

# I SELF-CORRECT THE ERRORS: BRINGING MICROSOFT WORD'S PROOFING INTO ENGLISH WRITING TASK

Ditulis oleh Administrator  
Kamis, 09 Februari 2017 08:43

## I SELF-CORRECT THE ERRORS: BRINGING MICROSOFT WORD'S PROOFING INTO ENGLISH WRITING TASK

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### ABSTRACT

*English as a Second Language (ESL) / English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners may encounter difficulties in mastering English skills from speaking, listening, reading and/or writing. Writing skill is believed to be the most difficult English skill to learn. The preliminary research indicated that there was a number of non-English department students encountering many difficulties in English writing task. However, there is a media, that college students often use, which can be a way to help students in producing a good English writing i.e. A proofing system in Microsoft Word program. Based on the background, this research aims to find if Microsoft Word's proofing brought to English writing task helps students to be aware of their mistakes and self-correct them in order to get the best experience in learning English writing. This research used 10 college students from Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana as participants. The data was collected through three writing tasks and open-ended questionnaire. The data gathered, then, analysed descriptively based on substantial framework. The result of this research showed that the most common errors made were subject-verb agreement, reversion of word(s) and misused of vocabulary. It also indicated that students done writing task in conventional (paper-based) setting encountered more errors compare to writing task done in Microsoft Word. Students enjoyed and motivated in writing task using such technology. Moreover, they can developed their self-correction skill in accomplishing the task.*

**Key Words:** *English Writing, Writing Error, Self-Correction, Microsoft Word's Proofing, TESOL*

### INTRODUCTION

Language, for almost all area in life, is considered as the main effective medium of communication to get and share information particularly in a global society. There are many languages all over the world used by the speakers of language in their daily life. There are local/regional language which has limited spread and global language whose spread is wider. Some of these languages are considered as global language such as: Chinese, Arabic, Russian, French, Spain and, surely, English. In the 21st century, English becomes so important especially for those who want to connect one another so it serves as an international-accepted communication (Ke, 2015). English still becomes the most useful language to communicate internationally. Thus, many people attempt to learn English and develop their global language competence through many ways and tools.

Before learning English, people need to know some elements of English. There are, at least, four elements in language that, later on, will be called by English language skills like: speaking, listening, reading and writing skill (Nomass, 2013). Speaking skill is usually used to communicate orally from one speaker to one or more than one interlocutor. People use their verbal expression in speaking to transfer what are in one's mind to others. Besides, there is listening skill which is considered as receptive language. Receptive language in listening is actuated by catching messages delivered orally by speaker of language. In listening, people use their ears and hearing to get the exact messages spoken by others. The other receptive language is reading skill. Reading skill deals with words, sentences and/or texts. People use this skill to get the information delivered non-verbally- written text, signs, symbols, nuance, etc-. The last skill is writing. This skill is included in expressive language which products the language through non-verbal signs and symbols.

This skill is interrelated to reading skill. Those four skills cannot be mastered in the same route and rate. They have their own difficulties. Among those four skills, writing is believed to be the most difficult skill to learn (Al-Gharabally, 2015). Some said that in writing people are not only dealing with words but also grammar, style, diction and many more. For those who have learned writing, in this case English writing, they will know how high the difficulties. People who did not have English language background are demanded to work hard to learn this kind of skill. Students considered as non-English department students may feel the same. They found that English writing was not as easy as what they thought about.

The preliminary research of this journal showed that from total of ten non-English department college students joining this research, all of them said that they faced problems in English writing. They said that writing in English led them to a confusion. The difficulties vary from one person to another. Most of their sentences in writing tasks contained errors. They, at the beginning, got confused how to deal with those difficulties. Most of them showed their errors in the use of auxiliary and/or verbs related to subject and verb agreement, diction or word choice, written structure of phrase or sentences and interlingual interference. Here, can be concluded that non-English department students faced many problems in English writing so it is needed to have a special method and/or particular media to help them coping with those problems.

