

## Error Analysis of Using Punctuation in Narrative Text

Mukhammad Isnaeni<sup>1)</sup>, Frans Asisi Datang<sup>2)</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> *The University of Indonesia*

email: <sup>1</sup>*mukhammad.isnaeni@ui.ac.id / isnaeni.mhd@gmail.com*

<sup>2</sup>*fransisi@ui.ac.id*

**Abstract:** The objectives of this research are to find out whether the students commit punctuation errors in their narrative writing or not and to identify the types of errors which are made by the students in terms of Surface Strategy Taxonomy. This is a descriptive qualitative research. The instrument used for collecting the data is writing task in narrative text, consisting of recognition and production task. The data was, then, analyzed based on procedures used in error analysis of the descriptive approach. The results show that a number of students committed erroneous data either in recognition or production task on the use of punctuation marks in terms of omission, addition, substitution, and misplacement.

**Keywords:** *error analysis, punctuation, surface strategy taxonomy*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Language is an important element in man's daily life. It can be used to express and understand their minds, ideas, and feelings. It also enables human being to communicate with each other by stating ideas, expressing feelings, and exchanging information. One of the tools how people communicate with each other is writing. Writing is highly important to be mastered by language learners. Through writing—whatever it is, the readers can catch and follow the writer's opinion and messages. The most important thing in conveying messages accurately is a good organization in writing. Warriner (1973: iv) suggests that a good organization can be (1) the study of grammatical correctness in the use of inflected forms, (2) the study of the conventions of usage and of appropriateness in word choice, (3) the study of vocabulary and diction as a means to a more powerful style, and (4) the study of mechanics, such as punctuation, manuscript forms, capitalization, and spelling.

Punctuation marks have an important and significant role in writing. Consider, for example, the respective effects on the following sentences of the first omitting punctuation marks and then inserting them.

(1). *The manager said his assistant is quite mistaken*, and (2). *The manager, said the assistant, is quite mistaken*. It can be inferred that both sentences have quite different meanings. From the first sentence, the meaning is: *"It is the assistant who is mistaken."* On contrast, the latter means: *"It is the manager who is mistaken."*

In his thesis, Sudirman (1994) points out that studies on the students' English Foreign Language (EFL) should not be focused only on major language aspects (grammar, syntax, phonology, morphology, semantics) and skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) in general, but also on specified areas of each aspect and skill. In writing, for example, the specified areas can be content, process, purpose, word choice, punctuation, or mechanics. Without intensively reaching these specified areas, studies would never gain comprehensive, deeper, empirical information on the students' EFL writing as a complete unit of language skill. In order to gain such information, then, efforts for studying the specified areas of the EFL writing need to be intensively made. By doing so, in turn, various problems faced by students in their writing can be revealed. Error studies on English writing have so far been largely focused only on general matter such as

grammatical, syntactical, and organizational structures (see for example: Jalal, 2012; Mutiadi & Patimah, 2016).

Although errors studies have been investigated by some researchers, the level was for university students (Jalal, 2012; Sudirman, 1994; Wati, 2014); while for high school students especially in Lampung Province, the error studies on punctuations have rarely been found or have not been got an attention yet. Therefore, this research is still relevant to conduct.

Concerning with the research background mentioned previously, the researcher would like to formulate two research problems as follows: (1) Do participants commit punctuation errors in their writing? and (2) What types of errors made by the students in terms of Surface Strategy Taxonomy?

### Concept of Error

Errors refer to any deviation from a selected norm of language performance, no matter what the characteristics or causes of the deviation might be (Dullay, H., Burt, 1982). Error has different meaning from *mistake*. The difference between error and mistake is that *error* is ungrammatical utterance which refers to the language competence while *mistake* is imperfectness of utterance which refers to the language performance. Similarly, Brown (1980; 2007) also points out the distinctive differences between error and mistake. He maintains that a mistake is a performance error that is either the random guess or slip in that it is failure to utilize a known system correctly. Errors, on the other hand, are problem that noticeable deviation from adult grammar of a native speaker.

Referring to the ideas above, it can be inferred that when learners produce sentences ungrammatically due to performance factors such as limitation of memory, fatigue during test, emotional, etc (Corder, 1973, 1981; Dullay, H., Burt, 1982; Sudirman, 1994) it can be mentioned

as mistakes. Therefore, we should not worry about it. When learners cannot self correct because they lack of systematic structures of target language, it can be referred to errors.

### Surface Strategy Taxonomy

Dullay et. al. (1982) points out that surface strategy taxonomy highlights the way surface structures are altered: learners may *omit* necessary items or *add* unnecessary one; they may *misform* items or *misorder* them. Analyzing errors from surface strategy perspective holds much promise for researcher concerned with identifying cognitive processes that underlie the learner's reconstruction of the new language. It also makes us aware that learner's errors are based on some logic. They are not the result of laziness or sloppy think, but of the learner's use of interim principle to produce a new language. In line with the previous explanation, the writer infers that surface strategy taxonomy is used to analyze error done by the learner concerning with surface structure. The scope of surface strategy is limited to omission, addition, misformation, and misordering.

