Errors in English Essay Writing from a Syntactic Perspective

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	This study discuses errors in English essay writing from syntactic perspective. Syntactic theory was used to analyze data while the data of this study were English essay writing written by university students. The method of this study was qualitative study which was divided into three namely data collecting method, data analysis method, and presentation of data analysis. Data of this study were collected using *simak* method. It meant monitoring the language used which was in the form of written text. Then there are two techniques used to collect data namely documentation and noted technique. Descriptive analytic was used to analyze data using syntactic theory. Informal method was used to present the result of data analysis in the form of sentences. There were two results of this study. Firstly, it showed that there were nineteen words, thirteen phrases, and thirteen clauses were found as errors in university students' English essay writing. Secondly, university students need to master English grammar to minimize syntactic errors in English essay writing.

I. INTRODUCTION

Essay is one writing material which must be mastered by university students. It is longer than paragraph, and it has some types like opinion, descriptive, process, narrative essay, and others. Savage and Mayer[1]stated that essay is a text that is longer than the paragraph and has three main parts, namely introduction, body, and conclusion. These parts must be found in an essay. If one of them is erased, an essay may have minus point or it can be said as incomplete essay.

In order to write a good essay, those three main parts must be supported by unity and coherence; and syntactic side. Unity and coherence relates to linkage between the contents of essay while syntactic side refers to the grammatical structure of sentences. Unity and coherence of essay will be good if it is supported by grammatical sentences. In this part, some university students usually have difficulties in syntactic part or in writing grammatical sentences.

Syntactic errors in writing essay were found in some students' essay. These errors appeared in the form of ungrammatical sentences used by them. Some of them had difficulties to write grammatical

sentences because they do not know well about it. Tallerman[2]said that syntactic is an arrangement of sentence. In other words, it is a sentence formation which follows the rules used by each languages. Rules of sentence writing similar to grammar of language which means the way a sentence is formed in a language. Ramlan[3] explained that syntactic is a branch of linguistics which discusses discourse, sentence, clause, and phrase. It can be said that it covers word, phrase, clause, and sentence so it describes parts of sentences itself.

The parts of syntactic in English essay writing are usually written incorrectly by some students. When it was done, their essay writing will have less point because they may not able to deliver properly the contents of their essay writing. Therefore, their reader may confuse about the content on their essay. Two examples of error syntactic in essay writing are run-on sentence and fragment. One example of run-on sentence is *Students admire Ki Hadjar Dewantara they apply his ideas.* On that sentence, there are two independence clauses without coordinating conjunction or punctuation, so that sentence should be written like *Students admire Ki Hadjar Dewantara, and*

they apply his ideas. Then one example of fragment in an English essay is *Finding job easier in my life.* This sentence misses verb, so it should be like *Finding job is easier in my life.* Those two example are easily found in university students' English essay writing. When their lecturer explained about English grammar before writing an English essay, they always said that they understood. In contrary, the situation was different when they started to write. They suddenly forget about English grammar, and they wrote anything on their mind without thinking their English grammar. This situation needs serious care because English essay writing is one of important subject in English education. Consequently, students must pay attention to their syntactic part on English essay writing.

The errors of syntactic part on English essay writing can be found in many university students' English essay writing. One of them can be seen in English essay writing which was written by students of English Education Program, Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa. One simple example of syntactic error is in word error that is a word *habbit* which must be written *habit.* It happened because they thought that *habbit* was similar to *rabbit,* so they have misconception for some words on their mind.

Those several examples mistakes in syntactic part became the first reason of doing this study. As a result, it was done because the writer want to find other syntactic errors in English essay writing focusing on word, phrase, and clause errors; and to observe the reasons behind those mistakes. Finding them become one of ways to minimize errors in university students' English essay writing.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

a. Definition of Syntactic

Richard[4] mentioned that syntax is the study of combining words into sentences. Thus it can be said that arranging grammatical sentences based on grammatical rules used by each languages is called syntax. The point is following their rules.

