



## Students' Metalinguistic Awareness in L2 Writing: The Case of Grammarly-Mediated Feedback

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### ABSTRACT

*This case study aims to explore students' perceptions of their metalinguistic awareness in L2 writing mediated by Grammarly as online feedback tool. Data garnered from twenty participants' questionnaire and reflection were analyzed. The findings reveal that the participants perceive the online feedback tool facilitates their drafting process in terms of grammatical awareness. In other words, the online grammar checker could be help to raise their metalinguistic awareness in L2 writing. This study implies that language teacher and teacher educator could utilize this online tool in learning and teaching process in order to raise learners' metalinguistic awareness as well as learner autonomy.*

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**ABSTRAK**

Studi kasus ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi persepsi siswa tentang kesadaran metalinguistik mereka dalam penulisan bahasa Inggris yang dimediasi oleh Grammarly sebagai alat umpan balik online. Data yang dikumpulkan dari kuesioner 20 peserta dan refleksi dianalisis. Temuan penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa peserta merasakan alat umpan balik online memfasilitasi proses menulis mereka dalam hal kesadaran tata bahasa. Dengan kata lain, alat pemeriksa tata bahasa online ini dapat membantu meningkatkan kesadaran metalinguistik mereka dalam penulisan. Penelitian ini menyiratkan bahwa guru bahasa asing dan dosen dapat memanfaatkan alat online ini dalam proses belajar dan mengajar dalam memediasi kesadaran metalinguistik serta kemandirian pebelajar.

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**1. Introduction**

In the traditional view of learning, the whole teaching and learning activity, particularly L2 writing was done both by the teacher and the learners in the face-to-face manner (Qassemah & Soelaimani, 2016). When learning L2 writing, learners are involved in the construction process, such as planning, drafting, revising and editing (Vanderpyl, 2012). Recently, the traditional view of learning has been rivaled by many programs that have been built to support the language learners in achieving better language proficiency (Nova, 2018) such as blended learning which combines two ways of learning activities, i.e. online and face to-face activity (Sarré, Grosbois & Brudermann, 2019).

Several recent studies have discovered that metalinguistic awareness plays a positive role in L2 proficiency (Alipour, 2014); (Roehr & Gánem-gutiérrez, 2009). It has been shown that metalinguistic awareness is strongly related to beginning reading skills (Bryant, MacLean & Brandley, 1990) since reading has a metalinguistic component and hence time should be devoted to raising metalinguistic awareness when teaching and honing reading skills and strategies (Sinar, 2018). In line with Hawkins' (1992) notion of language apprenticeship which emphasizes the value of acquiring one language as a basis for acquiring another language, the acquisition of metalinguistic awareness is crucial for bilingual learners to succeed (Clyne, 2003).

Another study also explored the role of language dominance in the relationship between vocabulary size in both languages of bilingual children and metalinguistic awareness in the societal language. It evaluates the impact

of two metalinguistic awareness abilities, morphological and lexical awareness, and on receptive and expressive vocabulary size (Altman, Goldstein, & Armon-lotem, 2018).

Metalinguistic awareness often juxtaposed with second language writing. Gombert (1992) shows the result of his investigation that the higher level of abstraction and elaboration required in the processing of written language requires a higher level of metalinguistic activity. Therefore, the acquisition of metalinguistic awareness is regarded as a central factor in writing development. Another research on the application of blogs to English as second language writing (Chen, 2015) provided an analysis of learners' writing performance by using blogs. Chen's (2015) study examines two further dimensions of learners' metalinguistic awareness and affective performance. The results of comparison showed no significant differences between the two classes in regards to metalinguistic strategy use but there were significant differences in metalinguistic awareness.

Given that grammar benefits language learning, it can help the students to connect their knowledge of grammar to language production particularly in the forms of production tests, writing and makes learning grammatical structures easier (Alipour, 2014). Students need to use standard grammar and adhere to grammatical conventions to succeed in academic writing at universities (Cavaleri & Dianati, 2016). However, they cannot improve their language skills without input. Lee (1997) explains that students fail to correct errors not because they lack grammatical knowledge but because they cannot detect the errors.

In writing activity, the students need some feedback from the lecturer to hone their writing skill, especially for Grammar because the common errors writing found by the lecturer is grammatical error. In some cases, the lecturer may feel that it is not their responsibility to provide detailed grammatical feedback on students' papers, or they may not feel confident that they have the ability on how to explain complex grammatical rules (Jones, Myhill & Bailey, 2013). To overcome this case, either lecturer or students should find an innovative way concerning corrective feedback, Grammar in particular. Thus, Grammarly comes in handy because it can help the students to be corrective feedback for their writing and considering as reflection for the students in their writing error.

