Grammatical Errors in EFL Students' Final Project Writings

Zewitra, Poppy Fauziah

English Department, Politeknik Negeri Bandung, Indonesia

Email: zewitra@polban.ac.id , poppy.fauziah.bing17@polban.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Making errors is an unavoidable aspect of acquiring a new language, especially for those who do not use the new language as their first medium of communication. Writing in a foreign language can be a considerably tough challenge for EFL learners, one of the problems is regarding the grammatical rules. This present study attempts to discover and analyze the grammatical errors found in EFL students' final project writing. It employed a descriptive qualitative method using a textual analysis process by adopting the theory of Dulay et al. regarding grammatical error analysis. Dulay et al. classify grammatical errors into four; omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. Five students' final projects with a total number of 2884 sentences became the object of this research. The final projects were taken from Politeknik Negeri Bandung (Polban) English Department students of 2018 and they were limited to the project of 'Travel Writing'. Travel Writing was chosen since it contains more various types of sentences, more complicated sentence structure, and a higher level of language modification. The results of this study claim that all types of grammatical errors presented by Dulay et al are found in those five students' final projects. Misformation is the most frequent error by 74% (380 out of 516 errors) while misordering is the least one by 1% (7 out of 516 errors). Theoretically, the findings can be a base for the next researchers to further analyze the cause of this error production. Meanwhile, practically the results can be used by curriculum designers as a guide to evaluate and develop new curriculum, syllabus, materials, and teaching methods that are more suitable for EFL students in order to communicate effectively and write skillfully.

Keywords: error analysis, grammatical error, writing, travel writing

INTRODUCTION

English is one of the foreign languages for Indonesians. Thus, Indonesian English learners are considered EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. People in Indonesia do not usually use English in their daily communication, but still, they learn it at schools, universities, or even courses since it is the global language people use to communicate. It becomes a compulsory subject for high school and higher education students in order to prepare themselves to communicate in the global context.

Bahasa Indonesia and English are two totally different languages. They come from two different roots which have two different systems and rules. Bahasa Indonesia belongs to the Austronesian language family while English comes from the Indo-European family (Lanehart, 1998). Because of these different origins, it is very understandable for

Indonesians to accidentally make mistakes and errors in their process of acquiring English. Dulay et al. (1982) even claim that people cannot learn a language without first systematically committing errors as it is an inevitable part of learning. Besides, Kafipour & Khojasteh (2012) justify that today, errors that one produces when trying to learn a new language are not seen as a negative aspect but rather a natural phase in his development of language skills. It is also in line with Brown, Gass, and Slinker (in Muhsin, 2016) who agree that language learners experience a trial and error nature in their process of learning. Thus, the discussion leads to a conclusion that making mistakes or errors is a natural phase someone will experience in his process of learning a second language.

Among four English skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), scholars agree that writing is seen to be the most difficult one to master by students, the EFL learners particularly (Sermsook et al., 2017). In fact, a native speaker even still experiences obstacles to produce a good piece of writing (Zhao, 2017). Hourani (2008) in his dissertation reports that composing a text, especially an essay, in a new language often results in the greatest challenge to the students at all levels because essay writing is extended and more demanding than just a short paragraph. Despite its difficulty, scholars still highlight the importance of writing. Bjork and Raisanen (1997) and Ulijn and Strother (1995) in Tahaineh (2010) argue that writing is a tool for language development, critical thinking, and learning. Together with speaking, it is also seen as an active or productive skill of language use.

The analysis of learners' errors will deeply explain their language learning process; besides, it helps teachers and curriculum planners focus on teaching materials that best suit the needs of language learners, Dulay et al. (1982) claim. Therefore, the study of errors toward students' writing becomes a growing research interest and has been observed for decades. Tahaineh (2010) conducted a research on EFL students of Arab universities. He observed the kinds of errors the students make in using English prepositions. He found out that involvement of mother tongue and transferring strategies to target language are the main reasons for the errors. Kafipour & Khojasteh (2012) observed the writing of Iranian undergraduate students, analyzing the kinds of errors seen from the sources. The research shows that the majority of the errors are caused by developmental, ambiguous, and interlingual factors. In line with this, Sermsook et al. (2017)'s study on Thai EFL students found that punctuation, spelling, capitalization,

subject-verb agreement, articles, and fragment to be the most often committed errors made by the students. They also discovered that both interlingual and intralingual interferences along with limited knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary as well as carelessness of the students are the major sources of the errors. Further, Salehi & Bahrami (2018) in their research on journal papers written by Persian authors found that the most common error is regarding the word usage while the least common one is the subject-verb agreement. They also concluded that L1 influences the production of writing and causes errors. Karim et al. (2018) discovered slightly different results. Their observation towards EFL learners in Bangladesh resulted in some types of errors the learners often made. The common errors identified are related to grammar usage, misformation, misordering, and overgeneralization.

