

An Error Analysis on Students' Business Letter Writing

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ABSTRACT

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Writing a business letter is a fundamental skill in the professional world, yet it presents various difficulties that can challenge even experienced writers. This research aims to analyze the common errors found in students' business letter writing, categorize them, explore their possible causes, and suggest educational approaches to address these issues. This research used a descriptive quantitative approach. To achieve these objectives, frequencies, percentages and means of errors were calculated and tabulated. The data gathered by observation and documentation, where the documentation was writing assignment assigned by the lecturer. The result of research showed that students' error in writing business letter were 55 errors. First, there were 29 errors in omission which were 52,7% of total errors. Second, there were 19 errors in misinformation which were 34,5% of total errors. Third, there were 6 error in addition which were 11% of total errors. There were 1 error in misordering which were 1,8% of total errors. Furthermore, the dominant errors in this research was omission which were 52,7% of total errors. In addition, brainstorming, drafting, peer review, and revising should be done as this improves error awareness and overall quality. Moreover, the teachers can assist the learners so that they will be able to draft business letters that are grammatically correct and contextually suitable.

Keywords : Writing, Error analysis, Business Letter

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INTRODUCTION

Business English is a specialized branch of the English language used in professional and corporate context. It plays a crucial role in effective written communications, presentations, negotiations, and international business communication. Johan (2014) explained that Business English is a variant of international English, particularly associated with global trade. It falls under the category of English for Specific Purposes and is considered a specialized area within English language learning and instruction. One of the key components of a Business English course is the writing of business letters. A business letter refers to any type of

formal correspondence used in a professional setting. Writing, as one of the four essential language skills, is a fundamental competency that second language learners need to develop when studying English is writing.

According to Carter, et al (2002: 269) in Apsari (2017), writing is essential both for career and personal life, as others often evaluate our thinking skills based on what we write and how we express it. For professionals, the ability to write business letters in English is a crucial skill; however, it often presents challenges, particularly for non-native English speakers. Clarity, professionalism, and conformity to established formats are necessary for effective business correspondence. Nevertheless, many individuals struggle with aspects such as terminology, tone, syntax, and cultural differences, which can lead to miscommunication and misunderstandings.

Mastering grammar and sentence structure is one of the main challenges in writing business letters in English. Errors like incorrect verb tenses and improper punctuation can readability and reduce the overall clarity of the message. While business letters are expected to maintain a professional tone, they should not be excessively formal or impersonal. An introduction, body, and conclusion are typically part of a well-structured business letter. However, many writers struggle to organize their ideas coherently, resulting in disjointed content that lacks logical flow. Such incoherence can lead to confusion and diminish the effectiveness of the communication. Word choice also plays a crucial role in writing for business. Writers sometimes use colloquial expressions or overly technical jargon that may not suit the context. It should be noted that in writing business letters should be clear, concise, and void of slang and jargon (Gilling, 2013).

Given these common issues, analyzing the types of errors made in business letter writing can provide valuable insights for both learners and educators. Error analysis is an activity aimed at identifying and understanding the errors found in speaking and writing. Richards et.al (1985:96) state that error analysis is the study of errors made by second and foreign language learners. It can be conducted to (a) assess a learner's proficiency in a language, (b) understand how language learning takes place, and (c) identify common difficulties in language learning, as an aid in teaching or the preparation of teaching materials. This definition highlights the important functions of error analysis in the context of language learning and instruction.

In the concept of error analysis (EA), it is important to distinguish between two related yet distinct concepts: *error* and *mistake*. James (1998: 78) explained that a *mistake* is irregular fault learners can recognize and correct themselves. These

mistakes can increase under the condition of stress, indecision and fatigue. In contrast, an *error* occurs when the learner lacks awareness or understanding of the correct language form—there is no intention to commit one. (James: 1998). Errors are produced by learners who do not yet fully grasp the rules of the language system.

Building on this distinction, errors can be analyzed at a more detailed level using what is known as the surface strategy taxonomy. This classification system focuses on the way a learner's incorrect utterance deviates from the intended or target form. As Brown suggests, errors can be broadly categorized into four types: as errors of addition, omission, substitution, and ordering, following standard mathematical categories. The surface strategy taxonomy is a classification system based on the ways in which the learner's erroneous version is different from the presumed target version (James in Fauziati 20019). Under this category, error can be classified into four types: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering (James: 1998). Omission errors involve the absence of an item that must appear in a well-formed utterance. Addition errors are characterized by the presence of an item, which should not otherwise appear in a well-formed utterance. Misformation refers to the use of an incorrect form of a structure or morpheme, while misordering pertains to the incorrect arrangement of a morpheme or words within an utterance. These categories help researchers and educators better understand the specific difficulties learners face in acquiring the target language.