*Omission* is characterized by the absence of items that must appear in well-formed utterance. For instance, "*He eat rice every day.*" In that sentence, there is an omission of 's' on the word *eat* because of subject and verb agreement. The correct one must be "*He eats rice every day.*" In a punctuation domain, this type of error is also often found, such as the omission of apostrophe (') and (paired) commas. For example, "*Dila hat is very nice.*" instead of "*Dila's hat is very nice.*"

*Addition* type of error is signed by the presence of an item, which must not appear in well-formed utterance. It usually occurs in the later stage of second language acquisition, when the learner has already acquired some target language rules. This type of error can also appear in the use of

English punctuation like in this sentence: “*We can say; the number of guests attending the party depends on the party itself.*” In this example, the punctuation mark *semicolon* (;) should not appear in the written American English standard.

*Misformation* is characterized by the use of the wrong form of the morpheme or structure. In this case, the learner supplies something eventhough it is erroneous. For example, it is often found some students make the sentence like this: “*The dog eated the chicken.*” The use past verb *eated* is incorrect or malformed. The correct one should be “*The dog ate the chicken.*”

In addition, this type of error can also be found in the use of English punctuation in form of substitution, like in “*Oh! Stop it!*” Here the exclamation mark is used as substitution for a comma following the word *Oh*. Thus, the correct form of punctuation is written as “*Oh, stop it!*”

*Misordering* types of error are characterized by the incorrect placement of morpheme or group of morphemes in an utterance. For example, the sentence “*Why you didn't go to campus?*” is erroneous. It should be well-ordered as written as follows: “*Why didn't you go to campus?*” This type of error can also be found in the use of English punctuation like the use of *semicolon* (;) in “*...(3) fill the reminder of call slip information; (4) hand in the call slip at the main desk.*” The *semicolon* here is misplaced. It should correctly be placed before the word *and*. Therefore, this error is misplacement type in the use of English punctuation.

### **Concept of Punctuation**

Barnwell (1983:435) argues that punctuation can be defined as the word that refers to all those marks and signs used in writing: the period, the apostrophe, the hyphens, and so on. In accordance with Barnwell, Shaw (1963) gives a definition about punctuation as a system by which, through the use of certain marks, one makes

the meaning of written communication clear and, if possible, unmistakable. The goal of giving punctuation mark in writing is clarity.

Rorabacher (1976: 188) asserts that punctuation is a system of marks used to help the reader to read a sentence as the writer wrote it. Here again, punctuation is referred to a mark that is used by a writer to help a reader understand the writing. In this regard, the mark is specifically the one which is conventionally agreed by many as to indicate units of idea, word groups, or sentences. Other writers, Lagget et al (1985) maintain that punctuation as a code that serves to signal structural, semantic, and rhetorical meaning that would otherwise be missed by the reader...and from the readers' point of view, punctuation provides a map for one who must otherwise drive blindly past the by-ways, intersections, and detours of writer's thought. The word *code* is the central idea of this definition. It implies the same meaning as mark or signal.

Huckin (1983: 485) points out the function of punctuation as the road signs to the reader. They help the reader see grammatical structure of a sentence and thus more easily grasp the meaning. In addition, they can also help the reader see the rhetorical relationships between sentence elements. In short, punctuation marks indicate grammatical structure, meaning, and rhetorical relationships. Furthermore, Warriner (1973: 623) clarifies that using too much punctuation is just as bad as using too little. He emphasizes that using punctuation marks because of two reasons: meaning and conventional usage. Likewise, Shaw (1963: 17) asserts that punctuations can be used to terminate utterances (such as: period, question mark, and exclamation point), introduce words or statements (such as: commas, colons, and dashes), separate parts of sentences (such as: commas, semicolons, dashes, or apostrophes) and enclose parts of a sentence

or longer units of expression (such as: commas, dashes, quotation marks, single quotation marks, parentheses, and brackets). In this research, the uses of punctuation marks are based on PUEYD (Pedoman Umum Ejaan Yang Disempurnakan 'General guidelines of Improved Indonesian spelling system') and Warriner (1973: 623).

## 2. METHOD

This research is a descriptive analysis research which aims at describing various phenomena in various conditions and situations according to their present existence. This method includes attempts of describing, recording, analyzing, and interpreting conditions existing and observable at present. In this way, the writer or researcher gathered the data from students' writing in narrative text. The researcher saw the error, then identified and classified the errors based on Surface Strategy Taxonomy. A total 62 participants from high school students in Pringsewu Regency volunteered as the subjects of this research.

