When we write, information related to the topic we are going to write is the basic source for our reference. It is our storehouse of information in our mind. Students in writing class have many different characteristics, some of them are creative, active, open minded and hard working. This kind of students are usually curious toward the up to date information so that they have enough background knowledge to write. Consequently, they will have plenty material to write. In other hand, some other students are passive and reluctant to seek the information surround them. They only read the lesson provided by the teacher in the class and seldom gain the information outside the class. As a result, they become narrow minded students with their limited background knowledge. This habit can influence the student competence in writing the content of the essay. In summary the students background knowledge is absolutely depend on the students' own effort in acquiring their own information, experience, and observation by themselves.

They don't master the grammar of English

In writing grammar is not everything, but everything needs grammar. It means that grammar is so important because we cannot avoid grammar when we write. Grammar is the framework of language when we want to express our ideas in written language. This framework is reflected through the sentences that we are using in a piece of writing. In other word the maturity of the students' competence in grammar can be measured in the use of the sentence. For example, the students who uses complex sentence or compound complex sentence in their writing is considered more acceptable since the use of these sentences reflects the maturity in English writing style. In contrast, mastering the rule of English is not always easy for the students. Despite of the similarities between the two languages, there are also some differences of language rule between the target language and the native language. The difference between the target language and the native language rule of the students sometimes becomes the major obstacle for the students. For example, the use of tense in English which is not exist in Indonesian is often becomes a problem for the students. It happens because they don't master the target language rule completely so that they are difficult to express their idea in writing.

They don't have sufficient vocabulary

To communicate with others vocabulary is very important in expressing their ideas. It also happens in written communication. How can we communicate if we have a limited vocabulary to write. It automatically influence the quality of their product. Foreign language learner usually has a limited vocabulary as his storehouse to write, as a result, their writing product is considered poor in

writing style. Moreover, English is very rich in vocabulary. It usually adopts words from any language throughout the world which does not exist in English. In addition, many English words have many words to associate only a slight different in meaning. For example, the word see, observe, stare, etc and vice versa. Many of the native language do not exist in English. This Phenomenon can be a significant obstacle for the students to produce good writing style.

From those three factors above it is not a questionable anymore that writing is the most difficult skill to master and it becomes a potential problem for the students. They often trapped in it specially for those who haven't mastered the English rule completely. Thus, making mistakes here is inevitable condition to avoid and even it is almost impossible for the students to achieve a perfect work in writing. Here the teacher should respond those mistakes carefully since the unappropriate method used can influence the students' motivation in learning. For example, the use of red ink in the students paper can make them feel unpleasant and discourage to write. Furthermore it can decrease the students' creativity in expressing their ideas. In accordance with this, a teacher should wisely to adapt any method needed for them. Here are some effective method used to give positive and useful experience for the students proposed by Harmer (2004) :

Selective correction

In correcting the students' work we do not have to correct everything, we don't have to spot every mistake that the student's produce. Kenneth Beare (2008) states that the teacher decides to correct only certain errors. Which errors will be corrected is usually decided by the objectives of the lesson, or the specific exercise that is being done at that moment. In other words, if students are focusing on simple past irregular forms, then only mistakes in those forms are corrected (i.e., goed, thought, etc.). Other mistakes, such as mistakes in a future form, or mistakes of collocations (for example: I made my homework) are ignored. In some cases, we could correct correct on the verb tense or punctuation only or focus instead exclusively on word order. We can also correct on paragraph organisation or the use of appropriate level of formality. We might only correct two paragraphs only in the essay or highlight mistakes in the layout of a letter.

If we use this method, it is importance for us to tell the students that we use this approach. When we tell them that this time we are only going to be focus on certain aspect, they will then concentrate on those aspect . Thus they will be more serious and do their best on those aspects. Furthermore this selective correction will be more effective is to discuss with the students what the teacher should be looking out for. If the decision asking process, they are likely to approach the task with more commitment and enthusiasm than usual, and they will pay a great deal of attention to the area earmarked for the teacher's correction.

Using marking scales

Giving score in writing is not easy to conduct, this is due to its complexity aspect included this skill. Different teacher may have their own criterion, in other hand, generally many teachers have certain guideline on what aspect they are going to measure. Some common they need to work focus on the particular areas to aspect are the following: grammar, vocabulary, organization, and content. Here is a scoring guide proposed by Brown and Baile (2004).