Based on the students worksheet, the researcher found some several probems in students' writing. First, there was a student error in omission. We can see on the following picture:

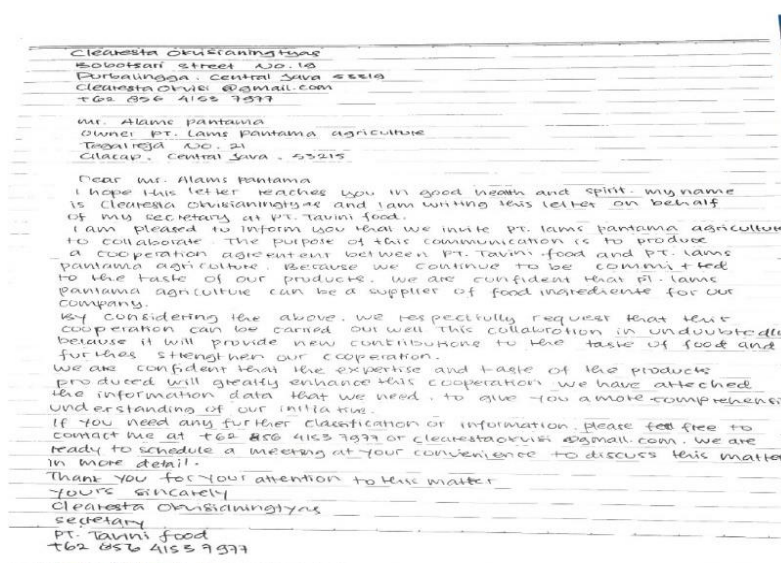


Figure 1. Example of Students' Error in Omission

Based on the worksheet from Clearesta Okvisianingtias, we can analyze that the sentence

"We have *atteched* the information" is incorrect. The correct sentence is "We have *attached* the information". "We need to give you a more *comprehensiv* understanding of our initiative" is incorrect. The correct sentence is "We need to give you a more *comprehensive* understanding of our initiative".

Second, there were some students' errors in writing business letter especially in format business letter. We can see that in the following sentence:

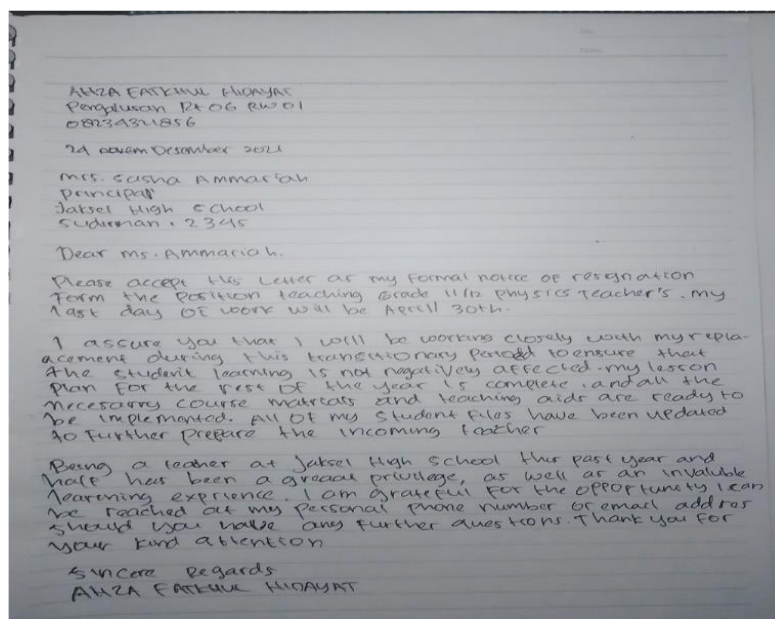


Figure 2. Example of students error in formating business letter

Based on the students' worksheet above, we recognize that the student utilized the incorrect format while writing the English date. He also didn't mention his email address and his position on his company.

