Linguistic Features that Impact Essay Scores: a Corpus Linguistic Analysis of ESL Writing in Three Proficiency Levels

LEAH ESPADA-GUSTILO

ABSTRACT

This study, which is a part of a larger project on learner corpora, used a corpus linguistic approach to analyzing ESL writing produced by freshmen college students from five private schools in Metro Manila, Philippines, in their first week of classes. The data for the study includes (1) essay scores used to classify texts by levels of proficiency, (2) computer tagging results, and (3) MANOVA, ANOVA, and regression analyses. The analyses revealed that most of the general text characteristics (e.g. fluency, unique words, word per sentence, number of sentence, number of paragraphs) and lexical (except conjuncts), clause-level, and grammatical features all have a steady increase across proficiency levels. This implies that the (1) writers of high score essays (level 2 and 3) are likely to employ more of these structures, and (2) The employment of these structures impact the raters' assignment of scores on the essays. The findings of the present study lead to tentative conclusions and implications for curricular enhancement and research.

Key words: corpus linguistics; learner corpora; writing proficiency; ESL writing

CORPUS-BASED STUDIES IN ESL WRITING

While research in language teaching has already described many of the features of ESL and EFL writing across cultures, research on learner corpora, a systematic computerized collection of texts produced by learners (Negrillo & Dominguez, 2006), is still very young or scarce, especially in Filipino classroom setting. Corpus-based studies using tagging programs have been playing a big role in understanding ESL writing (Grant & Ginther, 2000). Findings from corpus analysis suggest what language items and processes are to be given more emphasis in instruction (Kennedy, 1998). One of the first to establish its utility in ESL writing is Carlson, Bridgeman, Camp, and Waanders (1985 cited in Grant & Ginther, 2000) who used the Writer's Workbench and uncovered that linguistic features such as words, content words, short sentences, and "to be" verbs have significant correlations with test scores. Similarly using the Writer's Workbench, Reid (1992) investigated the function of four cohesion devices: pronouns, conjunctions, subordinating clause conjunctions, and prepositions in native and non-native student essays and found out the two groups differed in their use of cohesion devices.

Linguistic analysis on learner corpora has been carried out to describe differing use of linguistic features at different stages of proficiency. Grant and Ginther (2000) analyzed 90 Test of Written English (TWE) written by ESL students at three proficiency levels to unearth differences in students' essays by using "features of essay length, lexical specificity (type/token ratio and average word length), lexical features (e.g., conjuncts, hedges), grammatical structures (e.g., nouns, nominalizations, modals) and clause level features (e.g., subordination, passives)" (p. 123). Their study indicated that as proficiency level increases, writers produce longer essays and utilize more unique word choices, conjuncts, demonstratives, emphatics and amplifiers, nominalizations, modals, varied verb tense,

subordinators, and passive constructions. They found that computer-tagged linguistic features have the facility to unfold differences in the use of linguistic features.

Comparing non-native (NNS) and native (NS) texts, Karasawa (2003) found that different patterns of elaboration exist in NNS's essays. For instance, high scorers "showed (1) greater length indicated by the number of tokens per essay and (2) higher linguistic complexity indicated by a higher type/token ratio and higher numbers of the first set of lexical items examined" (p. 399). Low score essays were found to have extensive use of the adjectives in the predicative function; while the intermediate score essays favoured the attributive function. One of the interesting results of the regression analyses indicated that some variables were strong predictors of essay scores. For instance, the adjective variable has low frequency in the low score essays and high in the intermediate and high score essays. In addition, the prepositional phrase is highly favoured in the high score essays and less frequently used in the low score essays. Karasawa (2003) ascribes the differences to the different stages of inter-language development of NNS. Aware of the restrictions imposed on the limited sample used in her study, Karasawa (2003) recommends replication using a larger sample. This recommendation was followed in the present study by employing 150 texts.