Analytic scale for rating composition tasks

| | 20-18 Excellent to good | 17-15 Good to Adequate | 14-12 Adequate to fair | 11-6 Unacceptable- not college – level work | 5-1 Unacceptable- not college – level work |
|--|---|--|--|--|---|
| Organization Introduction, body, and conclusion | Appropriate title, effective introductory paragraph, topic is stated, leads to body, transitional expression used; arrangement of material shows plan; supporting evidence given for generalizations; conclusion logical complete | Adequate title, introduction, and conclusion; body of essay is acceptable, but some evidence may be lacking, some ideas aren't fully developed; sequence is logical but transition expression may be absent or misused | Mediocre or scant introduction or conclusion; problems with the order of ideas in body; the generalizations may not fully supported by the evidence given; problems of organizations interfere | Shaky or minimally recognizable introduction; organization can barely be seen; severe problems with ordering of ideas; lack of supporting evidence; conclusion weak or illogical; weak or illogical; inadequate effort at organization | Absence of introduction or conclusion; no apparent organization of body; severe lack of supporting evidence; writer has not made any effort to organize the composition |
| Logical development of ideas(content) | Essay addresses the assigned topic; the ideas are concrete and thoroughly developed; no extraneous material; essay reflects thought | Essay addresses the issues but misses some points; ideas could be more fully developed; some extraneous material is present | Development of ideas not complete or essay is somewhat off the topic; paragraph aren't divided exactly right | Ideas incomplete; essay does not reflect careful thinking or was hurriedly written; inadequate effort in area of content | Essay is completely inadequate and does not reflect college work level; no apparent effort to consider the topic carefully |
| Grammar | Native like fluency in English grammar; correct use of relative clauses, prepositions, | Advanced proficiency in English grammar; some problems don't influence communication, | Ideas are getting through to the reader, but grammar problems are apparent and have a negative effect on | Numerous grammar problems interfere with communication of the writer's ideas; grammar review of some | Severe grammar problems interfere greatly with the message; reader can't understand |

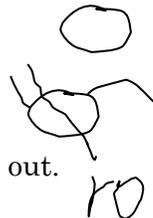
| | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|---|
| | modals, articles, verb forms, tense sequencing; no fragments or run sentences | although the reader is aware of them; no fragments or sentences | communication; run on sentences or fragments present | areas clearly needed; difficult to read sentences | what the writer was trying to say; unintelligible sentence structure |
| Punctuation Spelling, and mechanics | Correct use of English writing conventions; left and right margins, all needed capitals, paragraph indented' punctuation and spelling; very neat | Some problems with writing conventions or punctuations; occasionally spelling errors' left margin correct; paper is neat and legible | Uses general writing conventions but has errors; spelling distract reader; punctuation errors interfere with ideas | Serious problems with format of paper; part of essay not legible; errors in sentence punctuation; unacceptable to educated readers | Complete disregard for English writing conventions; paper illegible; obvious capitals missing, no margins, severe spelling problems |
| Style and quality of expression | Precise vocabulary usage; use of parallel structure; concise; register good | Attempts variety; good vocabulary; not wordy; register OK; style fairly concise | Some vocabulary misused; lacks awareness of register; style fairly concise | Poor expression of ideas; problems in vocabulary; lacks variety of structure | Inappropriate use of vocabulary; no concept of register or sentence variety |

In this case the teacher can use a different range marking scale. This means that the students may fall down on, say grammar, they can still perhaps do well in the way they use the vocabulary. This marking scale will help the students to focus on the particular areas that they think they are weak at.

Using correction symbols

Most teachers usually use note the students' mistake with the red ink and note the students' mistake. These sign can give negative effect to their motivation. Here, Hogue (1996) suggests some alternative symbols that can give constructive critics and reduce the students' fear as the following:

| | | |
|----|------------------------------------|---|
| P | Punctuation error | She lives in Salem, and works in Boston |
| F | Faulty agreement | My brother study engineering. |
| A | Article error | I don't have a time to do a homework. |
| U | Capitalization | My brother goes to harvard university and studies Medicine . |
| D | He plans to become Doctor . | |
| S | Spelling mistake | He speeks Spanish and Portuguese |
| V | Wrong verb tense | He is going the same thing for lunch day . |
| W | Wrong word form | She is very nice and kindness |
| WR | Wrong word | She gave the wrong factory. |


 Word missing
 Unnecessary word
 Wrong word order
 Run-on
 out.
 out.


