



## Faulty parallel structure in students' argumentative writing

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**Abstract:** In writing, to produce well-structured and understandable sentences, students must have knowledge of one aspect of grammar, namely parallelism. However, in fact, many students do not understand the concept of parallelism so that they fail to apply it in writing. This study examines the common types of faulty parallel structure in students' argumentative writing and investigates the factors which cause the fault. This is a qualitative study that collects the primary data from students' argumentative writing in particular topics which demand them to present their arguments and to provide their position, reasons and evidence in their writing, and the secondary data from the interview. As a result, this study discovers that students commit the faults in different types of parallelism, and mostly take place in parallel structure with elements joined by conjunction, both coordinating and correlative conjunction. The result of the interview section shows that students make the faulty parallelism due to lack of knowledge, lack of attention, and lack of vocabulary. Thus, in order to reduce the faulty parallel structure, the specific materials about parallelism should be added in writing or grammar's lesson plan.

**Keyword:** *parallel structure; faulty parallelism; argumentative writing*

### INTRODUCTION

Writing is a representation of language in a textual medium by using a set of signs or symbols known as writing systems (Hasna, 2009). It also refers to the arrangement of thought and information in a consistent way. Consistency is essential to a good writing because it makes the flow from one sentence to another sentence easy and natural. Furthermore, writing English for EFL learners particularly Indonesian learners is difficult because English is different from the Indonesian language in its structure, spelling, and lexical meaning (Sholihah, 2014). For that reason, Indonesian students who learn English tend to produce mistakes in their writing because they do not master the rules of writing in English well.

There are four forms of English writing such as narrative, descriptive, expository and argumentative (Balogun, n.d.). Writing in a foreign language, English in particular, often presents the greatest challenge to the students at all stages, specifically writing an argumentative writing because it deals with the complex and controversial issues. Moreover, argumentative writing provides facts, opinions, and evidence presented by the writers to convince the readers that their position is the best one, agree or disagree position. The primary purpose of argumentative writing is to convince and to persuade the readers that the writers' position or thesis statement on a controversial issue is valid through the writers' analysis of evidence from a variety of sources. At times, one may have a second purpose of her/his argumentative writing; to persuade the readers to take some

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sort of an action (Konar, 2009 p. 133) as cited in Pebrianita (2013). From the explanation, it can be concluded that argumentative writing is a kind of writing which consists of some facts and evidence provided by the writers to show their arguments toward the provided topics and to persuade the readers to agree with their statements in the writing as well.

Furthermore, it is important for writers to understand grammar to help them write clearly since writing is related to grammar. For that reason, the writers have to improve their sentence construction to link grammatical elements within a sentence in a correct and parallel structure. According to Wooley & Scott (1931, p.93) as cited in Young (2007), “when two or more sentence elements are in the same grammatical function, it should be made grammatically parallel; if one is an infinitive, the other should be infinitive; if one is a relative clause, the other should be a relative clause; and so on”. In conclusion, when two or more sentence elements are separated by conjunction or linking verbs, or the elements are written in series or the elements being compared, the one side and the other side should be at the same level of importance.

Parallelism is important in writing because when the students explain something that has more than one element, they should master the parallelism to add more information or explanation. The consistency in form also makes it easier for readers to understand and remember the ideas. Therefore, parallelism should become one of the main concerns in the language teaching and learning process, especially in writing and grammar. Both lecturers and students have to master the structure of parallelism in order to understand the use of it and to guide them to have good skill in writing, to have more comprehension about grammar and to have the competence how to produce comprehensible sentences.

The general principle of parallelism is the use of similar ideas expressed by a similar grammatical structure. Though many students fail to recognize the construction, there will be

no consistency in their writing. As a result, they produce a sentence that is guilty as what is called faulty parallelism (Raimes, 1987) cited in Hasna (2010). Moreover, most of the students use the ungrammatical structure of parallelism when they try to explain or to convince the readers in their argumentative writing because they do not have competence about the parallel structure and basic capability in writing. They repeatedly pay no attention to make the sentence parallel and often make faults in parallelism because they believe that it does not change the meaning of the sentence. In contrast, when the sentence structures are not parallel or balanced, writing sounds awkward and confusing.

Looking at the earlier studies, the study of the parallel structure has previously been conducted by a number of researchers. The first previous study was conducted by Ayu Pebrianita in 2013 that covered an analysis of parallel structure errors of sentences in students’ argumentative essays which purposed to find out the parallel structure errors in students’ writing. The participants of this study were English Department students in the fifth year of STKIP PGRI, Sumatra Barat. This study used documents as the instrument of data collection which were the students’ writing final project. There were 40 answer sheets selected by some requirements such as they have passed a writing class with satisfying results and have written an argumentative essay as the source of data. The data were analyzed by using theory of Gay and Arisian (2000, p. 239). It was shown by the result of this study that the most frequent errors of parallel structure in argumentative essays are misinformation errors.