Drawing on Grant and Ginther (2000) and utilizing achievement tests as the corpus for his study, Becker (2010) set out to examine linguistic variables such as general, lexical, clause-level, and grammatical features, among others. His findings corroborated that of Grant and Ginther's (2000) findings that the frequency of many linguistic features increased as the level of proficiency increased. Becker (2010) made a call to replicate studies using the same methodology applied in different writing tasks/situations in order to establish that linguistic features can be an effective tool in distinguishing and describing different levels of writing. The present study was made in response to this call.

Gregg, Coleman, Davis and Chalk (2007) used high stakes timed impromptu essays to examine the influence of handwritten, typed, and typed/edited formats of an expository essay on the scores received by students with (n = 65) and without (n = 65) dyslexia. They also examined the contribution of spelling, handwriting, fluency, and lexical complexity to the essay scores of students with and without dyslexia on the same writing task. Regression analyses indicated that vocabulary complexity, verbosity, spelling, and handwriting contributed significantly to the quality of essay scores for writers with dyslexia than for the writers with no dyslexia. Gregg et al. discussed implications for assessment, instruction, and accommodation in order to call for reforms that aim at improved teaching and learning.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study set out to answer the following questions:

- What are the characteristics of ESL writing as revealed in the essays of freshmen college students across proficiency levels in terms of general texts characteristics, lexical features, clause-level features, and grammatical features?
- Are there significant differences in the characteristics across proficiency levels?
- What linguistic items are significant predictors of essay scores?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The findings of the present study prove to be a valuable contribution to the burgeoning body of research employing computer tagging of linguistic features of learner corpora in Asia. It demonstrates the facility of computers in the classroom as teacher aids in analyzing students'

output. In addition, the findings help characterize Filipino second language learning/acquisition at different proficiency levels and, therefore, inform teachers as to which linguistic features are to be given emphasis in teaching. Lastly, the findings can provide information to the students regarding the characteristics of writing and features of language that impact success in writing.

METHODOLOGY

CORPUS AND DATA

The corpus is made up of 150 essays written by freshmen college students in five private schools in Metro Manila, Philippines. A controlled writing prompt written below was administered by the participating teachers either on their first or second day of classes:

In not less than one page, single-spaced essay, write your ideas on the topic, The Importance of the English Language in the Different Areas of My life: personal life, academic pursuit, and professional life. Provide a separate explanation for each area using examples and illustrations.

The whole class period (1 to 1.5 hours) was devoted to the activity. Prior written permission was sought from the school heads of the participating teachers before the activity was administered to the students. The study has three datasets: (1) essay scores used to classify texts by levels of proficiency, (2) computer tagging results, and (3) MANOVA, ANOVA, and regression analyses.

PROCEDURES

As soon as the written essays had been collected from the five schools, word-processed files were created to facilitate clear reproduction of the essays for scoring and coding purposes. After creating the word-processing files, I reviewed the files to remove all typographical errors made by the typists. All essays were rated by me and two raters who had between 10 and 15 years experience teaching English. The essays were rated using a six-point holistic scoring rubric patterned after the Test of Written English (TWE) scoring guide, the written component of TOEFL. Holistic scoring has specific criteria but has no assigned scores for each criterion. Rather, it enables raters to assess the overall quality of essays while considering usually four elements: organization, language use, content, and mechanics. An average score is assigned to each essay. Drawing on Karasawa (2003), the assigned scores were the basis for classifying the essays into different levels of proficiency. Essays rated 1-2 were placed in level 1 proficiency, 3-4 in level 2, and 5-6 in level 3. Table 1 shows the number of essays for each proficiency level.

TABLE 1. Number of essays per proficiency level

Proficiency Level	Number of Essays
Level 1	35
Level 2	91
Level 3	24
TOTAL	150

In comparing the essays in three proficiency levels, means were used instead of actual frequencies. We had a trial rating session, during which the scoring guide was discussed and sample essays were rated. The two other raters acted as validators of the scoring guide (see

Appendix). We rated the 150 essays independently in one month. The interrater reliability was established among the three raters using the Kendall's Tau coefficient of concordance. The computed coefficient of concordance was .71, $p<.05$, which indicates that the raters highly agree on the ratings provided for the essays.

