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Errors in Writing Made by German Language Students and Suggested Solutions

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Abstract. This qualitative descriptive study aims to describe student errors in German writing and to propose solutions. The data was collected from the essays of 28 German students from the 2018 class. The results of data analysis showed that student errors in German writing varied, including 1) grammatical/structural errors in German sentences, 2) errors in conjugating German verbs that do not match the subject, 3) errors in word choices, 4) errors in prepositions, and 5) errors in the arrangement of words if there are conjunctions in the sentence. Meanwhile, the suggested solutions to these problems include the use of clustering or associograms while teaching and the development of practice materials for German writing.

Keywords: *Errors in Writing, German, Solution*

¹ <https://ojs.unm.ac.id/eralingua>



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INTRODUCTION

German is one of the foreign languages that Indonesians are interested in. German language is taught at high schools and universities. The objective of teaching German is for students to gain a broad knowledge of the language. This shows that by using language, a person can communicate their ideas, thoughts, feelings and information.

In language learning, the first and second languages may be used. Two languages that are used interchangeably can lead to errors, which are usually called interference, defined as the influence of the first language on the language a person is learning (Alizuddin, N. A., & Razali, J. R. 2021; Pabumbun, A. R., & Dalle, A. ,2019; Mantasiah R, et al, 2019; Rahmayana et al, 2018, Aditya, R., 2017; Malik, A. R., & Fatimah, S. 2017). Linguistic errors are inherent in every use of both oral and written language. Whether adults who have mastered the language or children and foreigners who are learning a language can make errors when using it.

Several factors can contribute to errors, such as limited knowledge of the language being learned, lack of experience in using the language as well as differences in language and cultural backgrounds. German and Indonesian, for example, are noncognate which causes many differences between the two, especially in morphology, syntax, semantics and grammar/structure (Mantasiah R, et al, 2021; Parera, 1997; Agustina, T., & Oktavia, W., 2019; Hasmawati et al, 2020).

Writing in Indonesian have been taught since kindergarten until college, starting from learning to write alphabets, words, sentences, paragraphs and even essays. However, some students learn German in high school and there are even schools that do not teach German. Hence, some students start to learn German when they are enrolled in the German language education department at university.

In teaching German, there are four skills, namely *Leseverstehen* (reading), *Schreibfertigkeit* (writing), *Hörverstehen* (listening), and *Sprechfertigkeit* (speaking), which are taught in an integrated and interrelated manner. Based on the observations of the researcher who has taught *Schreibfertigkeit* (writing), students' German writing skills are still lacking, and most students still have poor writing skills, lower than the expected standards.

These shortcomings can be seen in basic aspects, such as vocabulary range, sentence patterns, German sentence structures, which are considered difficult to learn because it is in sharp contrast to the Indonesian sentence structures, word choices according to the context, spelling and etc (Li, J., & Mak, L., 2022; Ihsan, I., & Al-Ilmul, S. F., 2021; Mantasiah, R., et al, 2020; Vyatkina, N., et al 2015).

One of the factors that may cause these shortcomings is most likely the small amount of time the curriculum allocates for German courses, resulting in students' receiving less individual guidance since the number of students in one class is too large. It is also possible that the teaching method is not appropriate for the class since it is comprised of students who have differences in knowledge of German. This makes it difficult for the teachers to choose the right teaching method for the whole class.

The Nature of Writing

Writing is fundamental in everyday life. Writing is one of the most important and challenging skills to develop because it involves coordination and various processes as well as uses a number of language and cognitive skills (Kim, Y.-S. G., et al; 2021; Kim, Y.-S. G., & Graham, S. 2021).

Writing is not merely preserving a language with graphic symbols, but it is a language skill used to communicate indirectly with other people. Writing is a communicative activity that aims to convey the author's messages or ideas to his/her readers. Writing is comprised of thinking, compiling, and revising and produces a written product. In writing, people should consider what and why they want to write (Sumarti, S., & Widodo, P, 2020; Indrilla, N., & Ciptaningrum, D. S., 2018).