Furthermore, several previous studies have investigated issues related to errors in writing English business letters. The first study conducted by Nila, Shafa Firda (2017) in the article "Problems in writing English Business Letter: Error and Factors" This study aimed to identify the types of error found in English business letter writing and to explore the underlying factors contributing to these errors. The findings revealed four classifications of errors: morphological, lexical, syntactic, and mechanical. Additionally, the study identified three major factors contributing the errors: language transfer, overgeneralization, and context of learning.

Another relevant study was carried out by Dahler and Marlinawati (2014) in the article “A Study on the writing English Business letter difficulties at the first year students’ accounting department of SMKN 1 Bandar Seikijang”. The Purpose of this research was to determine the specific difficulties in writing the English business letter encountered by the first year students accounting department of SMKN 1 Bandar Seikijang. The result showed that a significant portion of the students expressed negative attitudes toward their ability to write business letters, with 71.73% of them reporting difficulties. These findings highlight the challenges faced by vocational students in mastering the conventions of professional writing in a second language.

The third relevant study was conducted by Antonio and Briones (2022), entitled “Linguistic Errors and Skill-Competency of Students in Writing Business Letters. The study examined the linguistics errors and skill competency in Business Letter Writing of student-leaders in College of Education in University of Nueva Caceres. The findings indicated that letter requests were the most commonly submitted type of business letter. The study also revealed that students frequently committed errors particularly in the punctuations, sentence structures, and word choice. These issues suggest a need for students to learn and relearn the key principles related to the format and content of effective business letter writing.

Drawing upon the insights from the studies discussed above, the present research aims to analyze the common errors found in students’ business letter writing, classify these errors, explore their potential causes, and propose educational approaches to address these issues. Accordingly, the researcher adopts a descriptive approach under the title: “An Error Analysis on Students’ Business Letter Writing”.

METHOD

Research Design

In conducting the research, the researcher used descriptive quantitative research. Quantitative research is an approach for testing objective theories by examining the relationship variables (Cresswell, 2014). These variables, in turn, can be measured, typically on instruments, so that numbered data can be analysed by using statistical procedures (Creswell & John, 2014). Arikunto (2006, p. 12) also stated that a quantitative approach is an approach that demands to use the numeric, begin from the collection of the data, interpretation of data, presentation of the data and also result.

The data was gathered through observation and documentation, with the documentation consisting of writing assignments assigned by the lecturer. The data

was taken from students' formative assessments, selected randomly (n=50). After that, the researcher analyzed of error in omission, mis-formation, addition, and mis-ordering in from worksheet business letter of students in by using descriptive design. The data of error analysis were analyzed based on target modification taxonomy purposed by James (1998), it focused in error analysis on the omission, addition, mis-formation, and mis-ordering. Referring to the objective of the research, the descriptive method is considered appropriate since it is a method used to describe or analyze the result of the study but not used for making broader conclusions (Sugiyono, 2005) as cited in (Apsari, 2017, p.53).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research aims to analyze the common errors found in students' business letter writing, categorize them, explore their possible causes, and suggest pedagogical interventions to address these issues. The result of this study shows:

1. *Description of the Data*

The research identified patterns based on the data collected from the raters. Out of 30 students' documents, 55 instances of errors were detected and classified into four categories: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. These classifications are in line with the surface strategy taxonomy proposed by James (1998). The following table showed the total number of the students' error:

Table 1. The total Number of Students' Error

Total Number of the Students	Total Number of the Errors
30	55

The table above shows that there are 55 errors made by the students of Madyathika Polytechnic. The researcher analyzed 4 errors in their writing. They were omission, addition, misformation, and misordering.

These documents were checked by 2 raters, calculation of 2 raters can be viewed on the table below:

Table 2. Students' error in writing business letter

No	Students	Omission	Addition	Misformation	Misordering	Total
1	Sample 1	0	1	1,5	0	2,5
2	Sample 2	3	0	2	0	5
3	Sample 3	5	1,5	2	0	8,5
4	Sample 4	2	0	0	0	2
5	Sample 5	0	0	1	0	1
6	Sample 6	1	0	1	0	2