The error analysis study in the Indonesian context is also favorable. Limengka, P.E., Kuntjara (2000) conducted research on English Department students of Petra Christian University. Misformation of verbs and nouns was found to be the most commonly made by students, even though other types of errors were also found. In line with this, Muhsin (2016) found a slightly similar result. His observation towards Junior High School students in Makassar, Indonesia said that missed formation, especially in applying simple present tense, is the most frequent error made with the percentage of 75,18%. Similarly, Ma'mun (2016) in her study on UIN Walisongo English Department students identified that misformation of adverb, verb formation, subject-verb agreement, article, modal, and passive voice to be the frequent error the students made. Next, an impressive study was conducted by Furtina et al. (2016). They observed the comparison between grammatical errors made by male versus female students. The results show that out of ten subcategories of error, seven were found to be made by male students while only six were found in female students. They concluded that female students are more careful than males in writing.

Based on the literature review, it can be seen that the analysis of grammatical errors produced by Indonesian diploma students while composing their final project products has never been done. The final project is compulsory for vocational school students to make in order to finish their diploma education, including those who study in the English Department of Politeknik Negeri Bandung. It aims to implement the knowledge and skills the students have gotten during the study. However, an observation prior to this research

found that the students still make numerous grammatical errors in their final project products despite having learned English for almost three years in the department. Therefore, this present study attempts to discover and analyze the grammatical errors found in those students' final project writing. The final project is limited to 'Travel Writing' since it contains more various types of sentences, more complicated sentence structure, and a higher level of language modification.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Error Analysis

Both errors and mistakes exist when one attempts to acquire a new language. These two terms are often interpreted differently. Performance error, caused by fatigue and intention, is often referred to as "mistake" while the term "errors" itself refers to what is caused by lack of comprehension of language law (Corder in Dulay et al., (1982)). Ellis (2010), then, adds that error occurs since a learner does not acknowledge what is correct, while mistake occurs because he fails to apply what he knows. However, Dulay et al. refuse to restrict the terms. Dulay et al use "error" to refer to any deviation from a chosen norm of language, regardless of the characteristics or causes of the deviation (Dulay et al., 1982).

Previously, the error was often regarded negatively; it was seen as a failure of the teaching process. However, today it is no longer seen as a negative aspect but more like a natural step that a learner faces to develop his language ability. Corder even claims that error is essential in three aspects. First, it tells teachers about the progress the learners have achieved. Second, it provides evidence for researchers of how language is learned and acquired. Third, it is indispensable to the learner himself because making errors is a natural step to learn a language (Corder in Muhsin (2016)). Dulay et al. (1982) also emphasize that there are two major goals of analyzing error: (1) it gives data to identify the obstruction of the nature of language process and (2) it shows teachers and curriculum developers about parts that are considered to be the most difficult for students to produce correctly and error types that most hamper learners to communicate effectively.

Error analysis can be divided into two categories; mechanical error analysis and grammatical error analysis. Mechanical error is related to the use of capitalization, punctuation, and spelling while grammatical error is regarding the inappropriate use of grammar rules (Mubarak, 2013). Since this present study only focuses on grammatical error analysis, it will be further explained in the next part.

2.   Grammatical Error

Every language has its own grammar rules which may be a lot different from the other languages. Languages from different roots especially, such as Bahasa Indonesia and English, will not rely on many things in common regarding their grammar and language structure. Therefore, it is very understandable for Indonesian English learners to produce errors in their process of learning, including in their English writing activity.

Since this topic has run for decades, many scholars have offered various categories of grammatical error. However, this present study will use the one proposed by Dulay et al in their book Language Two. Dulay et al. (1982) classify grammatical error into four; omission, addition, misformation, and misordering.

a.   Omission

Omission is an error in which there is a missing item that has to exist in a sentence. It is marked by the absence of a certain feature that has to appear in a grammatically-correct sentence (Muhsin, 2016).

