Indonesian EFL Students' Tendencies in Writing Academic Essays

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Abstract: This article aimed to find the tendencies exhibited by Indonesian students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in writing an academic essay in English. A content analysis method is employed as the method of the study. The data of the study were the final draft of the essays written by EFL students of the English Department of a reputable university in East Java, Indonesia. The essays were analyzed by looking for the shared properties in each part of the essay. The data were analyzed by extracting the most common properties in each essay which are (a) thesis statement, (b) coherency, and (c) concluding remark. The results showed that the students tended to forget to use definite and indefinite articles, misuse the definite and indefinite articles with plural forms, to use of nouns and pronouns inconsistently, to use an English sentence with an Indonesian rhetoric pattern, and to not include a summary of the subtopics discussed in their body paragraphs. The result may be use as reference for future writing classes in Indonesia.

Key words: writing tendencies, contrastive rhetoric, opinion essay

Abstrak: Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui kecenderungan mahasiswa Indonesia yang mempelajari bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing dalam menulis esai akademik dalam bahasa Inggris. Metode analisis isi digunakan sebagai metode penelitian. Data penelitian berupa draf akhir esai yang ditulis oleh mahasiswa Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris

di salah satu perguruan tinggi terkemuka di Jawa Timur, Indonesia. Esai dianalisis dengan mencari karakteristik yang sama di setiap bagian esai. Analisis data dilakukan dengan memfokuskan pada karakteristik paling umum dalam setiap esai yaitu (a) pernyataan tesis, (b) koherensi, dan (c) simpulan esai. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa cenderung lupa menggunakan kata sandang pasti dan tidak pasti, menyalahgunakan kata sandang pasti dan tak pasti dengan bentuk jamak, menggunakan kata benda dan kata ganti yang tidak konsisten, menggunakan kalimat bahasa Inggris dengan pola retorika bahasa Indonesia, dan tidak mencantumkan ringkasan subtopik yang dibahas dalam paragraf utama esai mereka. Hasilnya dapat dipakai sebagai referensi di kelas menulis selanjutnya di Indonesia.

Kata kunci: *kecenderungan menulis, perbandingan retorik, esai opini*

INTRODUCTION

The way people put their thoughts in the form of writing has always been influenced unconsciously by the preference of their cultural rhetoric pattern. Kaplan (1966) found out that non-English writers often employ rhetoric and a certain sequence of thought in their writing that contrasts the rhetoric and thought sequence of those who are native in English. It is generally known that Western and Asian students have a very different rhetorical pattern when it came to writing academically in English. Western students tend to be direct and are encouraged to write in a way that makes their intention clear. For Asian students, their culture prefers indirectness. Asian students compose their writing in a roundabout way. They also put on high faith in their readers to be able to find the main point of their writing.

These rhetorical differences might develop from the learning approach that the students from both cultures have. Western students are encouraged to be critical during the learning process. Instead of only memorizing what is given by the teacher, the students try to find more information on their own and to speculate the possibilities of the answer to problems. This leads the students to have the chance to extend their prior knowledge and contribute their idea at the same time. Asian students, on the other hand, are the complete opposite. One may say that Asian learning culture is only imitating or memorizing what has been told to them by the teacher.

Kaplan (1988; 1987) speculated that a person who speaks two languages should organize their thoughts differently when they use the languages. This

seems obvious as the two languages have characteristics which are different form each other. However, he argues that this act is unconscious. The person is not aware of the influence of the first language (L1) on the way they organize text logic, of the nature that the second language (L2) has its own text logic, or of the fact that there is a difference between L1 and L2. That is why in the case that the L1 is vastly different from the L2, this difference can become a problem.

The rhetorical pattern of the students owns culture affects the preference in the value and writing style employed by the students' local writing community (Xu, Huang & You, 2016). In most cases, students from a certain institution in Indonesia pick on these preferences and officially make these preferences as their standard on writing. Usually, the students will write an essay based on how other students write their essays. The most common act when a student is stuck while writing is to copy the work of the students of the earlier year cohorts. Even though not all the works are internationally acceptable, this practice still happens in South-east Asian countries, including Indonesia.