Done to express and communicate thoughts and feelings to others, writing is a productive and expressive language skill that is acquired through systematic practice. The entire expression of thoughts that are poured into a piece of writing is the result of writing experience (Nur, M. et al 2021; Syaputra, A. F., et al, 2021; Angreany, F., & Saud, S., 2017). Writing is neither easy nor difficult. If a person can produce correct written language, sequential and straight speech as well as clear ideas, that person is considered good at writing. However, many people find it difficult to arrange words and sentences when expressing their feelings and thoughts in a written form. This shows that writing is not an easy thing to do.

Writing is a difficult skill, particularly in German, which is not the students' first language. Writing is difficult because it requires mental awareness of how to combine sentences and their constituents. Because of the difficulty of writing, many people write poorly not only in the language they are learning, but also in their own mother tongue.

As is the case with other subjects, for examples mathematics and chemistry, writing lessons are not favored by many students. In addition to its complexity, writing is assumed to not benefit them in their social interactions. They think despite their weak German writing skills and no intention to improve them, they still can communicate. Besides, students dislike writing activities because in communicative language teaching, they only prioritize speaking and listening skills. Also, writing is a self-taught skill.

Quite simply, the principles of writing in German are not much different from those of writing in Indonesian. However, because German has dissimilar characteristics from Indonesian, there are things that are allowed in Indonesian, but not in German, and vice versa. They interfere with Indonesian sentence patterns into German sentence writing.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the observation, there were some writing errors made by the students which are stated as follow.

Grammatical errors

Grammatical error is error regarding sentence structure in German occurred due to interference of Indonesian structure, the native language of the students. It means that they wrote something in German while its sentences were composed of Indonesian sentence pattern. This type of error was done by the beginner German learners who have never learned it during their senior high school period. For examples:

Are you a teacher? / *Was ist ein Lehrer?*
What is your name? / *Wer heissen Sie ?*

In German's sentence, there are two ways to make interrogative sentence which are using question words (*ergaenzung fragen*) such as *wo* (where), *was* (what), *wann* (when), *warum* (why), *wielange* (how long), *woher* (from where), and *wohin* (to where), and not using question word (*entscheidung fragen*). The sentence's structure is started with verb, just like in the first example, and the correct sentence is: *Sind Sie ein Lehrer?* Based on the explanation, the correct sentence is:

Sind Sie ein Lehrer?
Wo waren Sie gestern?
Wie heissen Sie?

The other type of errors which frequently occurred were the error in writing perfect and *präteritum* sentence, known as sentence to state past events. For examples:

Yesterday I bought a book / *Gestern ich kaufe ein Buch*
Last week I went to Bali / *Letzte Woche ich gehe nach Bali*
Last year I took my final test / *Letztes Jahr ich mache meine Abschlusspruefung.*

From the examples above, it can be seen that the students created German sentences following Indonesian pattern. In German, sentences with past tense can be realized in two forms which are perfect and *präteritum* sentence. The formula of perfect sentence is as follow:

Subject + auxiliary verb's conjugation of *haben* or *sein* + verb (partizip perfect)

Subject + conjugation of verb (*präteritum* o form +Object)

Based on the rules above, the correct sentences are

Gestern habe ich ein Buch gekauft.
Letzte Woche bin ich nach Bali gefahren
Letztes Jahr machte ich meine Abschlusspruefung

The errors mentioned before occurred since the students transfered Indonesian pattern rule in writing German sentences.

Conjugation errors

Conjugation errors occur due to writing/changing verb based on the following or preceding Subject. This kind of errors happens not as frequent as grammatical error. Conjugation errors occur mainly in conjugating irregular/strong verb (*Unregelmäßige Verben*). As the name suggests, there is not any general rule in this conjugation, so the students have to memorize and understand it. Some examples of incorrect conjugation:

When are you going to leave for Jakarta? *Wann fahrest/ fliegst du nach Jakarta?*

Anti ate a slice of bread / *Anti esst ein Stück Brot.*

Every morning my father reads a newspaper / *Morgens mein Vater liest Zeitung.*

The following examples of errors occur due to the students have to follow basic rule in conjugating regular verb (*regelmäßige Verben*) as stated below.