The study which covered parallel structure was also conducted by Dwi Darmayati (2008) in her thesis entitled the error analysis on the parallelism made by English Department students of Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang. This study applied a quantitative method and aimed to explore the most frequent types of errors that might occur as well as some possible reasons for their occurrence. The data were

collected by giving a test and questionnaire for 30 minutes. Students' errors were then analyzed and classified into three classifications where parallelism is usually used; parallelism by using the coordinate conjunction, the comparison, and the paired conjunction. As a result, the highest number of errors is in the use of coordinating conjunction. The context of learning is the common source of errors.

Compared to those studies, the data were taken from students' document, questionnaire, and a test to correct unparallel sentences, while this research used a test to collect students' argumentative writing with provided topics as the source of data. The first previous study analyzed the types of errors in parallel structures that frequently take place in students' argumentative writing. However, the study that was conducted by Pebrianita in 2013 used students' documents of argumentative writing as the source of data while this recent study used a test in collecting the data through students' argumentative writing. It was believed as the appropriate instrument in collecting the data since the participants wrote argumentative writing based on the provided topics. Additionally, the primary focus of this recent study was to explore the types of faulty structure of parallelism that frequently used in students' argumentative writing.

Similar to the first study, the second study also covered the error analysis on parallelism. The primary data were collected through tests and the secondary data were collected by questionnaires. This second previous study classified the primary data into three types of parallel structure while this study used Benner's Theory (2004) that explained the five types of parallel structure. Moreover, questionnaires were being used in collecting the secondary data in the second study while this study used the interview result in supporting the primary data since it was believed that interview referred to spontaneous answers by the participants. Semi-structured interview was necessary to develop the questions as the necessity of the study.

Regardless of the differences, the participants of those studies were similar to this recent study; English Department students. Since those studies focused on grammar, particularly parallel structure, it was important to look for the participants who could write in English properly and understood the grammar as well. Thus, the similarities among these studies could help the researcher in analyzing the data in this recent study. The study that analyzed the types of faulty parallel structure that were frequently used was crucial to be conducted in order to decrease the faults in parallel structure and to lead the students to put more attention to the use of parallelism.

For that reason, this study must be conducted because it could show the readers about the types of faulty parallel structure that take place in students' argumentative writing. What more is, this study focused on analysis of grammar and sentence structure especially parallel structure point of view and also could be used as brand-new information. This study additionally revealed the causal factors of faulty parallel structure in students' writing.

## **METHOD**

The participants of this study were five students of Department of English Education, class of 2013. They were selected because they have fulfilled the requirements in selecting the participants. The first requirement was they have passed certain subjects with 3 marks or B (standard passing grade) for each subject such as English Structure, English Grammar, English Syntax, and Writing I – Writing IV because their works, particularly argumentative writing, were being analyzed to find the faulty parallel structure in their writing. The second requirement was they have a high GPA of 3.50 minimally. It was really necessary to be one of the considerations of selecting the participants because they had to write an argumentative writing which contained about 300 words (short writing). In considering the validity of the data,

the participants were eligible by having the basics of writing and grammar. Therefore, time availability and willingness to be the participants were the other aspects that affect the number of participants.

This study used test, students' argumentative writing, as the technique of collecting the primary data. The participants were asked to write argumentative writing which contained about 300 words with the provided topics. Additionally, the face to face interview with the participants is carried out to gain deep information about the factors that caused them ungrammatically used parallel structure. The type of questions which used in the interview section was Semi Structured, a type of interview that was not only based on the questions that had been provided, but also could be developed in the process of interviewing due to the necessity of the data.

This study aimed to investigate the types of faulty parallel structure in students' argumentative writing, to make interpretation and conclusion regarding the result of this study. Hence, the qualitative method is conducted in order to analyze and categorize the data. The procedure of analyzing the data was taken in accordance with the following four steps by Huang (2002) in Ngangbam (2016). The first is identifying and reviewing all available data from the source of the research; students' argumentative writing and interview results.

Theory of Wooley & Scott (1931) was used in determining the data and non-data. The second is classifying the sentences which contained faulty parallel structure based on the types of parallel structure by Benner (2004). The next step is interpreting the data. This study verified the sentences which contained faulty parallel structure based on English Sentence Analysis, English Syntax and Argumentation, Basic English Grammar Third Edition, and Grammar websites as the guidelines.