To decide the sample of the research, the researcher uses purposive random sampling. This technique was taken to assure the higher level of writing competencies so that the data gained through writing test, either in recognition or production test, did reflect their true ability and problems. The recognition test is given in an objective form or closed questions and production test is given to the students by producing writing narrative texts. The former requires students to supply individual punctuation marks while the latter requires students to write narrative paragraphs with the determined topic. The data, which were taken from the erroneous students' writing, were then analyzed and classified as omission, addition, substitution, or misplacement based on Surface Strategy Taxonomy. Furthermore,

the errors were then calculated based on their frequency and percentage.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The table below indicates the proportion of the types of errors in the use of punctuation marks.

Table 1 Proportion of the types of errors in the use of punctuation marks

Instrument	Types of errors	Frequency	Percentage
Recognition	Omission	673	68.05%
Test	Addition	178	17.99%
	Substitution	104	10.52%
	Misplacement	34	3.44%
TOTAL		989	100%
Production	Omission	144	41.86%
Test	Addition	99	28.78%
	Substitution	83	24.13 %
	Misplacement	18	5.23 %
TOTAL		344	100 %

It can be seen from table 1 that omission type holds the most frequent errors in the use of punctuation marks both in recognition (R) and production (P) tests. Its frequency is 673 out of 989 or 68.05% in R and 144 out of 344 or 41.86% in P. A number of students committed this kind of errors in the use of eleven punctuation marks. On the other hand, the lowest errors belong to misplacement type. Its frequency is 34 out of 989 or 3.44% in R and 18 out of 344 or 5.23% in P. In this case, the researcher inferred that most students committed these kinds of errors due to *intralanguage transfer* and *extraneous hinders*. The former indicates that the students make errors in the target language caused by the rules of the target language itself. In other words, the students in fact are lack of knowledge about English

punctuation rules. They committed punctuation errors since they do not know the correct or complete ones, for instance: *John Dryden a famous English poet said ...* instead of *John Dryden, a famous English poet, said....* Here, the students omitted a pair of commas enclosing a modifier *a famous English poet* because the students did not the correct uses of commas. Meanwhile, the latter implies that the students know the correct uses of certain punctuation marks, but they still make errors in this sense. The errors made are commonly caused by extraneous factors, such as carelessness or lack of attention, not lack of knowledge.

#### *Omission Type*

This type of errors is characterized by the absence of punctuation marks required in a particular unit of writing, sentences, or a part of sentences. In this study, the subjects of the research committed this error almost in all punctuation marks. The following data are presented as examples of this type of error:

1. At 1 am the program finished and I slept. (11/Om/S8/P).
2. John Dryden, a famous English poet said, "Nobody is perfect." (82/Om/S4/R).
3. Will you speak little louder, George (67/Om/S19/R)
4. The following are members of the new committee: Bob Bates, president of the Student Council Allan Drew, president of the Senior Class Helen Berger, vice-president of the Honor Society. (98/Om/S23/R).
5. Robert Frost's poem Stopping by Woody on a Snowy Evening is one of his best-known poems. (131/Om/S36/R).

Data number 1 indicates that the student omitted a period or full-stop in the underlined word *am*. Here, the word *am* is the abbreviation of *antemeridian* for showing the time. In this regard, a period must be inserted within the abbreviation. Therefore, the corrected version of the

erroneous data should be *At 1 a.m. the program finished and I slept*. Similar to the data number 1, in data number 2, a comma should be used after the underlined word *poet* to indicate non-restrictive elements of the subject of the sentence. Hence, the corrected version for data number 2 is *John Dryden, a famous English poet, said, "Nobody is perfect."* In data number 3, the question mark that should be used after the word *George* is omitted by the subject. In written standard, a question mark is used to indicate questions and terminate the direct question so that the corrected version should be *Will you speak little louder, George?*

From data number 4, the student omitted semicolon after the underlined words. The use of semicolon in this example is to set off or emphasize the division between items in series when one or more of the items include commas. It is to eliminate confusing elements of the items in series. Therefore, the corrected version of this example should be *The following are members of the new committee: Bob Bates, president of the Student Council; Allan Drew, president of the Senior Class; Helen Berger, vice-president of the Honor Society*. From data number 5, it was found that the student omitted quotation marks to quote the underlined words, namely the title of the poem. For this reason, the corrected version should be *Robert Frost's poem "Stopping by Woody on a Snowy Evening" is one of his best-known poems*.

In this research, this type of error is found in the use of eleven punctuation marks in recognition test and eight punctuation marks in production. The error characterized by the omission type is the greatest tendency in the use of English punctuation marks shown in this research as also indicated on table 1 in the previous pages. In other words, this type of error places the first rank among the other four types. In addition, there was a tendency that

the omission type found in recognition is greater than in production.