As what was stated earlier, students need support in a form of special teaching learning method and/or effective media (Nomass, 2013) to reduce their error in writing, motivate and help them to improve their writing skill. There appeared one idea responding the problem. It was obtained when some students tried to use Microsoft Word as their spread sheet to do writing task in English course. Earlier, they did not have any ideas and just asked the teacher whether or not it was correct to write their sentences. Their sentences still contain errors and every error marked by red and/or blue underline in Microsoft Word spread sheet. Looking at the underline sentences, there appeared an idea what if students use the red/blue underline- also known as proofing- indicating errors in Microsoft Word as an alert and stimulate them to self-correct the words, phrase and/or sentence.

When students are able to self-correct their mistakes, it means that they develop their skill, especially in English writing. They are supposed to notice the errors from the proofing and predict the correct words, phrase and/or sentence replacing the wrong one until they found it right. Self-correction is good to stimulate students' awareness of mistakes and trigger them to think harder to get the correct composition. Based on the background, this research aims to find if Microsoft Word's proofing brought to English writing task helps students to aware their mistakes and self-correct them in order to get the best experience in learning English writing.

## **ENGLISH LANGUAGE WRITING**

Previous part has discussed that there are four elements of English language i.e. speaking, listening, reading and writing. Sharma (in Nomass, 2013) said that every English skill has its own difficulties, ways of teaching and media to support learning. In other words, each language element or area cannot be delivered in the same way and, surely, be supported with different media. English writing, nowadays, perceived as an essential skill in modern global society. Furthermore, experts said that without having English reading and writing skill, people's opportunities will be hindered if it involves interaction with English-based instruments and/or communication (Bloomsbury International, no year).

In academic setting, students are commonly asked to express their understanding and/or experience through non-verbal expression like words, phrases, sentences, signs and symbols in a form of writing task. Teacher often demanded students to make a short story explaining their lives, describing something or someone, or simply identifying things in sentences. Teacher also asked students, in intermediate-above level, to write creative written text like: poetry, fictions and even a

journal. From those kinds of tasks, the most common tasks given to students is writing short story (Purcell, Buchanan & Friedrich, 2013). In mastering English writing, especially to be able to survive from various tasks, students need to develop their English writing competence. Writing competence can be obtained when students master several writing components.

There are some writing components that become a foundation in English writing production. First, students should know many vocabularies. Having a large amount of vocabulary is very important when someone is writing in English. The most effective way to improve vocabulary mastery is to read as much as possible and to correct errors appears personally. When students correct their mistake by their selves, they will develop their understanding and replace the former wrong concept to the new right one. Reading in improving vocabulary is considered as an incidental vocabulary acquisition while vocabulary acquired through conscious or aware as it is done in student's self-correction is considered as direct vocabulary acquisition (Rezaei, Mai & Pesaraghader, 2014). Second, students should develop ideas in a form of framework which determines the flow of writing. Framework is the organization of thought, or sometimes actions, manifested in points leading the writer to make a good flow of writing. Al-Gharabally (2015) gave some tips on how to aid ESL/EFL learners with writing: 1) get ideas by brainstorming and/or discussion, 2) write the ideas down, 3) enrich the ideas with questions, 4) make a rough draft of writing, 5) improve the draft, 6) correct the writing and 7) re-correct the writing (by using second reader). That action framework will help students preparing for producing a good English writing. As pointed by number six and seven, students are supposed to check and recheck their writing since they might face difficulties leading to the error production (Bloomsbury International, no year).

### STUDENTS WRITING DIFFICULTIES

The preliminary research of this journal showed that students might face difficulties in English writing especially for those considered as non-English department students. Grape and Kaplan (in Al-Gharabally, 2015) stated that ESL/EFL learners were often intimidated when they were asked to write in English. They found many difficulties leading to the disabilities of discovering and constructing a good flow of writing. Moreover, students were overwhelmed when they were demanded to complete writing task since they were afraid of making mistakes.