A research study conducted by Loi, Evans, Lim, and Akkakoson (2016) found out that in writing the discussions part Malay students showed dependency on the context, while English discussions are independent and standalone. The research also revealed that Malay discussion from all the subjects' articles showed similarity in which they did not put much on the explanation of the unexpected outcome and the limitation. Meanwhile, EFL Indonesian students showed difficulty in expressing their main ideas in a sentence (Husin, & Nurbayani; 2017). This is because Indonesian students tend to write in the Indonesian way and translate the writing into English. Translating an Indonesian sentence into English in writing an essay has become a common practice among Indonesian students although this creates problems in getting the main point across. This might be caused by the fact that some students did not get any teaching on how to write academically (Martinez, Lirola & Irwin; 2016), they lack the ideas in writing, controlling, and organizing the ideas, and they do not refer to rhetoric pattern that can assist them to write in English (Nurhayati, 2016; Yunhadi, 2016).

Despite the clear indication that writing in English requires the rhetorical framework of thought of the language, Indonesian students still hold on to their language text logic. This leads to the students to exhibit some tendencies in writing English. Because of their rhetorical pattern in writing, some students are inclined to write in a certain way. These tendencies affect

the quality of the writing of the students especially if they are different from what is acceptable in an international setting.

Therefore, this research aims to find the Indonesian EFL students' tendencies and the implications on teaching academic writing essays. The research questions are:

1. What are the tendencies exhibited by EFL students when writing an academic essay?

2. To what extent does the students' local institution rhetoric pattern affect their writing?

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. The Role of First Language

Most of the difficulties faced by second language (L2) learners were imposed by their first language (L1). Fries (1945) and Lado (1957) argued that based on the contrastive analysis hypothesis the learner's L1 knowledge might interfere with the L2. This could be seen from the structural linguistics that dissects the differences between languages taxonomically. From the behavioristic psychology it is believed that language learning was linked to a particular view of language learning as a series of habits that could be developed only through practice and reinforcement. In terms of writing in another language, the students might find that their view of English as a language is affected by their writing environment rhetoric patterns that have become an example for practices and had become the writing preference of the students.

The contrastive analysis hypothesis also discusses how interference or a negative transfer that happens in L1 and L2 are completely different from one another. In the case where the L1 and L2 were similar then L1 would actively aid L2 learning or having a positive transfer. In terms of writing academically, if Indonesian writing pattern is similar to the writing pattern of English language, it can be inferred that a positive transfer happens and the knowledge of the writing pattern in Indonesian should aid the writing process in English. However, if the two languages are different. there would be some sort of interference during the writing process.

B. Contextual Variation in Language-learner language

Language-learners' language contains errors. Errors are important sources of information because they demonstrate conclusively that learner does not simply memorize target language rules and reproduce them in own utterances. One of the major explanations from second language acquisition (SLA) theory is that learners' errors are not systematic in any simple way. A learner rarely produces the same error in all contexts of use. There are two types of context variation. Ellis (1989) divides contextual variation into two types. They are:

1. Situational Context

Learners use their knowledge of the second language differently in different situations, for example, learner produces errors when learner communicate directly; they do not have time to monitor the output. However, if they have the opportunity to monitor in producing language, they will not produce errors.

2. Linguistic Context

Learners produce errors in one type of sentence but not in another, for example, errors in the third person singular of the English simple present tense may not occur regularly in the second clause of complex sentences.

C. Rhetoric Pattern

During the process of composing a written text, there is a certain rhetoric pattern that is used by the writer. This pattern is heavily influenced by the writer's first language and different languages that may have a different rhetoric pattern. This difference in the rhetoric pattern would cause some trouble, especially if the writer is not aware of that difference. Kaplan (1966) stated that non-English writers often have this trouble. They unconsciously employ a certain thought process that contrasts the rhetoric pattern usually used in writing English. As a result, there would be some sentences or parts of the written text that did not make sense in the English context even though it makes perfect sense in the writer's first language.

