



Writing Compare and Contrast Essay : An Error Analysis in Punctuation
(A case study at Nasional Pasim University, Bandung)

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Abstract

Writing needs macro and micro skills (Ur, 1996). Punctuation belongs to the micro skill. Although, punctuation tends to be considered light in writing, the researcher still found that some students still made an error in placing proper punctuation to their English writing. Therefore, to obtain valid data, a study to investigate the issue needs to be conducted. This research tried to study errors in punctuation that students made in writing compare and contrast essay at Nasional Pasim University. The participants are twenty accounting students who were taking English Writing class. The study shows the largest percentage of error in punctuation mark is Comma. From total errors in punctuation, the percentage of comma remains 56 % in test 1 and 46 % in test 2. Meanwhile, Period is 51 % in first test 1 and 36% in test 2. Parentheses is 40% in test 1 and 1 % in test 2. Meanwhile, Apostrophe shows 11 % in test 1 and 15 % in test 2. Other punctuation mark places 4. 8 %. The data indicates that in writing compare and contrast essay, students tend to commit errors in propering punctuation mark to their writing. Therefore, in teaching writing, micro skills should be considered important as the macro ones by teachers. Students need more explanation on the use of punctuation, especially the use of comma, such as the explanation on transitional devices in which relates to the rules of comma before they practice to write a written product.

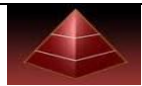
Keywords: Analysis of error, punctuation, compare and contrast essay.

1. Background

Writing is one of subjects taken by students at Nasional Pasim University. In this subject, the students are required to produce a written product. Writing itself is a complex process as Ghaith in 2002 argues that writing allows writers to explore ideas and make them visible and concrete. There are two skills that a writer should master to perform the writing process; the micro-skills and macro-skills (Ur, 1996). In terms of the macro, learners emphasize content and organization. The micro, however, demands learners to practice specific writing in the level of word or sentence, such as handwriting or typing, spelling, and punctuation.

Punctuation is one of the most important aspects of written English. It creates sense, clarity and stress in sentences as well as to structure and organize writing. In this term, the writer's message brought through his writing can be easily comprehended by the readers.

Punctuation is considered light in writing. The researcher, however, found that some students still made an error in placing proper punctuation to their English writing.



Errors in learning second language is common as stated by Norris (1983) that error is acceptable since the learners are in the process of figuring out the rules for the language they are learning. Error is also visible as Brown (2000) argues that “error is a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of native speaker, reflecting the interlanguage competence of the learner”.

Based on the issues, this study investigated errors in punctuation of the students in writing compare and contrast essay. The result of this study can be used by the researcher in setting appropriate method of teaching. As a result, students can be prevented not to make the same error.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of error

Second language learners must experience an error. It occurs since when they are learning the second language, their first language interfere the learning process. Consequently, errors are acceptable in the process of learning of second language as stated by Brown in 2000 that an error is “a noticeable deviation from adult grammar of native speaker, reflecting the interlanguage competence at the learner”.

The errors appearance has a lot to do with some aspects. Harmer (2001) argues that “error is the result of incorrect rule learning ; language has been stored in the brain incorrectly. Meanwhile, Hubbard et al (1993) believe that error is caused by lack of knowledge about the target language or by incorrect hypothesis about it, and mistake caused by temporary lapses or memory, confusion, slips of the tongue, and so on.

Norrish (1983) exposes three types and causes of errors. 1) Carelessness. It is often closely related to lack of motivation, 2) First language interference. The learners’ utterances were thought to be gradually “shaped” towards those of the language he was learning, and 3) Translation. This occurs unconsciously in the mind of the learners.

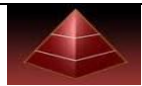
2.2 Compare and Contrast Essay.