According to Jimenez, Mira and Rodriguez (2013), there are several difficulties that students might face. First, students may spell words incorrectly. This problem hinders students to make well written words, phrase and/or sentences. Poor spelling includes difficulty in remembering word(s) pattern, writing word(s) inconsistently in the same document and reverse letters in spelling. For instance, students write 'tomorrow' instead of 'tomorrow'. In their writing, they use the word 'center' at the beginning and, later, inconsistently write 'centre'. Second, students may have grammatical problems. They demonstrate sentence mechanical errors like: lack of punctuation if they try to write connectives (first, second, so, in other words, etc) and inconsistent capitalization. They also write sentences without considering subject-verb agreement. For example, students tend to write 'Jack write' instead of 'Jack writes', 'He come' instead of 'He comes'. Besides, students found it was hard to compose a sentence if they did not know the word that they intended to use (lack of vocabulary). Those difficulties and problems appeared because they do not develop their awareness, tend to be passive in criticizing- check and recheck- their writing and lack of a system of proofreading (Lamberg, in Jimenez et al, 2013). Students can reduce their difficulties in English writing when teachers help them providing a effective method and media that contains proofreading so students will aware of their errors and try to correct them personally.

### INTEGRATING MICROSOFT WORD IN WRITING TASK

One of technologies offering a proofreading system is Microsoft Word program. This is a virtual writing sheet operated in Windows Operating System (OS) containing a function to mark the miss-typed words or phrases, miss-used words in a sentence and warn the writer if they unconsciously produce inconsistent words and/or phrases. According to Wang (in

Kasapoglu, 2010), integrating technology for ESL/EFL students can improve their speaking, listening, reading and writing skill. Students use computer program, in this case Microsoft Word, to check their works and correct themselves if there are any errors or mistakes. In addition, “technology integration in foreign language teaching demonstrates the shift in educational paradigm from a behavioural to a constructivist learning approach”. A research survey done by Purcell et al (2013) showed that 50% of teacher surveyed admitted that technology integrated in English course improved students' writing.

Microsoft Word offers many benefits from the way they give alert to the writer on lexical errors and/or grammatical errors. Lexical errors in Microsoft Word are marked by red wavy underline as presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1 also showed the grammatical alert marked by green (in Microsoft Word 2003 below) and blue underline (in Microsoft Word 2007 above). Students may use the proofing (underline alert) to build their awareness and reinforce them to struggle finding proper words, phrases and/or sentences in English writing task. The integration also brings a cognitive construction that affects students' skill development (Kasapoglu, 2010). This is happened when students write in English, find errors indicated by Microsoft Word's proofing, and try to think deeply to get the other option replacing the former typed words, phrases and/or sentences. They are reinforced to self-correct the errors in their writing task.