Moreover, interview results were presented in order to support the primary data and attempt the factors that caused the

participants ungrammatically used parallel structure. The last step is drawing conclusions from the interpretation of the data, in order to answer research question and to achieve the research objective.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Faulty Parallel Structure in Students' Argumentative Writing**

Thompson (1993, p. 102) cited in Pebrianita (2013) stated that argumentative writing is writing which presents the writers' argument in supporting their position with reasons. However, because the students are concerned more on the content of their writing, some students ignore the structure, particularly parallel structure. They often fail to keep the sentence elements in the same grammatical forms. They repeatedly make faulty parallel structure in a sentence because it is assumed that the parallel structures are still meaningful. As a result, from 5 argumentative writings that have been analyzed, there are 15 faulty parallel structures take place. Accordingly, argumentative writing has proven that students frequently commit faulty parallel structure because the students focus more in convincing the readers through their arguments in argumentative writing than focus on grammar particularly the parallelism.

Among the five types of parallel structure, which were parallel structure with elements joined by coordinating conjunction; parallel structure with elements in lists or series; parallel structure with elements being compared; parallel structure with elements joined by a linking verb or a verb of being; and parallel structure with elements joined by correlative conjunction, that introduced by Benner (2004), this study did not find the type of parallel structure with elements joined by a linking verb of a verb of being. This happened because the students rarely connect two or more ideas with linking verbs. As a consequence, the results of this study show that there is no datum that can be revealed in students' argumentative writing in this type of parallel structure.

As the 15 occurrences of faulty parallel structure, it is found that faults in parallel structure with elements joined by coordinating conjunction is overwhelming. The students tend to commit faulty parallelism in linking two ideas in phrases form. This result is in line with Hasna's Dissertation (2009) that revealed the phrase is one of the common uses of faulty parallelism. In relation to phrases, the students get confused to determine the types of phrases. It is because the whole sentence is still meaningful even though the sentence is not structurally parallel. For example, the phrase *unstable condition* was joined by coordinating conjunction „and“ with the phrase *still childish*. In this case, the students incorrectly joined those two different phrases in one sentence. As for the data findings, most of the data consisted of phrases that were ungrammatically connected. As Davidson (2002, p. 124) cited in Hasna (2009) stated that “*a phrase is any group of two words that can occupy the same slot in a sentence as a single word*”. The writer is free to arrange sentence elements in a number of ways which makes the writer confront unparallel structure construction. Hence, it is believed that the students failed in connecting two ideas in the same grammatical function by using coordinating conjunction.

This study also revealed that the data of parallel structure with elements in series were from series of noun to clause and from series of adjective to infinitive. The participants failed in keeping the same grammatical function in a sentence. In Benner's theory (2004), she gives examples of parallel structure in series such as series of words, series of infinitives, series of phrases, and series of clauses. Thus, among those 4 examples that have been mentioned, this study only revealed 2 data that include as series in words and series in infinitive. For instance, the participant collaborated *to be honest* and *to be disciplined* with *to socialize* and *to respect* which are in different grammatical form. In contrast, because the other types of series or lists are not found in this study, it does not mean the other types do not

exist, but the participants wrote several kinds of series and even lists that are symmetric as parallel structure.

The other type of parallel structure is parallel structure with elements being compared. This study revealed one datum in this type of parallel structure since the participants rarely compare something in their writing or even, they commit comparison symmetrically. This type of parallel structure is quite difficult to reveal in students' writing. It does mean that the entire comparison sentence deals with parallelism. In case, “*for the real example is elementary school and junior high school students starting to sleep when they arrived at home until sunset perhaps they think it is better than do nothing at home*” which indicates the word „it“ as a pronoun is being compared to the verb phrase “*do nothing at home*”. It does not mean this sentence is not parallel, but this sentence cannot be categorized as parallelism since „it“ refers to the previous thing that has been mentioned „*students starting to sleep when they arrived at home until sunset*“. In different case, the sentence “*It is argued that this policy will develop students' productivity than they are at home while their parents are working*” is not parallel because the participant compared „*this policy*“ as a noun phrase to the certain situation „*they are at home while their parents are working*“. The point is, when comparing something, in this case, a noun phrase, it should be compared to another kind of noun phrase too.

Following parallel structure with elements joined by coordinating conjunction, parallel structure with elements joined by correlative conjunction was the second common use of parallel structures that ungrammatically being used. As the data finding, it is markedly that there are faults in parallel structure because the elements within a sentence are not grammatically equal. According to Baugh (1993) as cited in Hasna (2009), correlative conjunction such as *both. . .and* , *not. . .but* , *not only. . .but also* , *either. . .or* , *neither. . .nor* should be followed by the same grammatical structure. This study revealed the correlative

conjunctions that ungrammatically used were *both/and* and *not only/but also*. Saying *both* in a sentence implies that there must be two things that will be emphasized, so the second thing that follows *and* must be in the same part of speech as the word follows *both*. Whenever the writers use the combination *both/and*, they have to make sure to see if the syntax still stands up if they put the second thing in place of the first. In another case, the additive items that come after *not only* must be parallel. Putting *not only* before the verb sets up anticipation that another action will follow. For example, "*In this case, the government does not only think of the benefits for students, but also considers the impacts for the students themselves*". Whenever writers use the combination *not only/but also*, they have to put *not only* immediately before the first of the pair basics that are being added.