Sorenson (2000) defines Compare and Contrast is an essay which explains ways in which two subjects are similar or different. The aim of this essay is to analyze the differences and/or the similarities of two distinct subjects. It doesn’t only focus on how the subjects are similar or different but it also requires meaningful arguments about the two subjects (ideas/things). Somehow, this type of essay can be confusing as the writer tries to balance between comparing and contrasting.

2.3 Punctuation

The guidelines of punctuation have been formulated by Webster (2001). The elaboration would be described as follows.

A. Period (.)



There are some rules in using Period. A period is used at the end of a complete sentence that is a statement, to take an example: *I have eaten my breakfast.* Besides, the period is used after an indirect question; *He asked where his suitcase was.*

It is used when you use ellipsis; an ellipsis is used to show that words have been omitted in a quotation. Example: *In the beginning God created . . . the earth. When typing an ellipsis leave one space before and after each period.* An ellipsis is also may be used to indicate a pause, for example, *Well, Mom, I . . . didn't . . . go to . . . class today.*

B. Comma(,)

Similarly, there are some rules in using Commas. They are used to separate word groups with series of three or more, as the example:

He inherited his heritage among his wife, sons, daughter, and maid.

Moreover, comma is used to separate two adjectives when the word can be inserted between them. Examples:

He is a brave, healthy man.

Mr. Jack has luxurious, extraordinary mansion.

Besides, commas are applied before or surrounding the name or title of a person directly addressed. Examples:

You : Would you mind passing that salt, Lisa?

Lisa : Yes, Ma'am.

When the dialogue has ended, a comma is used. Example: *Maria said, "I need your help."* A comma is used to distinct the day of the month from the year and after the year. Example: *I attended the meeting on January 14, 2001, in Jakarta.*

However, if any part of the date is omitted, leave out the comma. Example: *They came to Indonesia in February 2011.* Use a comma to separate the city from the state and after the state in a document. Example: *I have lived in San Francisco, California, for 20 years.* Use comma to surround degrees or titles used with names. Example: *Rodrigo Gonzalez, M.D., gave the speech this morning.*

Use a comma after phrases or more that three words that begin a sentence. If the phrase has fewer than three words, the comma is optional. Examples; *To get a good job, you should know how to speak English.*

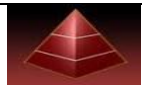
Comma can be used to separate two strong clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction—and, *or, but, for,* etc. However, the comma can be deleted if the clauses are both short. Examples: *I have cleaned the house, but he is still sleeping in his favorite couch.*

The last, comma is used in tag question; *It is raining, isn't it?* As well as in contrasting parts of a sentence. Example: *It is my money, not yours.*

C. Question mark(?)

We use question mark in three main terms. Firstly, it is used after a direct question. Examples: *Are you a student? Where have you been lately?*

Secondly, when we intend to turn a statement into a question, then question mark is used. This denotes that the speaker is assuming or hoping for a certain reply. Examples: *You promise to help me through these invoices?* and *She didn't actually quit her job?*



Thirdly, it is used in question tag. *You didn't tell him, did you? Just leave these papers on my desk, OK?*

D. Exclamation (!)

An exclamation mark usually show strong feeling, such as surprise, anger or joy. Exclamation is used when writing is rather like shouting or raising voice when speaking. Exclamations are most commonly used in writing quoted speech. There are some rules in using this punctuation mark.

Exclamation mark is used to indicate strong feelings or a raised voice in speech. E.g. She shouted at her, "Go away!"

A non-question sentence beginning with 'what' or 'how' is often an exclamation and requires an exclamation mark. Example: What a day! And What a world we live!

D. Parentheses ()

Parentheses is used to enclose words or figures that clarify as an aside. Examples: I expect five hundred dollars (\$500). He finally answered (after taking five minutes) that he didn't understand the question.

Use full parentheses to enclose numbers or letters used for listed items. Example: *We need an emergency room physician who can (1) think quickly, (2) treat patients, (3) handle complaints from the public.*

3. Research Questions

The aim of the research is to examine errors in punctuation that the students made in writing compare and contrast essay. The emerging question is:

1. What kinds of error do accounting students of Nasional Pasim University make in punctuation in compare and contrast essay?
2. What is the most frequent error in punctuation mark in writing compare and contrast essay?