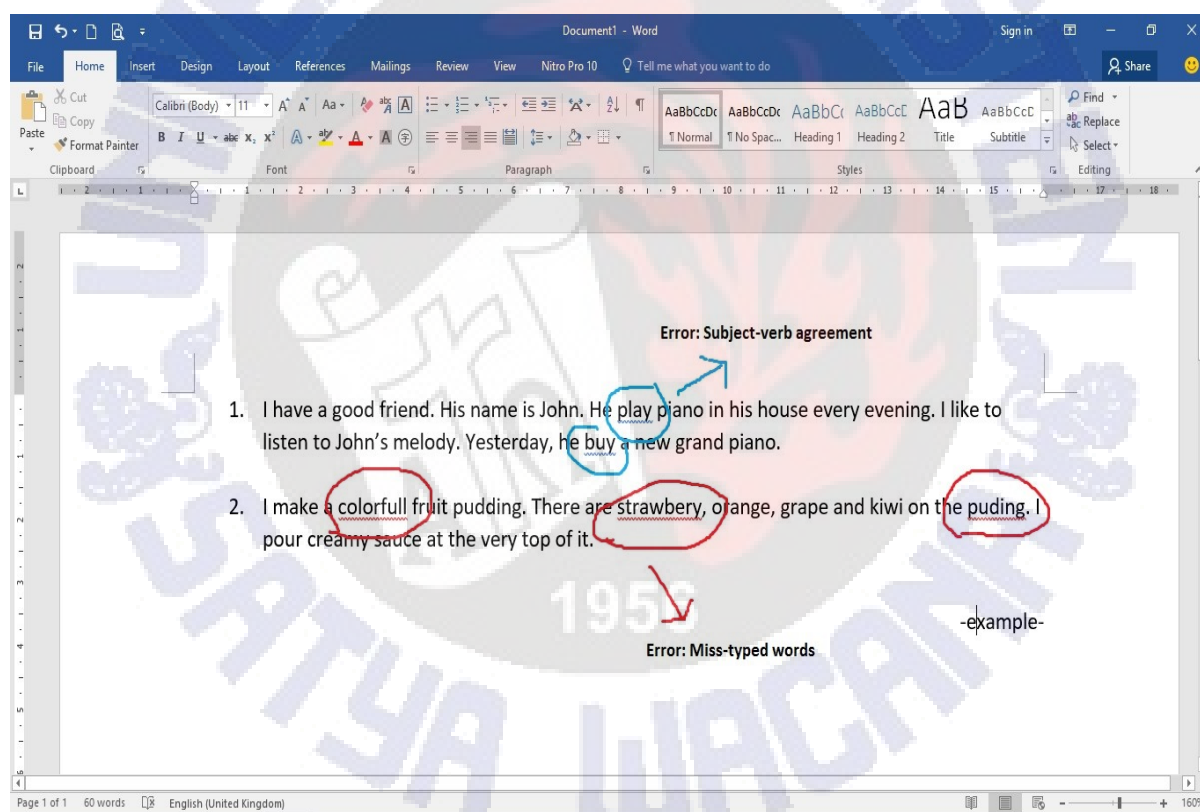


Figure 1. Example of Lexical and Grammatical Error in Microsoft Word

### STUDENTS' SELF-CORRECTION

After understanding several difficulties that students might encounter and some possibilities integrating technology, in this case Microsoft Word, students have chances to self-correct the errors in their writing task. Self-correction can be done if students apply error analysis prior to the correction. It is important to understand types of errors and some options in correcting them (Lee, 2012). Previous part of this journal has presented the difficulties or problems (errors) encountered by students. Those errors will be highlighted by Microsoft Word proofing and become students' clue to do self-correction. Students may investigate English writing feedback from the program and use the feedback to dig more information from their understanding, background knowledge and/or try to look up at supportive sources like dictionary and related websites.

According to Hedgcock & Lefkowitz's (in Lee, 2012) study, feedback that focused on linguistic matter and made student developing ideas were very useful in ESL/EFL course. Related to the developing ideas and skill, Taylor (in Serdechny, 2011) called it by learning autonomy. It means "the readiness and ability to take charge of one's learning. This readiness involves skills and attitudes which are not necessarily automatic, and which, therefore, need developing". This autonomy is encouraging because it increases motivation and speeds up students' improvement especially the autonomy is supported by an effective program. Microsoft Word proofing becomes the supportive program that makes students do efforts in self-correcting their errors.

Self-correction, as stated earlier, called by learning autonomy. This is a transition from teacher-centered to the learner/student-centered language learning. This also change the nature of conventional system where teachers spend a lot of time marking students' work into students develop their awareness and self-correct their mistakes. Teachers correction may be efficient in term of resource but it may be ineffective in term of students' progress (Serdechny, 2011). Hence, using proofing as a clue for students' self-correction in English writing task may be a good way or method to increase students' learning autonomy and develop their linguistic competence in English writing.

## **METHOD**

This research was conducted during English Language Learning course where the teacher, as a researcher, used writing task as the instrument of data collection. The participants of this research were 10 first-year college students joining English Language Learning course from Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana. They were considered as non-English department students since they were purely taking the course for the very first time and none of them come from English major.

There were three writing tasks given by the teacher. All tasks required students to write a passage containing five sentences written in English. They might write a positive, imperative and/or interrogative sentences. The first and second tasks were written in a piece of paper where the feedback was given through red-inked notes. The third writing was done by using Microsoft Word program in laptop / computer. Those writing tasks become a raw data of this research added by data collected through open-ended questionnaire. The data gathered was analysed by counting the errors of each writing task, classifying the errors and identifying students' self-correction of each errors. The result of the data analysis presented in a descriptive in accordance with students' perspectives and opinions.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***FREQUENCY OF ERRORS MADE BY STUDENTS IN ENGLISH WRITING***

Based on the data gathered through three writing tasks, students showed some differences in term of frequency of errors in their tasks. Some of them did errors so frequently while the other might made it at times. In writing 1, student 1 (S1), S4 and S6 made 5 errors while S2 and S8 only did it twice. S7, S9, S10 make the same amount of errors, 4 times in a session. S3 made three errors in a session. The most frequent errors (6 errors) made by S3. In average, students made four mistakes in writing 1. Figure 2 showed the frequency of students' errors in writing 1.