In syntax there are syntactic units. The units consist of functions, categories, and syntactic elements. Syntactic functions include subject, predicate, object, complement, and description. While the syntactic category consists of nouns, pronominal, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, interjection, and determiners. Furthermore, the syntactic element includes the word

which is the smallest object of syntactic study and the sentence which is the object of the largest syntactic study.

b. Function of Syntax

The syntactic function includes five sections namely subject, predicate, object, and adverb (Chaer, 2008: 207). First is subject. The part of the sentence that shows the doer, figure (thing), all things, or problems that become subject of the conversation. The forms of subject are usually words or phrases, clauses, verbal phrases. The subject can also be identified by using the question words who (who), what (which) to the predicate. If the answer is not logical then there is no subject.

Second is predicate. It states the condition of subject, the nature, situation, status, character or identity of subject, or the amount of something possessed by subject. It can be said that predicate is the part of the sentence except subject. It can be a verb/ verb phrase, adjectives, adverbs and nouns.

Third is object. Objects are part of sentences that complete the Predicate. The object is generally filled with nouns, nominal phrases, or clauses. The location of the object is always behind the Predicate in the form of a transitive verb, that is, a verb that requires the object. If the Predicate is filled with intransitive verbs then the object is not needed so that the presence of the object in the sentence.

Fourth is complement. It is part of sentence that completes predicate, and it is generally behind the predicate in the form of verbs. Fifth is adverb. It explains various things about the other parts of the sentence like subject, object, predicate, and verb. In addition, the position of the information can be at the beginning, middle and end of the sentence.

c. Syntactic Units

Syntactic units contain five parts namely word, phrase, clause, sentence, and discourse[5]. It means that syntactic covers minor area that is word to major area that is discourse. In this syntactic units, sentence and discourse will not be explained because the focus of this study is only three areas namely word, phrase, and clause.

At the level of syntax, words are the smallest unit that is hierarchically a component forming larger syntactic units, namely phrases. The word as a syntactic unit, that is, in relation to the elements forming a larger syntactic unit, namely phrases,

clauses, and sentences. As a small unit in syntax, the word plays a role as a syntactic function filler, as a marker of syntactic categories, and as a coupling in uniting units or parts of syntactic units.

Phrases are a linguistic meaning, and phrases are linguistic units that are bigger than words and smaller than clauses and sentences. Phrases are a collection of non-predicative words. This means that the phrase has no predicate in its structure. That's what distinguishes phrases from clauses and sentences.

A clause is a level in syntax that is above the level of a phrase and below the level of a sentence. A clause is a syntactic unit in the form of predicative constructs of words. That is, in the construction there are components, in the form of words or phrases, which function as predicates; and the other functions as a subject, as an object, and as an adverb.

d. Some Previous Studies

There are two previous studies in this study. First is Promsupa, Varasarin, dan Brudhiprabha[7] who analyzed grammatical errors in English writing by Thai University students. It was stated that the students made grammar mistakes 2.218 times. It showed that Thai university students have weak understanding in English grammar. Second is Sawalmeh[8] who examined the error analysis in essays English writing by students in Saudi Arabia. He found ten grammatical errors: verb tense, word order, singular/plural form, subject-verb agreement, double negatives, spellings, capitalizations, articles, sentence fragments, and prepositions. This study also showed that students in Saudi Arabia needs to learn English grammar.

From the two previous studies that have been mentioned, it is said that there are some errors in essay writing that seem to require attention. These mistakes are mostly in grammatical terms. Those two used grammatical point of view to analyze their data. Meanwhile, this study used other theory to analyze the data. It used syntactic theory which covered words, phrases, and clauses. In other words, this study only focused on those three areas.