Some of Indonesian researchers apparently found some aspects related to metalinguistic awareness. One of the studies comes from Misesani (2019) which is investigated English learners' metalinguistic awareness on detecting lexical ambiguity in a text. The result of the study reveals that most

of the participants could retrieve their metalinguistic awareness and linguistic knowledge in analyzing the article. Specifically, half of them could detect ambiguity because of the influence of their interest in semantics. Also another study carried out by Sirajudin (2017) in which he addressed that everyone's metalinguistic competence starts from an early age to adulthood. In the process of acquiring this metalinguistic competence, everyone will experience a development that is not always the same as the others' developments. Despite all relevant studies above, the research concerning this term has been a trending topic that either teacher or researcher interested in, in the whole of teaching and learning but still slightly limited to this country.

In exploiting an online tool in written feedback, there has been collaborative learning such a project involving foreign language students and teacher trainees in three different countries (Dooly, 2007). The project involved both online collaboration with international partners and face to-face classroom activities. In the contemporary L2 writing class, the provision of feedback via electronic files, chats, wikis, and blogs is no longer unusual (Elola & Oskoz, 2017; Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Both automatic, computer-generated feedback and human-generated, computer-mediated feedback can be provided electronically, synchronously as well as asynchronously. Today's learning will be accompanied by the most accurate online grammar checker named Grammarly that will play a role as a medium to raise students' metalinguistic awareness.

Grammarly could be the combination to balance face to-face activity. It is one of the online feedback programs that can help the writers to check their writing for grammar errors, potential stylistic mistakes, and other features of interest (Saddler, 2004). This online writing feedback has been studied in the last nine years both in a global and national context. There are a lot of studies that have been done abroad but still limited in Indonesian context. A previous study utilizing Grammarly conducted by Faller (2018) investigated the writing issues in two essays of Level 4 foundation students during the mid-semester examination. The issues included spelling, grammar, punctuation, enhancement suggestion, sentence structure, and style check. Meanwhile, Nova's (2018) study focuses on utilizing Grammarly in evaluating academic writing that detects the benefits and drawbacks of its online feedback application. This study used narrative inquiry as the approach in exploring three Indonesian postgraduate students' experiences by conducting interview and documentation. The last relevant study by Ghufon and Rosyida (2018) investigates the use of Grammarly and its

effectiveness in reducing students' errors in EFL writing compared to the teachers' indirect corrective feedback. The common issues that are the lack of students in terms of metalinguistic awareness. As previous studies revealed, Grammarly offers solution to overcome these issues because its presence as an online application that could facilitate direct feedback to the user that mediates to students' metalinguistic awareness.

The aforementioned relevant studies are focusing on Grammarly as the tool which could facilitate the users to write (Daniels & Leslie, 2013). However, less has been explored relevant to its role as the mediating tool in raising the users' metalinguistic awareness. Therefore, considering the importance of metalinguistic awareness role in L2 Writing and the increasing phenomenon of Grammarly as online feedback tool, this study is of paramount to be done. This study aims to explore the students' perceptions of metalinguistic awareness in English as foreign language writing as mediated by Grammarly as online writing feedback platform.

## **2. Method**

This study pertains to qualitative method since it describes the information as it is in accordance with the focus of the study (Jackson, Drummond & Camara, 2007). Under the approach of case study, this empirical study only focused on the boundary system of a writing class of students majoring in English language education in a public university in South East Sulawesi, Indonesia. Focusing on 24 participants who were willing to take part in this study, this study explored their perceptions of using Grammarly as online feedback tool in assisting them in the drafting process.

The data of this study were collected from writing class in which the students were required to write descriptive text as the first draft and checked their draft through Grammarly to get the online feedback. Having their first draft done, they submitted their writing to the teacher and got indirect feedback in form of symbols to the errors and general comment at the bottom of their writing. After that, they are required to revise their writing based on the teacher's feedback and consult the grammatical mistakes using Grammarly before submitting it to the teacher. After revising several drafts, the students would be asked to reflect on their experience in utilizing Grammarly throughout the drafting process. Besides reflection, a questionnaire was also administered to gain students' insight.

All the gathered students' documents concerning their experiences on utilizing Grammarly highlighted, collated and analyzed through coding and categorizing it in similar meaning (Sadoski & Paivio, 2001). The researcher

used pattern coding in analyzing data which is explained by Saldana (2013) that pattern coding method suggested to the researcher who need more exploration of participant actions/processes and perceptions found within the data. As for the data from the questionnaire, the frequency was calculated into percentages and this article only reports the result of the data analysis from the questionnaire.

### **3. Findings and Discussion**

There are two open-ended questions and three close-ended questions posed in the questionnaire. The researcher administered the questionnaire to the twenty participants through an online platform using Google form. The result of data analysis reveal two themes, i.e. Grammarly as facilitative tool in correcting grammatical mistakes and participants' realization on the use of Grammarly to their metalinguistic awareness.