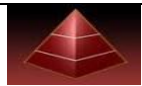
4. Methodology

This research is qualitative research applying descriptive research. Descriptive method is applied to describe a situation or event which is intended to accumulate data. With regard on this, the percentage on punctuation errors was shown in this research.

4.1 The site, participants

In qualitative inquiry, the intent is not to generalize to a population but to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2008:50), so to best understand the phenomenon of lesson study, this study selected the site and the participants purposefully. The site was Nasional Pasim University that is located in Bandung.

The participants were twenty students who are taking accounting as their major at Nasional Pasim University. As a matter of the fact, the role of the researcher in this study is non participant-observer.



4.2 Collecting data

The data were collected by delivering Test to the twenty students. The researcher conducted test to measure something in a circumstance. Two kinds of test were set in different time with different time allocation.

4.3 Analysis

The data gathered from the test were analyzed using formula:

$$P (\%) = f/n \times 100 \%$$

P =Percentage

f= Frequency of errors made

n= Number of sample which is observed

Then, after getting the percentage, the data were described and interpreted.

5. Findings and Discussion

This study collected the data by delivering two kinds of test : test 1 and test 2, to twenty students. In test 1, the participants were asked to insert some appropriate punctuations to their proper place in particular texts. This kind of test is easier than the latter test.

The texts that they should insert with proper punctuation would be shown as follows.

Text 1

“Im a 26 year old who is currently looking at wealth accumulation. Though I have a bachelors degree I am only earning a little more than two thousand dollar \$2000 a month I have to pay for insurance policies a professional diploma course my house rent, and a monthly allowance for my mother So I dont save much sometimes nothing at all. With my current financial commitments I dont think I can do any world-wide investments now but I am patiently considering it for the future One of my friends opened an account with a bank that lets you save as low as S\$200 a month and the bank handles the investment aspect That sounds good to me but I am cautious about how this can help me accumulate wealth”

The above text consists of one apostrophe, seven full stop, eight comma, and one parentheses.

Second text

“Changes in our society in recent years have weakened family life First of all todays mothers spend much less time with their children A generation ago most houses got by on Dad’s paycheck and mom stayed home Now many mothers work and their children attend an after school program stay with a neighbor or go home to an empty house. Another change is that families no longer eat together in the past Mom would be home and fix a full dinner—salad chicken roast potatoes and vegetables with homemade cake



or pie to top it off Dinner today is more likely to be take out food or Television TV dinners eaten at home, or fast food eaten out with different members of the family eating at different times Finally TV has taken the place of family conversation and togetherness Back when there were meals together talk with each other and share even of the day in a leisurely manner But now families are more likely to be looking at the TV set than talking to one another Many homes even have several TV sets which people watch in separate room Clearly modern life is a challenge to family life ”

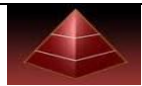
Text 2 consists of twelve full stop, thirteen comma, and one parentheses.

Table 1. Test 1 : The existence of punctuation.

No .	Test 1	Full stop	Com ma	Parenthe ses	Apostroph e
1	Text 1	7	8	1	3
2	Text 2	12	13	1	1
	Total	19	21	2	4

Table 2. Test 1 : Students' error in punctuation

No	Students ID	Full stop	Comma	Parentheses	Apostrophe
1	0102161085	9	8	0	1
2	0102171059	8	9	1	0
3	0102181025	9	7	0	1
4	0102181026	5	7	0	0
5	0102181027	4	5	0	0
6	0102181028	5	7	0	1
7	0102181029	4	6	1	0
8	0102181030	3	7	0	0
9	0102181031	5	9	0	1
10	0102181032	3	8	0	1
11	0102181033	7	5	1	1
12	0102181034	6	7	1	1
13	0102181035	5	3	0	0
14	0102181036	4	5	0	1
15	0102181037	5	6	1	0