III. METHODOLOGY

Method used in this study was qualitative method. It is an umbrella term for a wide variety of approaches to and methods for the study of natural social life[9]. A wide variety covers spoken and written data which can be collected using interview transcripts,

fieldnotes, documents, and others. The method of this study was divided into three. First is data collecting method that is *simak*. Mahsun[6] stated that *simak* method means paying attention to the use of language in the spoken or written language. In this study, *simak* method was used to collect written data of English essay writing. The data were written essays which were collected from forty English Education Program students of Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa on third semester academic year 2017/2018 using documentation and noted technique. Collecting data using documentation technique was the first step, so all forty English essays writing was collected. After collecting data, they were noted using noted technique, so they were separated into three parts those were word, phrase, and clause error syntactic. Second was analysis data method namely descriptive analytic. The data were described and analyzed using syntactic theory focusing on three parts namely word, phrase, and clause. The analysis data was divided into three parts those are analysis of word, phrase, and clause. Moreover, finding syntactic errors in each data based on syntactic theory. Third is data analysis presentation namely informal method. It means that the data analysis were explained in the form of sentences. They were written using simple, compound, and complex sentences.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section is divided into three parts based on the focus of syntactic level analysis. The first part is word syntactic error, the second is phrase syntactic error, and clause syntactic error.

a. Word Syntactic Error in Essay Writing

Based on the collected data in this study, there were nineteen words syntactic errors which can be seen on table 1 below:

No	Word Syntactic Error	Position of Error	Correction
1	Slove	Inverted position of letter (o) and (l)	Solve
2	Traffict	Excess letter (t) at the end of word	Traffic

3	Importan	Minus letter (t) at the end of word	Important
4	Jogja	Incorrect initial letter (J)	Yogya
5	Jus	Minus letter (t) at the end of word	Just
6	Recorganize	Excess letter (c) at the middle of word	Reorganize
7	Strategi	Incorrect letter (i)	Strategy
8	Minimalis	Minus letter (t) at the end of word	Minimalist
9	Techologic	Minus letter (n) before (h)	Technologic
10	Wok	Minus letter (r) before (k)	work
11	Patien	Minus letter (t) at the end of word	patient
12	nerveous	Excess letter (e) after (v)	nervous
13	Grammer	wrong letter (e)	grammar
14	Combain	Excess letter (a) after (b) and minus letter (e) at the end of word	combine
15	Usefull	Excess letter (l) at the end	useful
16	Mak	Minus letter (e) at the end of word	make
17	manag	Minus letter (e) at the end of word	manage
18	interestin	Minus letter (g) at the end of word	interesting
19	carefull	Excess letter (l) at the end of word	careful

Table 1. Word Syntactic Error in Essay Writing

There were nineteen word syntactic errors on table 1. They were divided into seven types of errors. First was inverted position of letter in a word as shown on table 1 number 1, and it occurred only once. The inverted position appeared in a word *slove*. A position of letter (o) and (l) should be changed, so *slove* became *solve*. Second was excess letter at the end of a word as shown on table 1 number 2 like *traffic* which should be changed into *traffic*; number 15 like *usefull* which should be changed into *useful;* and number 19 like *carefull* which should be changed into *careful*. The number of this error was three. Third was excess letter at the middle of a word as shown on table 1 number 6 like *recorganize* which should be changed into *reorganize;* number 12 like *nerveous* which should be changed into *nervous;* and number 14 like *combain* which should be changed into *combine*. The number of them was three. Fourth was minus letter at the end of a word as shown on table 1 number 3, 5, 8, 11, 14, 16, 17, and 18. One example of this error was *importan* which should be changed into *important*. It must have a letter (t) at the end of the word. Fifth was minus letter at the middle of a word as shown on table 1 number 9 like *techologic* which should be changed into *technologic;* and number 10 like *wok* which should be changed into *work*. The amount of them was two. Sixth was incorrect initial letter of city name as shown on table 1 number 4 like *Jogja*. It refers to lack of understanding of standard word for city names in academic writing. *Jogja* is used in the non-academic writing, so it is better to use *Yogya* or *Yogyakarta* in an academic writing like essay. The number of it was one. Seventh was incorrect letter in a word as shown on table 1 number 7 like *strategi* which should be changed into *strategy;* and number 13 like *grammer* which should be changed into *grammar*. This error was influenced by the Indonesian language like example number 7 and the pronunciation of the words in English like example number 13. The influence of Indonesian language means that university students still use their Indonesian grammar in English essay writing. This situation is reasonable because this study were done in Indonesia so the participants of this study always use Indonesian language in their daily life, but they can minimize it by adding a portion of the practice of writing an English essay. While the pronunciation of the words in English happened because some university students wrote the words based on their pronunciation. This can be seen in the example in datum number thirteen for the word *grammer*. The pronunciation of the word grammar in English is