#### *Addition Type*

This type of errors is characterized by the presence of unnecessary punctuation marks in a particular unit of writing, sentences, or a part of sentences. In this study, the subjects of the research committed this error as presented as follows.

1. Will you speak a little louder, George?. (6/Add/S19/R)
2. The groom and bride, make a gown....(27/Add/S7/P)
3. Will you speak a little louder, George??? (66/Add/S19/R)
4. For your convenience we have enclosed:...(11/Add/S1/R)

From data above, the unnecessary punctuations come from the use of a *full stop*, a *comma*, a *question mark*, and a *colon* following the underlined words. Data number 1 indicates that the students added the unnecessary *a full stop* after question mark. The use of full stop is to terminate affirmative utterances while the use of question mark is to terminate interrogative sentences. It is not allowed to use both punctuations together in one sentence. Therefore, the use of full stop after question mark is redundant and the corrected version for data number 1 is *Will you speak a little louder, George?*

Likewise, in data number 2 the use of a *comma* after the underlined word *bride* is not recommended. A comma should not be used to separate between subject and predicate of the sentence. Thus, the corrected version is *The groom and bride make a gown....* In example 3, the students committed an addition error in the use of question marks. The use of question mark as indicated in the example above can be categorized into double marking addition. In formal writing, to end direct question only one question mark is absolutely recommended, not double question marks.

For this reason, the corrected version from the erroneous data is *Will you speak a little louder, George?* In example 4, the use of colon is not appropriate. The colon is not required after the word *enclosed* in example 4. In formal writing, it is not recommended to use colon after verbs followed by direct objects. The omission of colon, however, makes the sentences correct.

Like the omission type, addition type is also found in this research. In this study, addition errors rank the second position both in recognition and production. This tendency is suspected to be due to avoidance by the subjects in producing more sentences that do not require the specific punctuation marks in the production task. As a result, they used unnecessary punctuation marks in the sentences they produced in their writing.

#### *Substitution Type*

This type of error is characterized by substitution of a punctuation mark for another punctuation mark required in a particular unit of writing, sentences, or a part of sentences. The following data are presented as examples of this type of error.

1. Will you speak a little louder, George. (1/Sbt/S36/R)
2. All of my cousins and my nephew felt happy, all of them felt so fun. (71/Sbt/S4/P)
3. What a tremendous value? (23/Sbt/S36/R)

From the above-mentioned examples, it is apparent that the substitution errors were represented by the presence of incorrect use of particular punctuations as a substitution of correct punctuations, such as the use of a full-stop in example 1, the use of a comma in example 2, and the use of a question mark in the third example. Instead of those punctuation marks, a question mark, a full stop, and an exclamation mark should be used to replace them. In example one, to terminate a question (*will you speak a little*

louder, George) a question mark is best applied, not a fullstop. In example 2, the use of a comma after the word *happy* is incorrect. The correct one should be a full stop to end a statement. In example 3, the use of a question mark, instead of exclamation mark, is not appropriate.

In this research, it seems that there is a relatively little tendency of errors characterized by the substitution type in the use of English punctuations.

#### *Misplacement Type*

In the use of punctuation mark, this type of error is characterized by the misplacement of required particular punctuation mark in a particular unit of writing, sentence, or part of sentence. The following data are presented as examples of this type of errors.

1. John Dryden, a famous English poet, said, "Nobody is perfect". (2/Mp/S41/R)

2. He asked, "Would you sing a song?" (62/Mp/S22/P)

3. I came to the party with my father, who was wearing black shirt; my mother, who was wearing white kebaya and; Samsul, my oldest brother. (85/Mp/S17/P)

In an example 1, the full stop after the underlined words is misplaced. It should be placed inside the quotation marks, following the word *perfect*. Many students committed this error because of their habit in writing and using the full stop at the end of the statements. In example 2, the use of question mark is also misplaced. It should be placed inside the quotation marks. In example 3, the use of a semicolon is also found to be misplaced. The semicolon should be placed after the word *kebaya*, but before the word *and*. In this research, this error appears only little tendency and places the fourth rank position.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In reference to the result and discussion, the writer draws his conclusion as follows. The subject of the research committed punctuation errors in their narrative writing both in recognition and production test in terms of Surface Strategy Taxonomy. It can be concluded that omission type holds the most frequent errors in the use of punctuation marks both in recognition (R) and production (P) tests. The researcher inferred that most students committed these kinds of errors due to *intralanguage transfer* and *extraneous hinders*. The former indicates that the students make errors in the target language caused by the rules of the target language itself. While the latter characterizes the errors caused by extraneous factors, such as carelessness or lack of attention, not lack of knowledge. Future studies are needed to complete the finding of the research. The use of communicative effect taxonomy together with surface strategy taxonomy looks much more interesting to investigate.

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