No	Students ID	Full stop	Comma	Parentheses	Apostrophe
16	0102181038	2	5	0	1
17	0102181039	3	7	0	0
18	0102181040	5	5	0	1
19	0102181041	4	6	0	0
20	0102181043	4	4	0	1
	Total	194	245	46	32

The data shows that the most frequent error in punctuation is comma with 245 errors. In contrast, the lowest number of punctuation error is apostrophe with 32 errors. In more detail, the percentage of the errors in punctuation would be shown as follows.

Table 3. Test 1: Frequency of error in punctuation mark

No.	Punctuation Item	Frequency Error	Percentage of Error
1.	Period	194	51%
2.	Comma	245	58%
3.	Apostrophe	46	11%
4.	Perentheses	32	40%

Table 3 will be portrayed in the following diagram for more detail data.

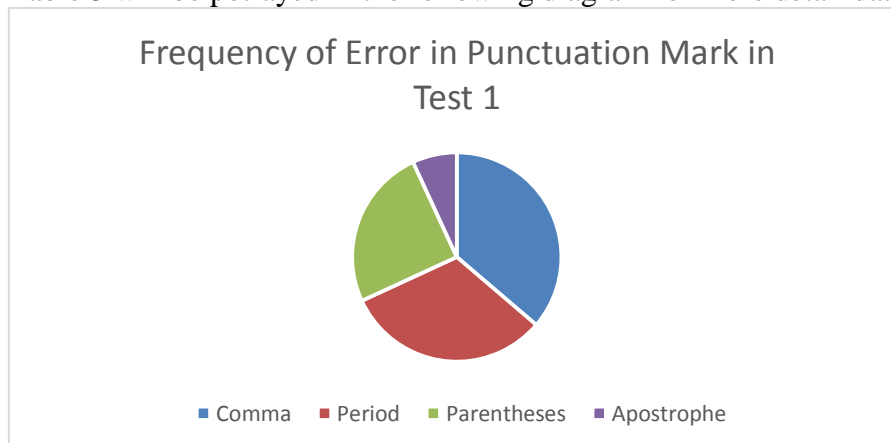
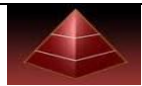


Diagram 1. Frequency of Error in Punctuation Mark in Test 1

The data shows that Comma has the highest percentage of error in punctuation mark which reach 58 %. Meanwhile, the second frequency of error is Period as 51%. Parentheses is 40% in third place and the lowest place is reached by Apostrophe, that is 11%. The result shows Comma tends to have the most frequency of error. In terms of



rules of placing Comma, Comma has more rules than others punctuation marks. Therefore, it seems to be that the cause of such errors of punctuation has a lot to do with lack of motivation of students. In order words, carelessness tends to be the cause of the error (Norris, 1983)

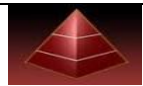
Test 2.

In this test, students were required to write a compare and contrast essay. The test was taken in their mid test. The topic of the essay is *watching film at home versus watching film in cinema*.

The frequency in punctuation mark in writing compare and contrast essay entitled *watching film at home versus watching film in cinema* will be clearly potrayed in table 4 below.

Table 4. Test 2 : Frequency of error in punctuation mark of students.

No .	Students Number	Total of clause	Com ma	Period	Apostrophe	Parentheses	Other punctu ation mark	Total of error
1	0102161085	42	8	3	2	0	0	13
2	0102171059	55	7	4	2	0	0	13
3	0102181025	45	5	3	3	0	1	12
4	0102181026	34	9	4	1	0	0	14
5	0102181027	45	8	5	2	1	2	16
6	0102181028	46	9	2	3	0	0	14
7	0102181029	39	5	8	1	0	1	14
8	0102181030	60	8	6	3	0	1	18
9	0102181031	53	6	4	4	0	0	15
10	0102181032	40	5	6	2	0	1	13
11	0102181033	43	8	5	1	1	0	15
12	0102181034	54	7	4	3	0	1	14
13	0102181035	59	6	5	2	0	0	13
14	0102181036	37	4	6	4	1	0	15
15	0102181037	41	7	5	1	0	1	14
16	0102181038	40	2	6	1	0	2	9
17	0102181039	32	8	5	2	0	1	15