/ˈɡræm.ər/. It usually happened when they are in hurry. They have limit time to write English essay, so they only write what is on their mind without rechecking it.

The seven types of word syntactic errors can be seen on table 2 below:

No	Word Syntactic Errors	Total
1	Inverted position of a letter in a word	1
2	Excess letter at the end of a word	3
3	Excess letter at the middle of a word	3
4	Minus letter at the end of a word	8
5	Minus letter at the middle of a word	2
6	Incorrect initial letter of city name	1
7	Incorrect letter in a word	2

Table 2. Seven Types of Word Syntactic Errors in Essay Writing

b. Phrase Syntactic Error in Essay Writing

Based on the collected data in this study, there were thirteen phrases syntactic errors which can be seen on table 3 below:

No	Phrase Syntactic Error	Position of Error	Correction
1	Working or hang out	Incorrect pattern of *parallel structure*	• <u>Working</u> or <u>hanging</u> out • <u>Work</u> or <u>hang</u> out
2	Is can minimize	There is *to be* (is) before modal (can)	Can minimize
3.	To finished	To is not followed by V2 or V3	To finish
4	Many school	Incorrect plural form of a word *school*	Many schools
5	A organizer	Incorrect use of article *a*	An organizer
6	Many student	Incorrect plural form of a word *student*	Many students
7	A hour	Incorrect use of article *a*	An hour
8	Many time	Incorrect plural form of a word *time*	Many times
9	A students	Incorrect singular form of a word *student*	A student
10	Can good	Minus *be* after *can*	Can be good
11	Road can be <u>overcoming</u> the traffic or <u>subtract</u>	Incorrect pattern of *parallel structure*	Road can be <u>overcoming</u> the traffic or <u>subtracting</u>
12	read book, using internet, and ask friends	Incorrect pattern of *parallel structure*	• <u>reading</u> book, <u>using</u> internet, and <u>asking</u> friend • <u>read</u> book, <u>use</u> internet, and <u>ask</u> friends
13	The colour red	Incorrect pattern of English phrase	The red colour

Table 3. Phrase Syntactic Error in Essay Writing

There were thirteen phrases syntactic errors on table 3. They were divided into eight types of errors. First was incorrect pattern of parallel structure as shown on table 3 number 1, 11, and 12. One example of this error was *working or hang out* which should be changed into *working or hanging out* or *work or hang out.* This example was incorrect because a word before and after *or* should be in the form of *v-ing* or *v1*. They happened for several reasons. The number of this mistake was three. Second was *to be* before modal as

shown on table 3 number 2 like *is can minimize*. This error can be changed into *can minimize* because modals should be followed by v1. Third is to + v2/v3 as shown on table 3 number 3 like *to finished*. This error can be changed into *to finish* because to infinitive must be followed by v1. The number of this error was one. Fourth was incorrect plural form of a word as shown on table 3 umber 4, 6, and 8. One example of this error was *many school* which should be changed into *many schools* because there is quantifier *many*. The number of this error was three. Fifth was incorrect singular form of a word as shown on table 3 number 9 like *a students*. It should be *a student* because there is article *a*. The number of this error was one. Sixth was incorrect use of article *a* as shown on table 3 number 5 and 7. An example of this error was *a organizer* which should be changed into *an organizer*. The number of this error was two. Seventh was minus *be* after *modal* as shown on table 3 number 10 like *can good*. This error should be changed into *can be good* because modal cannot be followed directly by adjective. The number of this error was one. Eighth was incorrect pattern of English noun phrase as shown on table 3 number 13 like *the colour red*. This error should be changed into *the red colour* because the pattern of noun phrase is adjective followed by noun. In addition, this mistake happened because of the pattern of noun phrase in Indonesian language is adjective + noun like *warna merah*. Some university students used their Indonesian pattern of noun phrase in English essay writing.