Example:

•   *James the new director.*

There is an omission found in the sentence above. The *to be* is omitted. A *to be* functions as a predicate in a nominal sentence. The sentence will be grammatically correct if it is completed with "is".

However, Dulay et al. (1982) claim that even though any items might be omitted, there are such things which have important roles: nouns, verbs, adjective, and adverbs. Those are called content morphemes. When a content morpheme is omitted, the sentence will be meaningless or the meaning will change.

Example:

•   *James is the new director.*

The words James, new, and director are the content morphemes that hold important roles in the sentence. People will still get the meaning although it is only *James new director*. However, if people only hear or read *is* and *the*, they will not get any idea of it. Therefore, the words *is* and *the* are called grammatical morphemes. They exist to make sentences grammatically correct but they have a minor role in delivering meaning.

b.   Addition

Addition is the opposite of omission. In the error of addition, some items must not appear in a sentence.

Example:

- *Claire doesn't understands the rules.*

The "-s" ending in the verb "understand" is the addition error. The above example is a negative sentence formed by an auxiliary "does". When a sentence is negative and uses auxiliary *do, does,* or *did*, the verb must be written in the infinitive form. Thus, the correct verb form to use is "understand".

c.   Misformation

The wrong form of the morpheme or structure is called misformation (Dulay et al in Muhsin, 2016). It can be recognized by the incorrect use of grammatical rules, such as tenses, subject-verb agreements, comparative-superlative patterns, prepositions, and so on. Muhsin (2016) claims that this kind of error occurs because students do not really master and understand the rules and patterns of English grammar.

Example:

- *Give me that. Me hungry.*

There is a misformation of pronoun functioned as a subject of the sentence. Pronoun "me" is an object pronoun. For subject position, the correct pronoun to use is "I".

d.   Misordering

Misordering occurs when there is an error placement of morpheme(s) in a sentence.

Example:

- *I never know what is that.*

Morphemes "what is that" is misplaced. The morphemes form a noun clause functioned as the complement of an active affirmative sentence. Since it is an affirmative sentence, the correct arrangement of the clause is "what that is".

3.   Travel Writing

Travel writing is simply explained as writing about visiting different places, talking about a journey or place. It is different from a travel blog since the writing is more detailed and less informal (*Travel Writing*, n.d.). Delfino (2019) claims that travel writing has a way to get the reader to new places. It can encourage people to explore, try new things, and develop an understanding of various cultures when it is written well. In line with this, Mary Baine Campbell says that 'with loud metaphorical resonance, you can hear the whispers of the people on the far side of the glass world as if they were speaking in your own ears' (Campbell in Youngs, 2018).

Writing a travel article involves the language of sensory as it aims to make readers feel the experience that the author describes. Delfino (2019) mentions some rules of travel writing; (1) be written in first-person, (2) tell the past event, (3) tone conversational – dialog is allowed, (4) explore sensory details, (5) be valuable in some way, either providing useful tips or insight into a culture, and (6) be relatable to the audience. Lindstead (2020) adds that travel articles can be started in any way, but they should grab readers' attention. Thus, travel writing contains more various types of sentences, more complicated sentence structure, and a higher level of language modification as it aims to make readers feel that they are in the place described. Due to this complexity of language, travel writing was chosen to be the object of this current research.

METHOD

This present study employed a descriptive qualitative method. Nassaji (2015) states that descriptive qualitative research aims to evaluate language learning and teaching in the natural environment without any other variables to intervene or manipulate. In short, the data are described as they are. To reach the purpose of the research, the descriptive qualitative method involved a textual analysis process. It involves observing language, symbols, and/or pictures in texts to obtain insight into how people make sense of and

express their life experiences (Allen, 2017). Besides, this research also applied a simple calculation method in order to discover the numbers and percentages of errors found in the objects of observation.

The research was conducted by adopting Dulay et al (1982) theory of grammatical error analysis. This theory classifies grammatical errors into four big groups; omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. Indonesian diploma student writings were taken as the object of this study. The data analysis steps consist of the collection of samples, identification of errors, classification of errors, description of errors, and evaluation of errors (Corder in Salehi and Bahrami, 2018).

The first step is collecting samples. Five students' final project products with a total number of 2884 sentences were collected from Politeknik Negeri Bandung (Polban) English Department students of 2018. The products were limited to the project of 'Travel Writing'. This type of final project was chosen since it contains more various types of sentences, more complicated sentence structure, and a higher level of language modification. The samples were read several times to identify the grammatical errors. When the errors were found, the data were transcribed to Microsoft Excel and marked bold. Using Microsoft Excel eased the researchers to perform the calculation at the end.