A computer expert subjected the essays into computer tagging using the ICE Tagger 1.0. The word class tags in the tagger is based in part on Quirk *et al*, *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (1985). Afterwards, the tagged files were run in another licensed text analysis software that automatically generates the data for general text characteristics and frequency of occurrence of lexical, grammatical, and clause-level features.

The frequency data were run in statistical software by a statistician to generate means, sums, standard deviations, and percentages. Tests of significance using MANOVA and ANOVA were also made to compare the differences in three proficiency levels. Regression analyses were employed to examine significant predictors of essay scores.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

GENERAL TEXT CHARACTERISTICS

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations of the variables that describe the general text characteristics of Filipino writers at three levels of proficiency.

TABLE 2. General Text Characteristics of Essays at Different Proficiency Levels

	PROFICIENCY LEVEL					
	LEVEL 1 (n=		LEVEL 2		LEVEL 3	
TEXT CHARACTERISTICS	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Fluency (total no. of words)	194.37	38.41	326.08	74.99	435.92	79.40
Lexical complexity:						
word length (letter per word)	4.40	0.23	4.34	0.22	4.44	0.24
unique words	91.40	15.71	145.20	34.26	210.04	37.07
Type/token Ratio	0.46	0.06	0.45	0.07	0.49	0.05
Sentence/paragraph length						
word per sentence	14.03	2.66	17.59	3.41	19.98	2.49
number of sentence	13.94	4.40	19.37	5.52	23.58	5.90
sentence per paragraph	5.52	4.73	5.67	3.20	6.78	2.45
number of paragraph	2.63	1.40	3.80	1.29	3.79	1.10
Readability	10.14	3.65	10.30	2.69	10.33	2.04
Strength index	25.60	23.31	19.12	19.75	19.29	16.96

The data shown in Table 2 either corroborate or challenge predictions and findings of earlier research. For fluency index, for example, Grant and Ginther (2000) and Karasawa (2003) found that as proficiency level increases the overall word count also increases. In this study, high score essays have more number of tokens, indicating that writers in this level produced longer essays. For the lexical complexity/specificity variable, Grant and Ginther (2000) found that average word length and type/token ratio (i.e. number of types of words divided by the total number of words) increased as scores increased. In this study, however, essays at Level 2 proficiency have the shortest word length and the lowest type/token ratio. Level 3 essays have the longest word length and the highest type/token ratio, followed by Level 1 essays. The number of unique words or different words in an essay, a measurement

of the size of the vocabulary of the author, has a steady increase from low to mid and high score essays. As regards sentence/paragraph length, word per sentence, number of sentence, number of sentence per paragraph and number of paragraph have a steady increase as proficiency level increases. The readability index, a measure of how easy or difficult the text is based on the level of education of the reader to understand it, showed that the essays in all three levels require an average reading level of 10 (10^{th} grade). The Right Writer 5.0 software analysis indicated that a reading score between 7^{th} and 11^{th} grade is considered good. The relative strength index which measures writing style, however, showed that the essays in all three levels have a weak style. The essays will be considered as possessing good style if they scored 50% or higher.

The MANOVA was used to test the differences in proficiency levels 1, 2 and 3 on text characteristics as a whole and individually for each factor. It was found in the overall MANOVA text characteristics at three proficiency levels significantly differ, $p<.001$. For the univariate analysis, number of words, words per sentence, number of sentence, number of unique words, type/token ratio, and number of paragraph at three proficiency levels significantly differ.

The data were analyzed using multiple regression. Used as regressors are the factors of text characteristics. The regression was a rather fair fit (R^2adj = 45.55%), but the overall relationship was significant ($F_{7,140} = 18.56$, $p < 0.05$). With other variables held constant, essay proficiency levels were positively related to *word per sentence* and *number of unique words*, increasing by 0.26 for every extra word per sentence, and by 0.45 for every extra number of unique words. Word per sentence and number of unique words significantly predict proficiency levels of essay scores t (138) = 2.63, t (138) =2.48, p < 0.01.