The most phrase errors did by university students in English essay writing were incorrect pattern of parallel structure and incorrect plural form of a word. This situation shows that university students have weak ability to master English grammar. Consequently, they should improve their English grammar in writing, so they can avoid silly mistakes like incorrect article *a* and incorrect pattern of phrase.

The eight types of phrase syntactic errors can be seen on table 4 below:

No	Word Syntactic Errors	Total
1	Incorrect pattern of parallel structure	3
2	*to be* before modal	1
3	*to* + v2/v3	1
4	Incorrect plural form of a word	2
5	Incorrect singular form of a word	1
6	Incorrect use of article *a*	2
7	minus *be* after *modal*	1
8	Incorrect pattern of English noun phrase	1

Table 4. Eight Types of Phrase Syntactic Errors in Essay Writing

c. Clause Syntactic Error in Essay Writing

Based on the collected data in this study, there were thirteen clauses syntactic errors which can be seen on table 5 below:

No	Clause Syntactic Error	Position of Error	Correction
1	it is can make many traffic problems	There is *to be* before modal *can*	it can make many traffic problems
2	that is the simple ways to solve the traffic problems in Yogyakarta	*Subject* and *to be* do not show plural	those are the simple ways to solve the traffic problems in Yogyakarta
3	the solution is be made in Indonesia	Incorrect passive form	the solution is made in Indonesia
4	Jogja also become city	Incorrect subject-verb agreement- *become*	Yogya also becomes city
5	because they has travelling in mountain	Incorrect *Verb*	because they have been travelling in mountain
6	Manage the time to study	Minus subject	They manage the time to study
7	school policy very difficult	Minus verb	school policy is very difficult
8	Every school have four or five securities	Incorrect *verb- have*	Every school has four or five securities
9	when he work	Incorrect subject-verb agreement - *work*	when he works
10	When on the street	Minus subject and verb	When she was on the street

11	The techniques also to gain	Minus *verb-are*	The techniques are also to gain
12	When we speak sometime make some	Minus punctuation (,) and subject at *independent clause*	When we speak, sometime we make some
13	When students not familiar	Minus *verb-are*	When students are not familiar

Table 5. Clause Syntactic Error in Essay Writing

There were thirteen clauses syntactic errors. They were divided into seven types of error. First was *to be* before *modal* as shown on table 5 number 1 like *it is can make many traffic problems*. This error should be changed into *it can make many traffic problems* because this clause did not need *to be* before *modal*. *Modals* always appear before subject of a sentence, and always followed by v1. The number of this error was one. Second was incorrect subject-verb agreement as shown on table 5 number 2, 4, and 9. An example of this error was *when he work* which should be changed into *when he works*. The verb *work* in that clause needs a letter *s*. subject-verb agreement must follow the rules of English grammar. If there is a singular subject, a verb must also be singular. If there is a plural subject, a verb must also be plural. The number of this error was three. Third was incorrect passive form as shown on table 5 number 5 like *the solution is be made in Indonesia*. This clause should be changed into *the solution is made in Indonesia* because that clause used simple present tense, so the formula of passive form in that clause is subject + to be + v3. Some university students get confused between *to be* and *be*. Some of them think that *to be* in passive form pattern is *be*. The number of this error was one. Fourth was incorrect verb of has/have as shown on table 5 number 5 and 8. An example of this error was *Every school have four or five securities*. This error should be changed into *Every school has four or five securities* because *every* refers to singular. In this error, some students also get difficult to identify the use of *has* and *have* in a clause. Some of them assume that they are similar. The number of this error was two. Fifth was minus subject as shown on table 5 number 6, 10, and 12. An example of this error was *Manage the time to study*. This error should be changed into *They manage the time to study* because a minimal requirement of a clause is subject and verb.