#### ***3.1 Grammarly as facilitative tool in correcting grammatical mistakes***

Concerning the participants' response to the use of Grammarly in the drafting process, 60% agree that they were helped in the drafting process through the use of Grammarly. The participants acknowledged that the online feedback tool facilitated them to realize their grammatical mistakes. This finding resonances Qossemzadeh and Soleimani's (2016) finding that Grammarly as online feedback tool could mediate the students in raising their grammatical awareness and revising their drafts.

Considering the common mistakes' realization in the participants' drafts, the result of data analysis shows that 32% of the participants' problem is grammatical mistakes. They realized that their knowledge on grammar is still limited so that most of the mistakes in their writing draft deal with grammar in terms of syntax and it is not easy for them to detect on their own. Lee's (1997) study recalls the similar issue that students fail to detect errors due to their lack grammatical knowledge. In this study, some of the participants (17%) were difficult in using the appropriate tenses used in their composition. Meanwhile, 15% of the participants were having problem in punctuation use and capitalization. Also, vocabulary use is one of the students' problematic issue in writing. As much as 12% of the participants acknowledged of having lack of vocabulary but Grammarly facilitated them through some word choices offered in their drafts.

#### ***3.2 Students' metalinguistic awareness as mediated by Grammarly as online feedback tool***

Relevant to the participants' progress throughout their drafting process, Figure 1 illustrates how Grammarly helped reducing their common mistakes in their writing in terms of grammatical errors. Some of the participants

(29%) admitted that their grammar mistakes were reduced with Grammarly help in detecting their errors. Meanwhile, some participants (19%) were helped in terms of vocabulary choices in their composition and some other were helped in dealing with tenses and punctuation use as well as spelling errors. The drafting process indirectly foster the students to be more independent and autonomous in correcting their own errors in their writing. As Karyuatry, Rizqan and Darayani (2018) admitted, the use of Grammarly was helpful to minimize the teachers' overcorrection on the students' essay and in turn, the students were very actively seeking for their own errors independently.

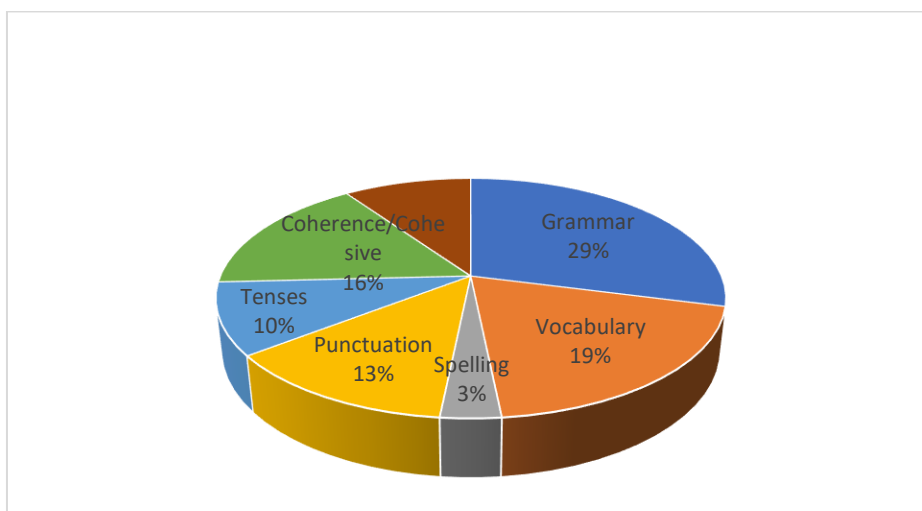


Figure 1. Students' realization after Grammarly use

Furthermore, the result of data analysis shows that 31% of the participants consider Grammarly as a reflection of their writing ability. Grammarly helped them reflect on their writing mistakes, show them their sentence writing ability, guide them to reduce the small mistakes that mostly ignored such as punctuation and spelling. As a result, 6% of participants admitted that they were helped in realizing the correct punctuation and spelling having used Grammarly throughout the drafting process.

This study reveals that the participants who frequently utilized Grammarly as online feedback tool could develop their errors awareness in their own writing and learn to correct then without using Grammarly. Some of the participants were confident that they submitted the final draft to their satisfaction. They think that they still have weaknesses and it takes a good deal of learning experience to write and learn more from their teachers feedback. This study indicates that as online feedback tool, although Grammarly could detect many errors in the students' writing they need more

experiences in learning to write, detect their grammatical mistakes, and raise their metalinguistic awareness.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The use of Grammarly could be one of the mediated tool in raising students' metalinguistic awareness in L2 Writing. The result of the study reveals that the participants were assisted in their drafting process and did some progress in terms of grammatical aspects after using Grammarly. Such result was obtained through repeated drafting and repeated use of Grammarly in the drafting process. This study implies that Grammarly could play role as a medium to help raise the students' metalinguistic awareness in L2 writing. This study also implies that language teacher and teacher educator could utilize this online tool in learning and teaching process in order to develop the language learners' autonomy.

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