 Comma splice
 went out.
 out.


 Fragment
 went out
 entertaining.

Transition Add or change a transition signal
 English has many silent letters. The b in the
 Word *doubt* is not pronounced. 
 Correction: English has many silent letters. For example, the b in the
 word *doubt* is not pronounced.


 Paragraph This is the symbol for paragraph.
 Usually the teacher place those symbol above or next to the place in the
 students' writing where the problem occurs. After knowing the symbol, the
 students can make the necessary adjustment to their writing.

Reformulation

Reformulation is a way of showing students how they could write something more correctly. This is also an important way in improving the students' writing. This method aims at showing the students how he or she would write the correct form of the sentence for example. In this case this method is very helpful for the students in learning something by comparing the correct and the incorrect form. Reformulation is extremely useful during the drafting and re-drafting stage in writing.

Referring students to a dictionary or grammar book

In producing the work on writing, the students often make the mistakes. The material related to the gammar and the words are usually become a potential problem for the students. For example the studens when write "Iam not interested about history", sometimes the teacher indicate those mistakes by saying ' have you check it in your dictionary or a grammar book?'. It means that the teacher suggest them to they are having tense, grammar, or word order form. This method is very important for the students to encourage them to look the information with the purpose of mind. He will learn as they correct it and hopefully it will fosillized in along time.

Ask me

Writing teaching learning process can be different to teaching other skill in English. Sometimes a teacher can face difficult time when he wants to explain the students' error just in a paper. Furthermore from the students' work the teacher can be confused to understand what actually they want to write. The teacher often cannot read or even guess the students' way of thinking. Very often the students produce ambiguous work that is impossible for the teacher to follow. This usually happens not only in the area of the content of the writing itself but also happens in the area of syntax, diction or grammar. For example, in the area of grammar the students often transfer their speaking habit into their writing. They just write what they want to speak in the paper producing comma splice and run on sentences. In addition, in the area of diction, the students usually also produce inappropriate words/terms to express their ideas. It seems that the students are far away from the standard language rule system. In such cases, the teacher can ask the students to talk to them so that they can sort out the problem face-to-face. This method seems to be beneficial in clarifying what actually they want and

Remedial Teaching

Remedial teaching is a special task/treatment given again to the students during the teaching learning process to improve their competence. Kenneth Beare (2008) states that many teachers also choose to correct students **after** the fact. Teachers take notes on common mistakes that students make. During the follow-up correction session the teacher then presents common mistakes made so that all can benefit from an analysis of which mistakes were made and why. In other word, in writing class when the majority of the students commit certain mistakes, it is considered that the remedial teaching is important to conduct. There are usually some typical mistakes that most of the student make, for example, in the area of grammar the students often produce dangling sentence, comma splice, fragment, etc so that the sentence is not effective and difficult to understand. In addition, the students usually also face difficult time in organizing their ideas correctly, for example, they often include irrelevant ideas, repeat the same ideas presented before in the same paragraph, etc. In this case a teacher can pick one of the students' own error used as a model to be spotted in the class. Here the students are asked to put them right. By doing this, the students automatically will realize their mistake although the sentence to be spotted is not his/hers since the example have the same characteristics to her/his sentence. When the teacher did this, it is advisable for him not to mention the student's name whose sentence used as the model to avoid the feeling of ashamed. In other word none of students will recognize who produce those mistakes, except the doer of course. This feeling relax hopefully can make the students confident in writing in the future.

Those methods above are alternatives solution that can be used as a reference for the teacher to correct students writing. Error correcting takes lots of teacher time and energy and many students just do not want to see their writing compositions after teacher corrections. In other words every English

writing teacher would like to imagine that their student takes their corrected paper home, pulls out a dictionary and grammar book and carefully goes over each correction. Unfortunately, most students only check to see how much "red" is on the paper and then file it away - never to be looked at again. In this case, the teachers must use effective correction so that their careful corrections are not wasted.

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