A clause cannot be called as a clause if it does not have both of them. If they only have a subject without a verb, it is not a clause, it may be called a phrase or only a string of words. The number of this error was three. Sixth was minus verb as shown on table 5 number 7, 10, 11, and 13. An example of this error was *school policy very difficult*. This error should be changed into *school policy is very difficult* because a clause must have at least subject and verb. A verb in that clause is in the form of *to be* that is *is*. The number of this error was four. Seventh was minus punctuation as shown on table 5 number 12 like *When we speak sometime make some*. This error should be changed into *When we speak, sometime we make some* because punctuation comma was needed if a sentence used subordinating conjunction at the beginning. The number of this error was one.

The most clause errors did by university students in English essay writing were minus verb, minus subject, and incorrect subject-verb agreement. Furthermore, those three main errors and other errors in clause syntactic errors were closely related to incomplete part of the clause which means there is a missing part. It may miss subject or verb. It can also be said that they happened because of some university students' weakness in English grammar which means they do not know it well. It also happened because they did not have preparation of writing, so they only wrote it. They did it like they were speaking. Talking everything without paying attention to the rules of English grammar.

The seven types of phrase syntactic errors can be seen on table 6 below:

No	Word Syntactic Errors	Total
1	*to be* before *modal*	1
2	Incorrect subject-verb agreement	3
3	Incorrect passive form	1
4	Incorrect verb of has/have	2
5	Minus subject	3
6	Minus verb	4
7	Minus punctuation	1

Table 6. Seven Types of Clause Syntactic Errors in Essay Writing

V. CONCLUSION

According to this study, some university students made some words, phrases, and clauses syntactic errors. The word syntactic errors were divided into

seven namely inverted position of a letter in a word, excess letter at the end of a word, excess letter at the middle of a word, minus letter at the end of a word, minus letter at the middle of a word, incorrect initial letter of city name, and incorrect letter in a word. The phrase syntactic errors were divided into eight namely incorrect pattern of parallel structure, *to be* before modal, *to* + v2/v3, incorrect plural form of a word, incorrect singular form of a word, incorrect use of article *a*, minus *be* after *modal*, and incorrect pattern of English noun phrase. The clause syntactic errors were divided into seven namely *to be* before *modal*, incorrect subject-verb agreement, incorrect passive form, incorrect verb of has/have, minus subject, minus verb, and minus punctuation.

The main causes of syntactic errors are divided into two. First was word syntactic errors which were influenced by the pronunciation of English. Some university students often wrote words according to how they are pronounced. They missed the right written form of a word. It seems difficult for them to memorize the written form because they wrote what was on their mind. Second was phrases and clauses syntactic errors occurred due to lack of understanding of English grammar. Those errors were also influenced by Indonesian grammar which means that some university students are not able to use English grammar properly because of their Indonesian language. It becomes serious problem because Indonesian and English language have different pattern.

All syntactic errors in English essay writing can be minimize by doing three steps. First is practicing to write English essay twice a week. It means they must write any English essay in a week. It can be short or long English essay as long as they love it. Practicing twice a week will help them to improve their syntactic part in English essay writing. Second is rechecking their written English essay. By doing it, they will know which parts are incorrect. Then learning from their own mistakes is the best way to avoid similar mistakes in English essay writing. Third is correcting their mistakes. After rechecking their English essay, it would be better if they correct their mistakes. It will help them to memorize the pattern in English grammar, so they will not do the same mistakes in the future. Moreover, there is one important part to minimize syntactic errors in English essay writing that is mastering English grammar. It must be done by university students because English grammar always relates to syntactic part, and university students who

master it well will be able to write a good essay. It means they are able to deliver the messages on their English essay writing to their readers because they can read them well.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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