After being identified, the errors were then categorized based on the classification of grammatical errors by Dulay et al. In this step, the data were also numbered by using capital letters (indicating the type of error), Roman numerals (indicating the number of the book), and numbers (indicating the order of error found in the certain book). For example, datum numbered (A.I.1) means it contains omission error, it is from the book I, and it is the first omission error discovered. Next, the errors were described from the grammatical point of view. It ranged from the use of prepositions, articles, suffixes, to tenses and so on. After that, the possible corrections of the errors were given in the evaluation step. Finally, the number and the percentages of errors were calculated to discover the most frequent error made by EFL students in writing their Travel Writing products.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Five Travel Writing books produced by Polban English Department students were used as the object of this study. They were inspected to discover grammatical errors and classified into four groups; omission, addition, misordering, and misformation. Table 1 presents each book (title and author were hidden) and the number of sentences it has, while Table 2 gives the results of the study.

Table 1. Five Students' Travel Writing Products

No.	Books	Number of sentences
1	Book I: about trip to Kepulauan Seribu	174
2	Book II: about trip to Labuan Bajo	1022
3	Book III: about trip to Belinyu	540
4	Book IV: about staycation in Bandung	729
5	Book V: about trip to Kabupaten Bandung Barat	419
	TOTAL NUMBER OF SENTENCES	**2884**

Table 2. Types of Errors in Five Students' Travel Writing Products

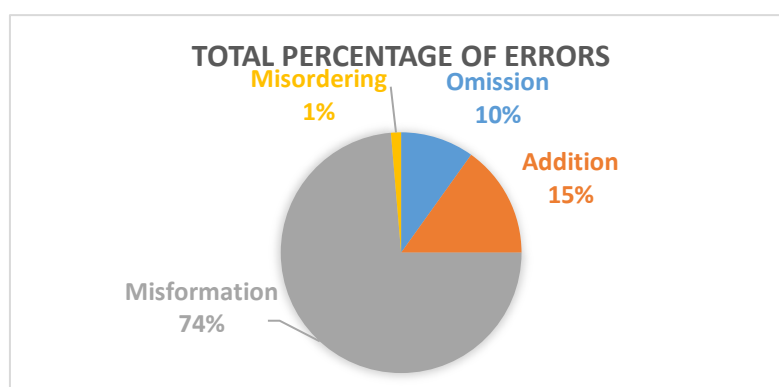| Books	Number of Sentences	Number of Errors				Total number of errors (per book)
		Omission	Addition	Misformation	Misordering	
Book I	174	13	18	77	2	110
Book II	1022	4	10	14	1	29
Book III	540	29	41	191	3	264
Book IV	729	4	4	33	0	41
Book V	419	1	5	65	1	72
Total number of errors (per type)		**51**	**78**	**380**	**7**	**516**

Figure 1. Total Percentage of Errors

Table 2 and Figure 1 show that all kinds of grammatical errors suggested by Dulay et al are found in the five students' Travel Writing products. It can be seen that misformation is the most frequent error made by 74%, followed by addition by 15%, and omission by 10%. Meanwhile, the least frequent error is misordering by only 1 %. The analysis is explained below, arranged from the most to the least frequent error found.

1.   Misformation

The wrong form of the morpheme or structure is called misformation (Dulay et al in Muhsin, 2016). It can be recognized by the incorrect use of grammatical rules, such as tenses, subject-verb agreements, comparative-superlative patterns, prepositions, and so on. Muhsin (2016) claims that this kind of error occurs because students do not really master and understand the rules and patterns of English grammar. This analysis found that misformation is the most frequent error made by diploma students in their Travel Writing products. The examples are presented below:

Table 3. Misformation Errors

Data	Erroneous Sentence	Correction
C.I.1	The islands are located around 45 km north of Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia, so that the **islands is an** administrative regency which belongs to Jakarta.	The islands are located around 45 km north of Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia, so that the **islands are** administrative regency which belongs to Jakarta.
C.II.6	Most of them (the food stalls) served fresh seafood that **smell** delicious.	Most of them (the food stalls) served fresh seafood that **smelled** delicious.
C.III.6	In here, somehow it feels **more cool** than the first area.	In here, somehow it feels **cooler** than the first area.
C.IV.7	**On** February, I got a chance to go to Saung Angklung Udjo.	**In** February, I got a chance to go to Saung Angklung Udjo.
C.V.14	The sapphire-blue water **welcoming** my arrival.	The sapphire-blue water **welcomed** my arrival.