In reviewing the result findings, it can be concluded that faulty parallel structure is indicated in students' argumentative writing. Among those types of parallel structure proposed by Benner (2004), there was one type that did not appear in this study; parallel structure with elements joined by linking verbs. In contrast, parallel structure with elements joined by conjunctions; both coordinating and correlative conjunctions are overwhelming.

### **Causal Factors of the Faulty Parallel Structure in Students' Argumentative Writing**

Besides the data that have been elaborated, this study also intended to explore the factors that might cause faulty parallel structure in supporting the primary data. Moreover, it is equally important to point out the factors. Based on Johnson (2008), there are five causal factors of making mistakes in general that are being connected to writing particularly deal with faulty parallel structure; they are incomplete knowledge, poor communication, changing form, pressure and complexity. After interviewing all of the participants in this study,

it can be concluded that there were 3 factors that might cause the faulty parallel structure keep taking place in students' writing, they are; lack of knowledge, lack of attention and lack of vocabulary.

The first and the main factor is lack of knowledge. The participants confessed that they do not know well about parallel structure since they do not learn about it specifically in class. They have learnt parallel structure only in the first year in college particularly in the second semester. Regarding this, they committed parallel structure in writing. In most cases, the material that is taught to students is understandable. They probably know the general rules and principles, but many students do not have any idea about how to apply those rules and principles into writing because of lack of knowledge particularly lack of practice. Otherwise, the students might not know the rules and principles of parallel structure so that they commit faulty parallel structure.

The second factor is lack of attention. When students are writing, they tend to ignore the details related to grammar and structure of the sentence, particularly parallel structure. This thing occurs because they put more concentration on the ideas that they will deliver in their writing and focus on the content that they are writing. This statement is supported by the statement from the interview session which stated that the participants only focused on the ideas and contents of the writing rather than the grammar.

The third factor is lack of vocabulary. Vocabulary mastery is the basic thing in learning a language, mainly foreign language. It is impossible for learners to learn about grammar without knowing or mastering vocabulary. For that reason, vocabulary mastery can be an obstacle in learning grammar. If the students are not rich in vocabulary, they can only produce poor writing as well. As a result, they will only use the same word in the different situations of writing. The participant admitted that she only uses the familiar word in her writing and ignores the structure of

parallelism. In case, the participant only knows the word “*disadvantageous*” which is an adjective word of classes, then, she used the adjective form of the word rather than the noun form “*disadvantage*” in her writing. Because of limited vocabulary, the participants are poor at word choices in expressing their idea in writing. Students often wonder what word to use to describe their ideas. As the final year students, the participants are expected to have unlimited vocabulary that will provide for clear information of their ideas and thoughts.

Most of all, the main factors that cause faulty parallel structure are because the students lack of knowledge about parallel structure since it was only learnt in the first year of college. All in all, faulty parallel structures that occur repeatedly in writing are due to the lack of attention, lack of vocabulary and lack of knowledge about parallelism.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the study that has been conducted, the data from students’ argumentative writing revealed that the students tend to make faulty parallel structure in using conjunction, both coordinating conjunction and correlative conjunction. Then, these types commonly occur in students’ argumentative writing, specifically parallel structure in phrase form. Otherwise, the occurrences of parallel structure based on these types are the most used faults in students’ argumentative writing. This research also shows that the participants rarely use linking verbs or verbs of being in parallel structure because there is no datum that can be revealed in this type.

Then, based on the result of the interview session, the major factors which cause the students to commit faulty parallel structure are lack of knowledge, lack of attention and lack of vocabulary. The students are lacking knowledge and competence about parallel structure because they do not learn about it specifically in the classroom. Students state that they do not have an adequate knowledge

and understanding of parallel structure that it can influence their writing. Additionally, the students are still lacking knowledge in parallelizing the elements of the sentence. Another factor is lack of attention. It causes the students to pay more attention to the context and idea of their writing rather than to the grammar. Therefore, lack of vocabulary is also the other factor of faulty parallel structure committed by the students. It is because they do not master the different forms of word classes that cause them to use inappropriate word form in a sentence.

Lastly, for the future researchers who want to conduct the similar research about parallel structure, it will be better to use the different objects such as students’ speech, literary works which deal with parallel structure or another kind of writing as the source of data, and also use different theories in analyzing the data. Otherwise, no one is perfect and all things are needed to be developed. Hopefully, this research will be a good reference for further researchers and will lead the next research.

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