Therefore, when writing in a different language, the writer should be able to organize their thought in the rhetoric pattern of the target language. Kaplan (1988; 1987), however, emphasized that non-English writers will unconsciously use the rhetoric pattern of their first language when writing in English. There are two reasons for this, as explained by Kaplan. The first is the

lack of awareness of the influence that the writer's L1 has on their thought process and the lack of knowledge that English has its own thought process. Lastly, the writer simply did not know that there is a difference between writing in their L1 and writing in English. They might have thought that because writing is universal the way everyone conveys messages and ideas will be the same.

METHOD

A. Type of Research

This study followed a content analysis method of research that can be achieved by collecting the final drafts of the participants' writing, codifying, analyzing, listing the tendencies exhibited by the students' and comparing them to the writing regulation set by the lecturer.

B. Research Participants

The participants of this study were 29 students of the English Department of Universitas Negeri Malang, a reputable state university in East Java, Indonesia. The students attended the Argumentative Writing Course with four semester hours. The students are required to finish two pre-requisite courses which are Paragraph Writing and Essay Writing. The objective of the Argumentative Writing course is to help the students in making two kinds of essays: opinion and argumentative essays. The first half of the course was spent to write opinion essays and the second half was used to learn argumentative essays.

The lecturer used a writing process approach in the teaching of Argumentative Writing. the students had to start their writing with a plan in the form of determining title and points of development. Then the students had to write down a draft of their essay in a few meetings. The students were given occasional feedback by the lecturer regarding their essays and some revisions were made. The students were given time to revise and improve their essays before the essays were submitted as scheduled. The students' essays were submitted in the middle of the course in the form of hard copy.

Data were collected from the students' submitted essays which were the final versions of their essays. There were totally 29 opinion essays. The data were then codified and analyzed to see the tendencies exhibited by the

students in their essays and then compared them to the writing regulation set by the lecturer. The students were required to write the introduction part, body part which consist of three paragraphs, and the conclusion part with a specific instruction made by the lecturer (see Table 1).

Table 1:
Rubric for Opinion Essays

Part of essay		Length	Aspects to be evaluated
Introduction		3-5 sentences	- General Introduction of the topic, - Thesis Statement (contradictory statement).
Body Paragraphs	1	8-12 sentences	- Topic sentence, - Points that support the thesis statement.
	2	8-12 sentences	- Topic sentence, - Points that support the thesis statement.
	3	8-12 sentences	- Topic sentence, - Points that support the thesis statement.
Conclusion		2-3 sentences	- Concluding signal, - Re-stating of the thesis statement in other words, - Summary of the points stated in the body part. - Personal comment

For the introduction part, the students are expected to write in about three to five sentences consisting of a thesis statement in the form of contradictory statements. In the body part, the students are required to write three developmental paragraphs with the expected length of eight to twelve sentences in each paragraph that will describe the students' opinion of the topic and support the thesis statement. The addition of examples, statistics, quotations, or other data are encouraged in these paragraphs. Lastly, the conclusion part of the opinion essay must include concluding signals and the thesis statement written in different words or summary of the points stated in the body paragraph in two to three sentences. Students are also asked to write a personal comment regarding the topic that they have chosen. The essays for this study were the final version of the opinion essay that has been checked and revised during the class.

C. Research Procedure

The following steps were the procedures for this study:

1. Categorizing

   Based on the lecturer's rubric for an opinion essay, the shared properties of the opinion essays are categorized into codes.

2. Coding

   The codes for this study are Thesis Statement (TS), Coherency (C), and Concluding Remark (CR). Each code is given weight with the distribution of 20% for TS, 55% for C, and 25% for CR.

3. Collecting

   The essays were collected after the students have revised their final draft and submitted it to their lecturer in the middle of the semester.

4. Listing

   With the codes as guidance, the most common codes that appear in the students' writing were stated as the students' tendencies in writing an opinion essay.

5. Comparing

   The last step was comparing the results with the expectation from the lecturer as stated in the rubric for opinion essays. The results of the analysis were reviewed to see whether the teaching process is suitable enough in helping the students meet the exercise.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

The tendencies exhibited by the EFL students when writing an academic essay in this research are categorized into three parts. Those three parts are (a) thesis statement, (b) coherency, and (c) concluding remark.