As can be seen in Table 3, misformation errors made by diploma students in writing their Travel Writing products range from various types of grammatical errors. The error in datum (C.I.1), for instance, is regarding the subject-verb agreement. The verb "is" does not agree with the subject "islands". The "-s" ending in the subject "islands" indicates a plural noun; thus, the verb should be in the plural form as well. The correction for this error is using "are" instead of "is". Datum (C.II.6) contains an error in using the correct tense. Since travel writing talks about the author's experience, the condition described in

the sentence is in a past context. Therefore, the verb should be in the past form as well. The correction for this error is "smelled". The same case also happens in datum (C.V.14) in which the author used "welcoming" instead of "welcomed" to indicate a past event. Besides, the verb "welcoming" still cannot be used because there is no auxiliary verb or verb be to accompany this progressive form. Next, datum (C.III.6) contains an error in the use of a comparative degree. An adjective with one syllable as "cool" uses "-er" ending instead of "more" to indicate a comparative degree. Thus, the correction for this error is "cooler". The error in datum (C.IV.7) is about the use of prepositions. The author used "on" to precede the name of a month, whereas the name of month should use "in" as the preposition.

2.   Addition

In the addition error, there is an incorrect additional item in a sentence. Dulay et al in Muhsin (2016) state that this error is marked by the presence of a feature that must not appear in a grammatically-correct sentence. The error includes double marking, regularization, and simple addition. Addition error is the second most-produced errors made by diploma students in composing their Travel Writing products. The examples are as follow:

Table 4. Addition Errors

Data	Erroneous Sentence	Correction
B.I.6	… but in this trip, I will not visit those islands since they have **been become** popular.	… but in this trip, I will not visit those islands since they have **been** popular.
B.II.1	… I wished there were trees here, on the top of the hill, so they could protect my **heads** from the sun.	… I wished there were trees here, on the top of the hill, so they could protect my **head** from the sun.
B.III.3	The smell of sea that I **was** missed so much started to fill my mind.	The smell of the sea that I **missed** so much started to fill my mind.
B.IV.4	In Sundanese culture, if a little boy has got circumcised, his family will held a celebration where the friends of the child will cheer him to make him forget **of** his pain.	In Sundanese culture, if a little boy has got circumcised, his family will hold a celebration in which his friends will cheer him to make him **forget** his pain.
B.V.3	It was as clear as crystal **clear**.	It was as clear as crystal.

Table 4 presents the various kinds of grammatical errors in relation to addition found in students' Travel Writing products. It lies from the addition of a single morpheme to the addition of word(s). In datum (B.I.6), for example, there is an addition of one unnecessary word. The word "become" does not need to be used in the sentence since it has a similar function with the word "been", which is also in the sentence. Further, datum (B.II.1) contains an error in the addition of the "-s" ending to indicate a plural noun. The addition of "-s" in the sentence is incorrect since the noun to modify is "head". It talks about the head of a person which must be singular. Next, datum (B.III.3) contains an error in the addition of the verb be. An active simple sentence, either present or past simple, cannot contain both verb be (such as "was") and verb (such as "missed") together. They both function as the predicate. The sentence in datum (B.III.3) is a verbal sentence, therefore, the correct form of a verb to use is "missed". In datum (B.IV.4), the error lies in the addition of incorrect preposition. Certain verbs must be followed by certain prepositions or certain adverbs, but the verb "forget" does not belong to this classification. Therefore, the addition of "of" after the verb "forget" is classified into error in addition. Last, datum (B.V.3) contains an unnecessary word. The adjective "clear" has been mentioned previously. The addition of the later "clear" would be unnecessary.