LEXICAL FEATURES

The results of automatic tagging for the Lexical items that fulfil discourse function in the text (Grant & Ginther, 2000) are shown in Table 3 below.

TABLE 3. Means, Standard Deviations, Frequencies and Percentages for the Lexical Features at Different Proficiency Levels

	PROFICIENCY LEVEL							
	LEVEL 1		LEVEL 2		LEVEL 3		**Levels 1-3**	Levels 1-3
LEXICAL FEATURES	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	**f**	%
Intensifiers	2.20	1.61	4.59	3.47	8.38	3.55	**696**	1.58
Demonstratives	1.59	1.65	2.97	2.57	6.38	3.35	**477**	1.08
Additives	0.97	1.18	2.26	1.81	3.13	2.21	**315**	0.72
Exclusives	0.34	0.73	1.47	1.41	1.96	1.68	**191**	0.43
Particularisers	0.37	0.69	0.65	0.98	1.13	1.42	**99**	0.23
Hedges	0.17	0.45	0.43	0.82	0.71	1.20	**62**	0.14
Conjuncts	0.37	0.73	0.30	0.67	0.54	0.93	**53**	0.12

As can be seen, out of the seven lexical items tagged, the four lexical items that were most frequently used by Filipino writers especially by level 3 writers are intensifiers, demonstratives, additives and exclusives. In describing how important English is in their lives, the writers in the study had the tendency to intensify their claims using adverbs such as *so, very,* and *really*, to maintain coherence by frequently using demonstratives (e.g. *this, that*) as referring items, to use additive adverbs such as *both, neither, too,* and the like; and to use exclusive adverbs such as *merely, only, just.* On the other hand, they seemed to have been

unaware of the need to use particularisers (e.g. *in particular, at least*), to hedge their claims, and to show sentence connections through conjuncts (e.g. *however, meanwhile, for example*). There is an increase of these features as proficiency level increases, corroborating Grant and Ginther's (2000) findings for lexical features.

The MANOVA results indicated that when taken as a whole, proficiency levels significantly vary on lexical features. The UNIVARIATE analysis showed that proficiency levels significantly differ on all lexical features except for conjuncts.

The multiple regression analysis showed that lexical features, when taken together, significantly predict proficiency levels ($F_{11,38} = 21.17$, $p < 0.05$. When taken individually, exclusives, additives, intensifiers, and demonstratives significantly predict essay scores t (140) = 2.81, t (140) =3.67, t (140) =6.01, and t (140) =4.51, p < 0.01.

GRAMMATICAL FEATURES

The next set of linguistic features tagged were the grammatical structures at the word level. Corroborating Grant and Ginther's findings (2000), nouns, pronouns, and verbs have the highest frequency of occurrence among the grammatical structures tagged in this study, as shown in Table 4. Other grammatical items were maximized by the writers except for nominalizations, which showed a different pattern. It has the fewest frequency in level 1. Writers in level 3, however, made use of more nominalised structures, indicating more complexity in their writing. What is most interesting is that there was a steady increase of all linguistic items under consideration across levels, which shows that level 3 writers are likely to employ more of these structures when they write their opinions about the importance of English. They almost doubled their use of nouns, prepositions, adverbs (general), and modals and doubled their use of pronouns, verbs, adjectives, and articles. As mentioned earlier, the pattern in nominalization was different in that there was a 9-point jump from the mean score of level 1 to the mean score of level 3.