³ Ich : stamm + e

Du : stamm + t/est

Er/sie/es : stamm + t/et

Wir : stamm + en

Ihr : stamm + t

Sie : stamm + en

Conjugation of irregular verb does not follow the rule above, but there is a vocal change in conjugation of second person singular subject (du) and third person singular subject (er, sie, es), such as:

lesen becomes : du *liest* , er/sie/es *liest*

Essen becomes : du *isst*, er/sie/es *isst*

Fahren becomes : du *fährst* , er/sie/es *fährt*

Helfen menjadi : du *hilfst*, er/sie/es *hilft*

Based on those rules, the correct sentences are

Wann fährst du nach Jakarta

Anti isst ein Stück Brot

Morgens liest mein Vater eine Zeitung

Errors in word choices

Errors in word choices may happen in German writing since almost every word has more than one meaning. Moreover, there are some Indonesian words that have more than one equivalent word in German. Here are some examples:

Der Reis in German has 3 meanings which are paddy, rice, and cooked rice (in Indonesian they are *padi*, *beras*, and *nasi*).

Gehen may mean to walk, to ask, and condition.

There are some equivalent words for an Indonesian word *alat* in German, which are *der Apparat, das Geraet, and das Mittel*.

The word *pergi* in Indonesian or “to go” in English may be written as *gehen, fahren, and fliegen* in German. This kind of word choices can confuse students and lead them to choose incorrect word so their sentences have inappropriate meaning. Here are some examples of students’ errors regarding word choices:

Tomorrow I am going to Jakarta / *Morgen ich gehe nach Jakarta*

The clock has stopped / *Der Stunde geht nicht*

The lesson is taking place for one hour/ *Der Unterricht dauert eine Uhr.*

This error occurred since the word “go” or “pergi” in Indonesian may mean *gehen, fahren, and fliegen*. However, it needs to be understood that the word *gehen* is used for a person who walks, *fahren* is used for a person who uses certain land or marine vehicle, while *fliegen* is used for a person who travels with plane. So, the correct sentences should be: *Morgen fahre /fliege ich nach Jakarta,*

The Indonesian word “jam” has two meanings in German: *Uhr dan Stunde*. The word *Uhr* tells time. For example: “What time is it?” Meanwhile, the word *Stunde* is used to tell duration. For example: “How long is the lesson?” Thus, the correct sentences should be:

Die Uhr ist kaput? Die Uhr geht nicht

Der Unterricht dauert ein Stunde.

Errors in prepositions

In German, prepositions have different purposes depending on the cases they belong to. For instance, there are accusative, dative, and genitive prepositions, but there are some prepositions that belong to dative and accusative cases. Besides, some prepositions have the same meanings. For instance,

both *aus* and *von* mean “from”,

while *auf* and *über* mean “on”.

There are some students who still made errors in using these prepositions. For examples,

Where are you from?

Where were you from?

(*wo von kommen Sie?*)

I am from Makassar.

(*Ich komme von Makassar*)

Where were you from yesterday?

(*wo von sind Sie gestern?*)

Yesterday I went to the supermarket.

(gestern ich bin im Supermarket)

I put the book on the table.

(ich lege das Buch über dem Tisch)

The plane flew over the city.

(Das Flugzeug fliegt auf der Stadt)

The difference in the use of these two types of prepositions which have the same meaning needs to be noted, where *von* means coming from somewhere, while *aus* is used to express if someone is going out, for example out of the house. Based on the explanation above, the correct sentences should be:

Woher kommen Sie?

Ich komme aus Makassar

Wo waren Sie gestern? Ich war in Supermarket

On the other hand, the preposition *über* is used to indicate that something is above something else, while *auf* is used to show that something is on something else. The correct sentences should be

Ich lege das Buch auf dem Tisch

Das Flugzeug fliegt über die Stadt

Errors in word order if there is a conjunction in the sentence

In German, there are several conjunctions, such as *und*, *oder*, *sondern*, *denn*, *aber*, *weil*, *deshalb*, *damit*, etc.