3.   Omission

Dulay et al say that omission error is marked by the absence of an important feature that has to appear in a grammatically-correct sentence (Muhsin, 2016). However, Dulay et al (1982) also claim that even though any items might be omitted, there are such things which have important roles: nouns, verbs, adjective, and adverbs. Those are called content morphemes. When a content morpheme is omitted, the sentence will be meaningless or the meaning will change. The examples of omission made by diploma students in their Travel Writing products are presented in Table 5 below:

Table 5. Omission Errors

Data	Erroneous Sentence	Correction
A.I.2	… so if you guys expecting to find a group of dolphins here you will **disappointed …**	… so if you guys expect to find a group of dolphins here you will **be disappointed …**
A.II.1	The trip **consisted** two flights.	The trip **consisted of** two flights.
A.III.9	It makes the water there sometimes smell fishy and does not good to become place to swim.	It makes the water there sometimes smells fishy and does not good to be **a** place for swimming.
A.IV.3	The puppeteers were **focused** doing their task.	The puppeteers **focused on** doing their tasks.

Omission is the second least frequent errors made by Polban English Department students in producing their Travel Writing products. It can be seen from the data that students were able to maintain the content morphemes in their sentences. The sentences are understandable; however, the omission of several insignificant morphemes still ruins the grammatical rules. In datum (A.I.1), for instance, the author omitted the verb be in his sentence. The word "disappointed" is an adjective that needs the verb be. Since the sentence use a modal ("will") that should be followed by an infinitive form of a verb, the correct word to make the sentence grammatically correct is "be". Further, in datum (A.II.1), the author used the verb "consisted". There is an omission of a preposition since the verb "consist" should be followed by "of". A similar case also happens in datum (A.IV.3) in which the verb "focused" loses its preposition "on". Last, datum (A.III.9) misses an article. An indefinite article "a" is needed before the word "place".

4.   Misordering

Misordering, or improper ordering according to Muhsin (2016), occurs when there is an error placement of morpheme(s) in a sentence (Dulay et al, 1982). It is the least frequent error, by only 1% of the whole errors English Department students made in composing their Travel Writing products. It means that the students have already understood the correct order of certain morpheme to make a correct complete utterance. Below explained several misordering errors found in those five students' Travel Writing projects:

Table 6. Misordering Errors

Data	Erroneous Sentence	Correction
D.I.1	If you adventurous enough **you** and wanted to make it cheaper you can go backpacking and save some of your money.	If you are adventurous enough and **you** want to make it cheaper, you can go backpacking and save some of your money.
D.II.1	**Two hours drive from Taka Makassar**, I spent for reading magazines, talking with my friends, and sitting on the deck, enjoying the view.	I spent t**wo hours drive from Taka Makassar** on reading magazines, talking with my friends, and sitting on the deck, enjoying the view.
D.III.3	**I and my cousin** decided to visit a small stall across Goa Maria.	**My cousin and I** decided to visit a small stall across Goa Maria.

In datum (D.I.1), the error occurs when the second "you" was put in the wrong place. Instead of going before, the word "you" should be placed after the conjunction "and" to function as the subject for the second clause. In datum (D.II.1), the error occurs in the placement of the adverbial phrase. It is better to place the phrase after "spent" since this adverb is used to explain the verb. Finally, the misformation error in datum (D.III.3) occurs in the arrangement of the subjects. When the pronoun "I" comes with another pronoun in a sentence, "I" should be written last.

CONCLUSION

Learners naturally produce errors in their process of learning a new language, especially if the new language they learn has a different structure and pattern from their mother tongue. Indonesian diploma students of Polban English Department also experience the same case. In their process of composing their final project products in order to graduate from the institution, they still made numerous grammatical mistakes. They still faced difficulties in understanding and applying their grammar knowledge into their writings. Therefore, all four types of grammatical errors proposed by Dulay et al were found in their final projects. Misformation is the most frequent error found by 74% or 380 cases from the total 516 errors, continued with addition by 15% (78 cases), and omission by 10% (51 cases). Meanwhile, misordering places the last since only 1% (7 cases) was found. It can be concluded that students are still confused in applying the correct form of verbs and distinguishing tenses in proper situations. However, they have been able to understand the correct position of morphemes in a sentence structure.

The results of this research are expected to benefits some parties. Practically, they can be a base for the next researchers to further analyze the cause of this error production. It can also be a guide to evaluate and develop the new curriculum, syllabus, materials, and teaching methods which are more suitable for EFL students to communicate effectively and write skillfully.

This current study is limited in some areas. First, the number and source of samples are still limited to Polban English Department students only. To get a broader view of error analysis made by diploma students, it is suggested for next researchers to explore a broader scope of population. Second, this study is only limited to the types of grammatical errors. Next researchers are expected to see it from other points of view, such as mechanical error. Third, next researchers are also hoped to explore the reasons behind the production of errors made by diploma students in order to discover the sources of the problems.

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