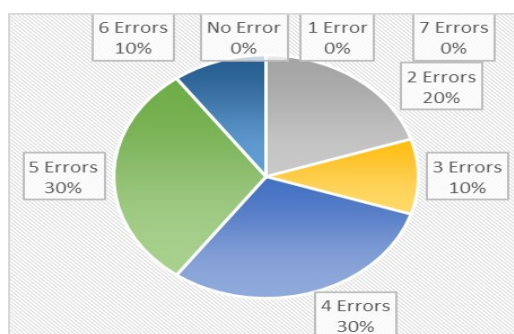


Figure 2. The Frequency of Students' Error in Writing Task 1.

In writing 2, most of the students showed improvement while some of them still did errors in the same amount even more than before. There were 4 students (S1, S2, S3, and S8) which only made 1 error in this session. They, previously, made more than two errors. S4 and S6 made 5 errors. That amount was the same as what they did in writing 1. It means no improvement for S4 and S6. S5, S7 and S10 made four errors. The most frequent errors in this session made by S6 whose total errors was up to 7. S9 show a terrible degradation compare to the previous writing task. In average, students made three mistakes in writing 2. Figure 3 showed the frequency of errors made by students in writing 2.

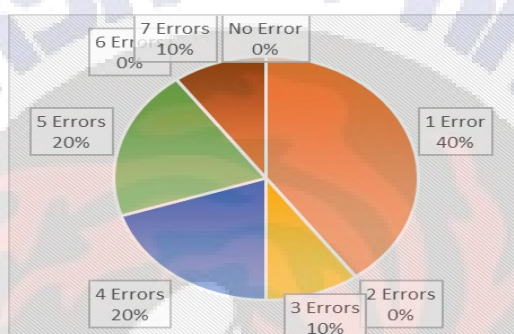


Figure 3. The Frequency of Students' Error in Writing Task 2.

In Writing 3, students stated to use computer or laptop to help them in finishing writing task. They used Microsoft Word spread sheet as the medium of their writing. In this session, almost all students showed improvement and none of them decreased the amount of errors. Total of 7 students only made one mistakes in English writing. There was one student making two errors while the other one made no error at all. In this session, the average number of mistakes made by students was only one error. Figure 4 showed the frequency of students' errors in writing 3.

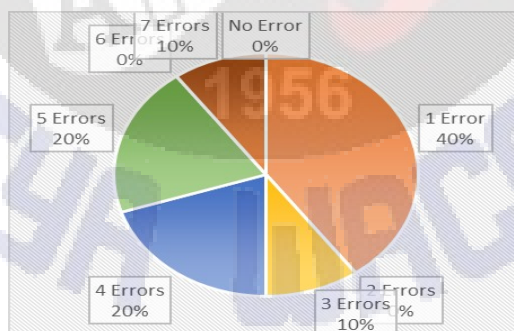


Figure 4. The Frequency of Students' Error in Writing Task 3.

Based on the data showing the frequency of errors in every writing tasks, there were tendencies that students still made errors in conventional (paper-based) English writing. Students showed only little improvement between writing 1 and writing 2 compare to the improvement between writing 2 and writing 3. This condition clarifies that teachers' feedback help students correcting their errors. However, by teacher written feedback, students only learn by memorizing some formula or concept in English writing to anticipate future problems. Students did not internalize the concept since they were not finding the correct answer by digging their own understanding, background knowledge and by referencing to other supporting websites. Two (20%) students said that writing on a piece of paper was terrible although eight students (80%) said differently. Writing tasks done on a piece of paper accompanied by dictionary, for those eight people, did not decrease their motivation. Nonetheless, all of them (100%) expressed much enjoyment in writing through Microsoft Word program.

## STUDENTS' WRITING ERRORS AND SELF-CORRECTION

There were some categories in students' writing errors derived from the data. Table 1, below, presented some categories of error students made in writing 1 until writing 3.