7	Sample 7	1	0	0	0	1
8	Sample 8	0	0	1,5	0	1,5
9	Sample 9	0	0	0	1	1
10	Sample 10	1	0	0	0	1
11	Sample 11	2	0	1	0	3
12	Sample 12	0	0	1	0	1
13	Sample 13	1	0	1	0	2
14	Sample 14	0	1,5	0	0	1,5
15	Sample 15	1	0	2	0	3
16	Sample 16	1	0	2	0	3
17	Sample 17	2	0	0	0	2
18	Sample 18	1	0	0	0	1
19	Sample 19	0	1	0	0	1
20	Sample 20	0	0	1	0	1
21	Sample 21	1	0	0	0	1
22	Sample 22	1	0	0	0	1
23	Sample 23	1	0	0	0	1
24	Sample 24	1	0	0	0	1
25	Sample 25	0	0	1	0	1
26	Sample 26	1	0	0	0	1
27	Sample 27	1	1	0	0	2
28	Sample 28	1	0	0	0	1
29	Sample 29	1	0	0	0	1
30	Sample 30	0	0	1	0	1
	Total	29	6	19	1	55
	Percentage of error	52,7	11	34,5	1,8	100

These figure indicate that omission was the most prevalent type of error, suggesting a significant lack of grammatical and lexical precision among the students.

2. Analysis of the Errors

In this section, the researcher analyzed the each error of the students' writing

a. Omission Error

Omission refers to the exclusion of necessary elements in a sentence. Morphemes or words can be distinguished into two classes: content words and grammatical words. The examples of content words such as: noun, verb, adjective, and adverb. Most omissions were grammatical, such as noun and verb inflections (-s, -ed, -ing), the article (a, an, the), auxiliaries (is, will, can, may), preposition (in, on, at, etc). and spelling of root words. For instance, "We speialize in providing..." should be "We specialize in providing..."

Table 3. Example of the Students' Omission Error

No	Error	Correct Form
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We <i>spealiaz</i>e in providing cutting-edge IT solutions.. create value for <i>bot</i> organization. We have built a reputation of delivering in <i>inovative</i>, realible, and cost-effective <i>solution</i>. achieve their goals <i>though</i> our expertise to discuss this proposal further. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We <i>specialize</i> in providing cutting-edge IT solutions.... Create value for <i>both</i> organizations. We have built a reputation of delivering in <i>innovative</i>, reliable, and cost-effective <i>solutions</i>. achieve their goals <i>through</i> our expertise to discuss this proposal further.
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>wich</i> will be launched on 30th February 2025. We <i>belive</i> that ... We would like to propose a strategic <i>patnership</i> for the launch of Choco Brulle. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>which</i> will be launched on 30th February 2025. We <i>believe</i> that We would like to propose a strategic <i>partnership</i> for the launch of Choco Brulle.
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To answer your question, our ginger milk <i>combine</i> flexibility, affordable pricing, and outstanding service to make the ginger milk the best-selling ginger in <i>today market</i>. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To answer your question, our ginger milk <i>combines</i> flexibility, affordable pricing, and outstanding service to make the ginger milk the best-selling ginger in <i>today's market</i>.
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have <i>atteched</i> the information We need to give you a more <i>comprehensiv</i> understanding of our initiative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have <i>attached</i> the information We need to give you a more <i>comprehensive</i> understanding of our initiative
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We're happy to <i>intoduce</i> PT Victor Pandu is <i>a</i> electrical company 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We're happy to <i>introduce</i> PT Victor Pandu is <i>an</i> electrical company

Based on the example above, most of the students' omission error were related with article, spelling and verb inflections. The students tend to omit a letter on a certain word such as specialize, both, innovative, solutions, through, which, believe, partnership, combines, today's market, attached, comprehensive, introduce, an.

b. Misformation

Misformation involves the use of incorrect word forms or structures. Students frequently confused lexical items and grammatical structures, such as "businnes" for "business" and "capasity" for "capacity". Based on the analysis

of the students' document, some of the students' misinformation can be viewed on the table below:

Table 4. Example of Students' Misinformation

No	Error	Correct Form
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am the <i>businnes</i> development manager We have built a reputation of delivering in <i>inovative</i>, <i>realible</i>, and cost-effective <i>solution</i>. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am the <i>business</i> development manager We have built a reputation of delivering in <i>innovative</i>, <i>reliable</i>, and cost-effective <i>solutions</i>.
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am writing to you in my <i>capasity</i> as owner-manager at Sweet Fluff Bakery We have always been <i>to</i> delivering innovative and high-quality products 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I am writing to you in my <i>capacity</i> as owner-manager at Sweet Fluff Bakery We have always been <i>about</i> delivering innovative and high-quality products
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have been <i>bussines</i> partners for 5 years We have prepare <i>somethink</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We have been <i>business</i> partners for 5 years We have prepare <i>something</i>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>your cincerely</i>, goods ordered from you in the from of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Yours sincerely</i>, goods ordered from you in the from of
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> My formal notice of resignation <i>from</i> the position of teaching grade 11/12 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> My formal notice of resignation <i>form</i> the position of teaching grade 11/12

Based on the table above, it can be seen that the student tend to make misinformation error because they do not know how to write correct morpheme and structure.

c. Addition

Addition errors occur when unnecessary elements are inserted into a sentence. Typical mistakes included the use of double consonants or incorrect forms, such as "conffident" instead of "confident".