TABLE 4. Means, Standard Deviations, Frequencies and Percentages for the Grammatical Features at Different Proficiency Levels

	PROFICIENCY LEVEL							
	LEVEL 1		LEVEL 2		LEVEL 3		**Levels 1-3**	Levels 1-3
Grammatical Features	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	**f**	%
Nouns	36.03	8.87	52.65	13.66	71.00	16.26	**7756**	17.64
Pronouns	30.74	7.77	53.05	17.93	63.96	15.85	**7439**	16.92
Verbs	29.34	8.67	52.71	13.59	61.21	11.56	**7293**	16.59
Prepositions	24.17	16.36	33.15	8.85	44.54	11.91	**4932**	11.22
Adjectives	15.00	5.06	24.42	6.61	33.67	8.71	**3555**	8.09
Articles	10.34	4.65	17.58	7.50	26.29	9.17	**2593**	5.90
Adverbs (general)	7.40	4.90	9.37	5.71	12.33	7.12	**1408**	3.20
Modals	5.83	2.63	9.05	4.87	9.05	2.32	**1331**	3.03
Nominalizations	1.77	1.42	4.03	4.52	11.42	4.65	**703**	1.60

The MANOVA and ANOVA results indicated that the essays in three proficiency levels significantly differ on grammatical level features. Multiple regression analysis showed that grammatical features, as a whole, significantly predict essay scores ($F_{9,140} = 24.99$, $p < 0.05$). However, when taken individually, only nominalizations, verb, and adverbs (general) significantly predict essay scores t (140) = 5.09, t (140) =2.19, t (140) = -2.04, p < 0.01.

CLAUSE LEVEL FEATURES

The last set of linguistic items tagged is the clause-level grammatical structures (See table 5). Consistent with the results on grammatical items at the word level, clause level features are likely to be employed more by level 3 writers. They almost doubled their use of complementation and subordination almost tripled their use of coordination, relative clauses, and passives; and quadrupled their use of adverb-*wh*. As writers become more proficient, they use more of these structures (Grant & Ginther, 2000). It is also interesting to note that the writers across the three levels favoured coordination structures vis-a-vis subordination. Perhaps it is because coordination is a simpler structure compared with subordination. Adverb-wh, relative clauses, and passives were the least frequent clause-level structures used by the writers, which might be due to the complexity in structuring these types of clauses.

TABLE 5. Means, Standard Deviations, Frequencies and Percentages for the Clause-level features at Different Proficiency Levels

	PROFICIENCY LEVEL							
	LEVEL 1		LEVEL 2		LEVEL 3		**Levels 1-3**	Levels 1-3
Clause Level Features	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	**f**	%
Coordination	5.31	3.20	11.89	4.76	14.83	7.19	**1624**	3.69
Subordination	7.20	3.52	11.46	5.58	12.50	4.73	**1595**	3.63
Complementation (that complement and infinitive complement)	4.34	2.44	6.62	3.86	7.46	3.22	**933**	2.12
Adverb-wh	1.43	1.70	2.31	2.18	4.63	2.70	**371**	0.84
Relative clauses	1.06	0.91	1.71	1.43	2.88	2.09	**262**	0.60
Passives	1.09	1.14	1.93	1.80	2.79	1.53	**280**	0.64

The multivariate and univariate analyses showed that the essays written in three proficiency levels significantly differ on clause-level features. The multiple regression analysis indicated that, as a whole, clause-level features significantly predict essay scores; as individual factors, coordination, adverb-wh, and relative clauses significantly predict essay scores $t(142) = 3.71$, $t(142)=2.00$, $t(142)= 3.62$, $p < 0.01$.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In relation to the questions under consideration, the findings of the present study lead to tentative conclusions (at least, in relation to the corpus used in this study) and suggest implications for curricular enhancement and research. Firstly, the analyses of essays of freshmen college students from five private schools in the Philippines revealed that most of the general text characteristics (e.g. fluency, unique words, word per sentence, number of sentence, number of paragraphs) and lexical (except conjuncts), clause-level, and grammatical features increased steadily across proficiency levels. This implies that the (1) writers of high score essays (level 2 and 3) are likely to employ more of these structures, and (2) the employment of these structures impacted the raters' assignment of scores on the essays. There was a significant difference in all levels of proficiency for all categories. Multiple regression analyses indicated that, as a whole, general text characteristics, lexical

features, grammatical structures at word level, and clause-level features significantly predict essay scores; as individual factors, word per sentence, number of unique words, exclusives, additives, intensifiers, demonstratives, nominalizations, verbs, general adverbs , coordinators, adverb-wh, and relative clauses are significant predictors of essay scores.