The use of these conjunctions needs to be considered because they cause changes of word order in a sentence (inversion). For examples: *weil*, *deshalb*, *damit*, etc. On the other hand, other conjunctions, such as *und*, *aber*, *oder*, *denn* and *sondern* do not change word order in a sentence. Many students made errors when using the conjunctions that require changes in word order. For instance,

Ich gehe nicht in die Schule, weil ich bin krank.

(I didn't go to school because I was sick.)

Ich muß viele Bücher kaufen, deshalb ich brauche si viel Geld

Ich lerne zu viel, damit ich in der Prüfung bestehen kann.

The correct sentences should be

Ich gehe nicht in die Schule, weil ich krank bin

Ich gehe nicht in die Schule denn ich bin krank

Ich muß viele Bücher kaufen deshalb brauche ich viel Geld

Ich lerne zu viel, damit ich in der Prüfung bestehen kann

Above are only a few examples of errors students made in writing German sentences. Most importantly, however, solutions should be sought to minimize

errors. Therefore, the following are some suggested solutions in order to reduce difficulty and errors among students in writing.

Teaching with clustering technique

It is clear that the errors made by students in writing are caused not only by the students' internal factors, but also perhaps by their teachers' method in teaching (i.e., the method used by the teachers is not appropriate). Research has shown that clustering technique is effective in producing better quality writing than other teaching techniques.

Clustering technique, which is applied in the pre-writing stage, is categorized as an integrative method. This stage aims to help students find inspiration by brainstorming ideas. Brainstorming is a method of collecting ideas, expressed by vocabulary related to the topic of the essay. Clustering technique as associagrams. He further explained that associagrams are an associative writing process that can activate a concept of cognitive structures that have been present during the learner's long-term activity. This suggests that with associagrams, a learner can make connections between existing knowledge and topics for writing.

Clustering is also expression of ideas in a structured way, meaning that it can give some inspiration during thinking process and joining the base of word with some ideas in the form of a word or a group of phrases. This technique can be used to teach how to produce a complete text, for example to write a letter. The other benefit of this technique in teaching writing is making it possible for the learners to select word or expression correctly based on the topic learned before. Besides, clustering technique gives the teacher a chance to teach new vocabularies. Therefore, it can be concluded that the use of clustering technique to teach writing can help learners practice their introductory concepts which have been known before so that they become more independent through brainstorming and their knowledge will develop, enabling them to creatively write essays with communicative words and sentence structures.

Developing practice materials (Übungsmaterialien)

Practice material development is expected to give the learners a chance to develop their creativity in writing. Thus, the slogan "*Schreiben macht Spaß nicht nur für Lehrenden, sondern auch für Lernenden*" can be realized. Here are some examples of this practice: The teacher gives students practice paper in which there are three or four photos/pictures. The students choose one of those pictures. To provide them with some clues, the teacher gives some questions related to the picture. *Zum Beispiel; wie alt ist sie, lebt sie allein, wo arbeitet sie, in welchem Land wohnt die Person? Auf dem Land oder in der Stadt?* Students should be given an explanation that the questions are given to help them sort ideas of which should be written in the complete essays. However, it is important to note that imagination and creativity need to be included. This kind of practice can be seen on practices and test of ZDaF (*Zertifikat Deutsch als Fremdsprache*).

CONCLUSION

4 Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that several types of errors occurred in German writing, including 1) grammatical/structural errors, caused by the influence of Indonesian structures; 2) errors in conjugating German verbs that do not match the subject; 3) errors in word choices, particularly the use of inappropriate words. In German there are words that have more than one meaning and vice versa and there are several words in German that have similar meaning in Indonesian; 4) errors in the use of prepositions. In German there are several prepositions, used depending on the case in which it is modified; and 5) errors in word order if there is a connecting word in the sentence. Moreover, it is important to pay attention to the use of conjunctions in German because there are some conjunctions that can change word order (inversion). These problems can be overcome by incorporating clustering or association techniques while teaching and by developing practice materials for German writing practices.

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