Based on the analysis of the students' document, some of the students' addition can be viewed on the table below:

Table 5. Example of Students' Addition Error

1especially with the <i>childrens</i> who play outside especially with the <i>children</i> who play outside
2	<i>Throught</i> this letter,.....	<i>Through</i> this letter,

3	I'm <i>confident</i> that our partnership could	I'm <i>confident</i> that our partnership could
4	We <i>convery</i> this order letter	We <i>convey</i> this order letter

According to the table above, the students tend to make error related with spelling, such as the word children, through, confident, and convey.

d. Misordering

Misordering is characterized by the incorrect placement of a morphemes, word or group of word in a sentence. Based on the analysis of students' misordering can be viewed on the table below:

Table 6. Example of Students' Misordering

1	We believe this collaboration can produce products that combine the essence of both brands, for example, <i>in the form perfume</i> .	We believe this collaboration can produce products that combine the essence of both brands, for example, <i>in the perfume form</i>
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According to the table, only one misordering error was noted. The sentence "in the form perfume" was supposed to be "in the perfume form", indicating confusion in English syntactic sequencing.

3. *Additional Observations:*

Further analysis revealed that students often struggled with tone and register, which are critical components in business correspondence. For example, some writings used informal expressions or greetings inappropriate for business contexts.

Moreover, there was a consistent lack of attention to the structural format of the letter, such as incorrect placement of addresses, dates, and failure to include essential components like subject lines or job titles. These errors detract from the overall professionalism and clarity of the communication.

4. *Possible Causes of These Errors*

Analyzing these issues is important if the instructor wishes to take steps to assist the students in performing better. Some reasons that can be considered include:

- a. Lack of familiarity with business writing conventions: a sizable number of students do not have the skills to compose business letters. They usually compose personal letters or academic essays.
- b. Negative transfer from students' first language (L1): students encounters problems with the formal writing's syntactic and lexical constraints.

- c. Inadequate emphasis on revising and editing processes during instruction: students apply rhetorical structures or politeness strategies from their languages which do not conform to English standards of business writing.
- d. Limited practice in using authentic business scenarios: During lessons, writing is too often regarded as the end product rather than the end result of a series of operations. As a result, learners do not receive adequate help during the drafting, revising, and editing stages, where many errors could be corrected.

5. *Educational Strategies*

Effective instructional strategies must include:

- a. Explicit teaching of business letter formats using exemplars. The instructor teaches the elements of business letters using models, genre-specific analyses, and writing exercises aimed at the specific genres.
- b. Incorporation of peer reviews to enhance editing skills. Brainstorming, drafting, and revising should be done as this improves error awareness and overall quality.
- c. Use of digital tools for real-time error correction. Differentiation of a student's L1 business writing English rhetorical structure comparison exercises can alleviate the impact of negative transfer.
- d. Contrastive analysis between L1 and English rhetorical structures. Common errors should be the focus of class reviews. Feedback of this nature should be consistent.
- e. Students can use Grammarly, Google Docs which suggests edits, and email simulators to practice real-world business writing. Use of these tools provides instantaneous feedback and fulfills instructional goals.

Additionally, scaffolding activities such as simulated email writing, mock business correspondence, and collaborative writing tasks can foster a more practical understanding of business communication norms.

CONCLUSION

The difficulties students face in writing business letters stem from a complex interplay of vocabulary, structural, and pragmatic aspects of the language. Classifying these errors is a helpful initial step in diagnosing the challenges and formulating effective teaching strategies. The teachers can assist the learners so that they will be able to draft business letters that are grammatically correct and contextually suitable. Such efforts are necessary not only from an academic perspective but also from a

practical standpoint, considering that many students still lack sufficient business communication skills that are vital in today's global market. It is hoped that this research will contribute to improving both teaching practices and student proficiency. By understanding their students' competency in constructing sentences, teachers can design a more targeted and effective instructional program for their students.

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