1. <u>Thesis Statement</u>

In the case of writing the thesis statement for the opinion essays, the lecturer has specified the criteria on what is expected from the students which is in the form of contradictory sentences. Almost all the students have followed the instruction to use contradictory sentences for their thesis statement. However, Student 5 used an interrogative sentence instead of a contradictory sentence.

Essay 5:

"So how to prevent this happened to our family or closest person? What should we do to avoid this action keep occurring in Indonesia? I will give you a 3 bright explanation to prevent bullying from occurring in Indonesia."

From the analysis of all of the essays, there are two tendencies exhibited by the students in writing their thesis statement. The first is the lack of the indefinite (a/an) and definite article (the) when the sentence required one. Some students show a bit of confusion for the use of the indefinite article with the plural form of the word. Here are the examples in the thesis statement:

Essay 1:

"Although education is important <u>for youngster,</u> in my opinion, there are many youngsters in Indonesia who did not <u>get proper education</u> because of three reasons."

Essay 25:

"Even though Indonesia already have a child protection organization, I believe that Indonesian government should create <u>a straight rules</u> for bullying that caused by underage children."

Essay 5:

"I will give you <u>a 3 bright explanation</u> to prevent bullying from occurring in Indonesia."

The other tendency is on the lack of focus on the controlling ideas stated in the thesis statement. All of the essays have good thesis statements.

The preference for arranging the ideas for the essay is by indicating the pattern of organization or indication of subtopics. The students have a strong tendency to indicate the subtopics they wanted to discuss in the body paragraphs. According to Oshima and Hogue (2006), this kind of arrangement of ideas is called the logical division of ideas. The most common phrase used by the students to indicate their subtopics is "because of three reasons".

> Essay 13:
>
> "Although the parents think that reading habit not beneficial, I believe that reading habit need to be applied and get more attention from parents <u>because of three reasons</u>."
>
> Essay 26
>
> "Eventhough many people in society consider cross-gender art as something strange and inappropriate, I believe this tradition is worth preserving <u>because of three reasons</u>."

2. <u>Coherency</u>

Oshima and Hogue (2006) describe coherence as being logical and smooth in transitioning between one sentence to the other. There should not be a sudden jump in writing. Each sentence must hold together for them to be coherent. This is what makes the whole essay makes sense. There are four ways to achieve coherence (Oshima & Hogue, 2006). They are the repetition of key nouns, the consistent use of pronouns, the use of transition signals to link ideas, and the arrangement of ideas in a logical order.

a) The Use of Consistent Nouns and Pronouns

For the consistent use of nouns and pronouns, like what has been stated in the thesis statement section, there is some confusion for the use of plural and singular forms. For the essay to be coherent, it is advisable for the writer to choose what pronouns they wanted to refer to a singular subject or a plural subject.

Around twenty-one students have shown some tendencies to use the singular and the plural forms of the noun interchangeably. This causes them to have to switch between using a singular pronoun or a plural pronoun.

Essay 1:

"....why many <u>youngsters</u> in Indonesia did not get proper education....... this problem needs to be solves quickly in order to improve its <u>youngster</u> quality."

Essay 27:

"In 2020 ministry of communication will enforce <u>new rules</u>. <u>That rule</u> is every smartphone that its IMEI does not register in the ministry of communication (black market phone) will be blocked."

There is also inconsistency on the subject-verb agreement as shown below:

Essay 12:

"....It is so pitiful to see the victim is hut, but the <u>bullies is</u> really fine."

Essay 8:

"...Some research said that <u>person who are</u> good at playing games have better levels of brain creativity than other children"

b) The Arrangement of Ideas in a Logical Order

Almost all of the students have chosen to indicate the number of subtopics that they would discuss in the body paragraph. Although this is one of the three acceptable ways to arrange ideas in essay writing according to Oshima and Hogue (2006), the downside is a lack of control in the students' body paragraphs.

Some students' have two ideas in one paragraph instead of one. The lack of detailed subtopics in the thesis statement means that the topic sentence for each paragraph in the body paragraphs became too broad. Because of this, some students tend to write down another idea that does not have any connection with the topic sentence.