No .	Students Number	Total of clause	Com ma	Period	Apostrophe	Parentheses	Other punctu ation	Total of error
18	0102181040	35	9	8	3	0	1	20
19	0102181041	52	5	3	3	0	1	11
20	0102181043	47	8	2	2	0	1	13
	Total	899	134	94	45	3	14	291

Table 2 points out that the most frequent error of punctuation mark that the students made is the use of comma as 134 errors followed by each period as 94 case, apostrophe as 45 cases, parentheses as 3 cases, and other punctuation mark; including parentheses, semicolon and exclamation as 14 cases.

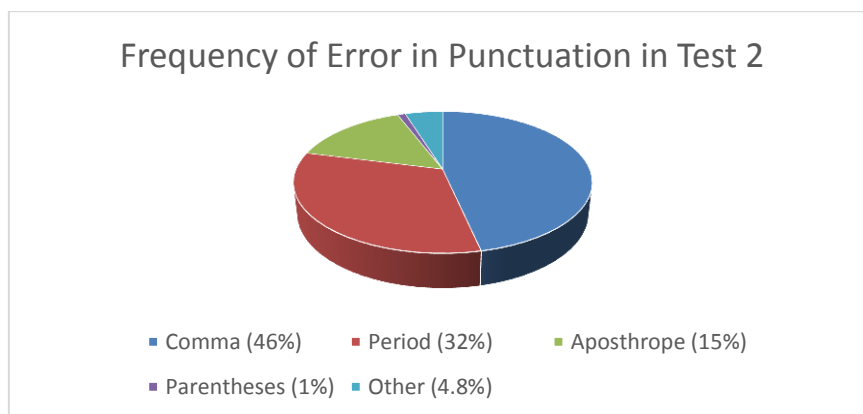


Diagram 1. Frequency of Error in Punctuation Mark in Test 2

The data shows that Comma has the highest percentage of error in punctuation mark which reach 46 %. Meanwhile, the second frequency of error is Period as 32%. Apostrophe is 15%. Parentheses is 1%, and the other punctuation mark is other punctuation mark.

Data from test 1 as well as test 2 point out that Comma tends to be the most frequency of error. After Comma, there is Period. In terms of rules of placing Comma, Comma has more rules than others punctuation marks. Therefore, it seems to be that the cause of such errors of punctuation has a lot to do with lack of motivation of students. In order words, carelessness tends to be the cause of the error (Norris, 1983).



The type of error in punctuation mark that the researcher frequently found is that the improper use of comma before coordinating conjunction, as can be seen in the following example.

Example 1:

False:

“I prefer watching at cinema but my sister likes watching at home.”

Correct:

“I prefer watching at cinema, but my sister likes watching at home.”

Comma is used to separate two strong clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction— and, or, but, for, etc. However, comma can be omitted if the clauses are both short.

Besides, the researcher found some students still commit error in separating words and wordgroups with series three or more. The example as follows. Example 2:

False: Usually, I go to cinema with my family. They are my mother, my sister and my brother.

Correct: Usually, I go to cinema with my family. They are my mother, my sister, and my brother. Example 2 shows form of error in using comma. Commas is used to separate words and word groups with series of three or more.

6. Conclusion

This study concludes that in writing compare and contrast essay, many students still commit errors in propering punctuation mark to their writing. Data shows the most frequent error in punctuation made by students is the using of Comma. The data indicates that students need more explanation on the use of comma, such as how it uses when transitional device occurs. Valid number from the data will be used by the researcher to prevent students in making the same error in writing class.

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