Table 1. Categories of Students' English Writing Error

No.	Student	Errors in			Categories of Error
		Writing 1	Writing 2	Writing 3	
1	S1	s-v agree, reverse, tense, vocab, concept	reverse	reverse	1. Subject – Verb Agreement 13x
2	S2	s-v agree, concept	tense	<i>to be</i>	2. Reversed Word(s) 9x
3	S3	s-v agree, <b>article</b>	<u>incomplete</u>	<i>to be</i>	3. Use of Tense 3x
4	S4	s-v agree, <i>modal</i> , <i>prep</i>	verb, adj	s-v agree	4. Misused Vocabulary/Verb 10x
5	S5	concept, <i>prep</i>	s-v agree, verb, tense, concept	s-v agree	5. Improper Article 2x
6	S6	s-v agree, reverse, <u>incomplete</u> , <b>article</b>	s-v agree, reverse, vocab	-	6. False Concept 9x
7	S7	concept, <b>miswrite</b>	concept, <i>prep</i> , vocab	reverse	7. Misused Preposition 4x
8	S8	reverse, vocab	vocab, verb	s-v agree	8. Misused To Be / Aux. 3x
9	S9	<i>verb</i> , concept	s-v agree, concept, reverse	verb	9. Miswrite Word(s) 1x
10	S10	s-v agree, concept	reverse, s-v agree	<i>prep</i>	10. Incomplete Word(s) 2x

Table 1 showed that, in English writing task conducted in this research, there were 10 categories of errors made by students. The most common errors made in English writing was Subject-Verb Agreement. Students tend to be careless in writing verb following the subject. They did not put their attention that verbs need to adjusted based on the subject. Here is some example of students' errors for Subject-Verb Agreement.

S2: *My mother cooking ...*

S3: *He play football ... ; She watch scary movie ...*

S9: *... I and Lisa wants to ...*

The other common errors in English writing was Misused of Vocabulary. Some students used vocabulary as what they knew. One student wrote 'clouded weather' instead of 'cloudy'. The other used 'bibliography' in referring to 'library'. 'Late' that supposed to be used to explain activities done overnight changed by 'lateness'. They did not notice that those dictions are incorrect. Most of the mistakes happened in writing 1 and writing 2.

Besides, students also made errors in reversion and pouring their concept into writing. They were interfered by structure in Bahasa Indonesia so when they were demanded to write noun-adjective phrase, they did wrong. For instance, they

wrote 'rental motor' instead of 'motor rent(al)', 'umbrella soaked' for 'soaked umbrella', 'holiday Easter' instead of 'Easter holiday', 'group study' for 'study group', and some more. They said that they cannot notice the mistake while they were writing the sentences. They felt that writing in English was difficult and some of them stated that opening dictionary consumed much time. All of them admitted that Microsoft Word's proofing helped them to quickly aware of the errors and find them out to correct.

In their third writing task, they did less mistakes since they have developed their alert when they found one or more words marked by red underline, they quickly thought for the other word option. The condition was pretty similar when the found words, phrases and/or sentences marked by blue/green underling, they read the again to find where is the improper grammar or composition. In this session, students only faced less than five categories of error. By looking at the analysed data, the result of this research in accordance with Nomass' research that Microsoft Word's proofing as a media benefits students to be aware of errors and motivate them to struggle with errors by self-correcting them to get the best English writing.

## CONCLUSION

By understanding the background, theoretical review and analysed data, there are some points as the conclusion. English writing was not an easy thing to do for ESL/EFL learners especially those who were considered as non-English department students. There were some difficulties leading to errors encountered by students in English writing tasks such as: subject - verb agreement, reversed word(s), use of tense, misused vocabulary/verb, improper article, false concept, misused preposition, misused to be / aux., miswrite word(s) and incomplete word(s). Subject - verb agreement, reversed word(s) and misused vocabulary/verb were the common mistake occurred in English writing tasks. Students might cope with those difficulties if there is a helping media i.e. Microsoft Word program. Microsoft Word provides a proofing system that makes students aware of mistakes and motivate them in self-correcting them to produce a good quality of writing. Thus, bringing Microsoft Word's proofing into English writing task can be an alternative to enhance students' self-correction skill although teachers still have a role to play in guiding them to have that positive habit.

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Terakhir Diperbaharui pada Jumat, 10 Februari 2017 03:39