Essay 8:

"The second reason why women should work is not underestimated by men. According to a new survey ou of

Australia where men reported......... And also to increase a woman's confidence that they can also be financial independence."

Essay 15:

"Next, she is beautiful. Although she used drugs, she is in the jail, and she was a man, she looks so beautiful. .... That is the reason why Lucinta Luna is beautiful and always cares about her body."

c) Translation from Indonesia to English

The overall essays show good quality of writing except several tendencies that make them completely different from what is expected from English writing. However, there are several sentences -especially complex sentences- that feel like an English sentence with an Indonesian rhetoric pattern. It feels a little bit confusing because some choices of words or the order of words might make sense in Indonesian but when translated into English, the equivalence of the word might not make a complete sense.

Essay 16:

"All in all, Kampus Merdeka will be enforced because it will be benefitial to students and campus, it can be something assisting to build this nation, ans it will be able to lift up the name of Indonesia."

Essay 12

"The second reason to support bullies must get a penalty that make them not bullying other again is to make deterrent effect for the bullies."

3. Concluding Remark

In ending the essay, it is important to make a good concluding remark that summarizes the whole ideas presented beforehand in the body paragraphs. For this specific essay, the lecturer specified the use of concluding signals, the restatement of the thesis statement in different words or summarizing the controlling ideas, and personal comment.

The specification for concluding remark set by the lecturer was in line with what Oshima and Hogue (2006) state as the functions of concluding remark. They are summarizing the subtopics, paraphrasing the thesis statement, and conveying a message to the reader. However, some of the students did not include a summary of the subtopics discussed in their body paragraphs. There is even a student who wrote down another idea not discussed previously.

Essay 5:

"Don't let bullying get you, that person is sad enough to be the one who starts talking about people. Just ignore it, walk away or change the topic if you two were in a conversation beforehand. If the action is really serious, consult someone else, preferably an adult, or ask that you can move classes."

Essay 14:

"To conclude, the stucked water channel and no water infiltration place are caused by human itself while the high intensify rain is cause by nature. Therefore, the government should give extra attention to the problems if the do not want the flood to happen again in the future."

Essay 23:

"All in all, before applying this system, the government and the schools should consider its disadvantages. Also the school is responsible for making the environment pleasant for students, thus they will not get bored all day in the school gates. Because the goal of this system is to improve the quality of the schools not to add burden for students, parents, even teachers."

4. Institution Rhetoric Pattern

For this research, the institution rhetoric pattern used is the rubric for opinion essay that the lecturer has shown to the students before they write their opinion essay. The rubric served as a guide for the students in how the opinion essay is expected to be. After comparing with what Oshima and Hogue (2006) had explained in their book about how to write an academic essay as expected by English-native writers. It can be concluded that the rubric is in line with the book.

Almost all the students have followed this rubric when writing their opinion essay. Only several individuals seemed to write a certain part of the essay differently. For example, as has been shown earlier, one student did not write the thesis statement as a contradictory sentence but as an interrogative sentence instead.

After comparing the students' final writing with the rubric, we can conclude that the students have written the way that is accepted by native English writers. Even though there are still some tendencies that are caused by the different thought pattern in how to convey a message in Indonesian and English, the text organization conforms to the English academic essay text organization. This happened because the rubric for opinion essays created by the teacher has been an excellent guide for the students.

B. Discussion

According to Kaplan's (1987) theory of contrastive rhetoric, the thought pattern of L1 will be used unconsciously when the L1 writers want to write in L2. He said that the act is unconscious because (a) the L1 writers are not aware that a certain pattern exists and influences them when they write in L2, (b) they are not aware of the fact that L2 has its thought pattern, and (c) they do not realize that there is a difference in thought pattern between L1 and L2. This thought pattern is linked with the culture of the language that is accepted by the people as the right way of writing. This acceptance has made the rhetorical pattern to be internalized in the local writing community (Loi, Evans, Lim, & Akkakoson, 2016). This leads to certain tendencies that still exist despite the awareness of the writers of this contrastive rhetoric between L1 and L2.

First, the students' essays showed the confusion of the use of definite and indefinite articles. When the articles are supposed to be used, some students did not use them. Meanwhile, when they used plural forms, they include the indefinite article (a) even though it is grammatically incorrect. This might happen because of the way Indonesians write singular and plural forms. In English, the singular forms required the use of a indefinite article (a/an) for a general noun or the use of the definite article (the) for a specific noun that both the writer and reader already knew. However, in Indonesian, there is no such a thing as definite and indefinite articles. Grammatically, an Indonesian sentence requires the word "sebuah" to show a singular form and the repetition of the noun word for plural. For example, the word table which is "meja" in Indonesian should be written as "sebuah meja" to show the

singularity of "meja-meja" for the plural form. This is correct grammatically but if a writer decided not to include the word "sebuah," the reader can still understand that the word is in the singular form. This rhetoric pattern might unconsciously be transferred while writing in English. That is why most of the students tend to miss the definite and indefinite articles when they write the singular forms.

Next, the students' essays showed the inconsistency of nouns and pronouns. One of the requirements for an essay to be coherent is to have a consistent nouns and pronouns. This means that when the writer chose a noun or a subject, they have to be consistent about the form they want to use, either the singular form or the plural form. If the writer chose to address the subject in the plural form, then wherever the subject is mentioned it should be in the plural form. The same can be said with the pronoun used. If at the beginning the writer changed the subject with the pronoun "he" then the pronoun "he" should be used. This also applies to how Indonesian essays should be written (Mulyana, 2005).

Some of the students' essays showed inconsistency in this aspect. Cholsy (2005) stated that the Indonesian language does not have any specific marker when it comes to plurality in either written form or oral form. This might be caused by the pragmatic aspect of some Indonesian words. Based on how the sentence is constructed, the singular form used represents the plural form. Haryanti, and Fatimah (2016) explain that this is an intra-system shift because there is a different between two languages in how they translate the singular and plural form. This can be seen in one of the students' essays where he wrote "youngster" or "Anak muda" in the essay but in a few sentences, he wrote "youngsters". Based on the intra-system shift in translating these words, the writer used the system in Indonesian where the use of plural and singular for the word "anak muda" didn't change the message of the essay. However, this is only true in the case of translating English sentences into Indonesian sentences. If it is the other way around, the system used in English should have been used instead. Therefore, the use of a plural or singular form should be consistent because it might change the message of the sentence.

Third, the students' body paragraphs showed the lack of controlling ideas. Research conducted by Yunhadi (2016) showed that Indonesian students tend to have problems when they are developing an idea of a paragraph. He argued that this happened because of the mistake in developing ideas in the paragraph, where the students failed to limit the discussion of the paragraph. This might happen because of Indonesian rhetoric to explain

things in a roundabout way. Even though the students have written down their controlling ideas in the thesis statement, the rhetoric pattern of Indonesian has made them unable to discuss the idea straightforwardly.

Lastly, there are some sentences in English with an Indonesian rhetoric pattern. Looking back at Kaplan's (1987) theory on contrastive rhetoric, the tendencies to write English sentences with an Indonesian rhetoric pattern might have been because of the fact that the students are not aware of the fact that Indonesian has a rhetoric pattern different from English and it influences how they write. While syntactically correct, the sentences are not semantically and/or pragmatically correct. The sentences were constructed not in a way that is accepted as correct English. The sentences made sense in Indonesian but they do not make sense in English.

CONCLUSION

Most of the students can produce good quality writing. They can meet the requirement of what a good opinion essay should be. This is because of the rubric shared by the lecturer that served as a guide for the students when writing their essays. By sticking closely to the lecturer's rubric, the students can make a good opinion essay. However, there are still some tendencies exhibited by the students that are not in line with the English rhetoric pattern. Those tendencies are the confusion of the use of definite and indefinite articles, inconsistency of the use of nouns and pronouns, the lack of controlling ideas, and the existence of some sentences in English with an Indonesian rhetoric pattern. These are things that are not mentioned in the rubric, but they are linked to the Indonesian rhetoric pattern. So, it can be concluded that writing in English can be affected by the writer's first language (L1) rhetoric pattern but the effect could be minimized with a correct guideline on how an essay should be written in English.

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