The findings of the present study should be applied to classroom instruction so that curricular adjustments can be made in English instruction both at secondary and tertiary education. First, teachers must make their students be aware that certain linguistic features impact the value attached by their teachers in assessing their writing. Taking for example the finding that the essays of high proficiency writers possessed both lexical complexity (number of unique words) and syntactic complexity (word per sentence), it is obvious that the raters placed high premium on the ability of students to manipulate varied vocabulary and use more complex sentence constructions. This means that the low essay scorers had limited vocabulary resources compared with the high scorers. What can teachers make of this? This observation implicates that there is a need to help our students enlarge their store of vocabulary. Teachers should go beyond teaching vocabulary learning strategies; they should instil in their students the love for reading and emphasize the importance of having a strong vocabulary (Gustilo, 2009, p. 23). In addition, students must be encouraged to go beyond writing short and choppy subject-verb-direct object sentence constructions. Varied sentence structures, for example, those that employ subordinations and introductory participial phrases, among other complex structures, must be explored by students in their writing to avoid monotonous style of writing.

More investigations using corpus linguistics on learner corpora must be conducted to confirm the impact of certain linguistic features on essay scores such as the ones identified in the present study. For now, it is worth mentioning that, perhaps, the most important contribution of the present study is that it corroborated previous claims by researchers that the analysis of linguistic features is useful in distinguishing different proficiency levels, and learner corpora can disclose areas where learners tend to show under-use or over-use of linguistic features (Negrillo & Dominguez, 2006, p. 83).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the University Research Coordination Office (URCO) of De La Salle University-Manila for funding this project.

REFERENCES

Becker, A. (2010). Distinguishing linguistic and discourse features in ESL students' written performance.Retrieved December 10, 2010 from http://mjal.org/Journal/Distinguishing%20linguistic%20and%20discourse%20features%20in%20ESL.pdf

Ferris, D. (1999). The case for grammar correction in L2 writing classes: A response to Truscott (1996). *Journal of Second Language Writing,* Vol. 8, 1-11.

Grant, L. & Ginther, A. (2000). Using computer-tagged linguistic features to describe L2 writing differences. *Journal of Second Language Writing, Vol. 9* No. 2, 123-145.

Gregg, N., Coleman, C., Davis, M. & Chalk, J. (2007). Essay writing: Implications for high-stakes tests. *Journal of Learning Disabilities.* Vol. 4 No. 4, 306-313.

Espada-Gustilo, L. (2009). Sentence-level errors in ESL writers' diagnostic essays: What students have achieved and what we can do. *Philippine ESL Journal.* Vol. 3, 108-126.

Zhang, J. (2008). A comprehensive review of studies on second language writing. *HKBU Papers in Applied Language Studies*. Vol. *12.* Retrieved December, 2010 from http://lc.hkbu.edu.hk/book/pdf/v12_05.pdf

Karasawa, S. (2003). Patterns of elaboration and inter-language development: An exploratory corpus analysis of college student essays. Retrieved September 26, 2007 from http://Ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/publications/CL2003/papers/karasawa.pdf

Negrillo, A.D. & Fernandez-Dominguez, J. (2006). Error tagging systems for learner corpora. *RESLA.* Vol. 19, 83-102. Retrieved December, 2010 from http://*dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/fichero_articulo?codigo=2198610...*

Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G. & Svartik, J. (1985). *Comprehensive grammar of the English Language.* Longman: London.

Reid,J. (1992). A computer text analysis of four cohesion devices in English discourse by native and non-native writers. *Journal of Second Language Writing.* Vol. 1 No. 2, 79-107.

Leah Espada-Gustilo
De La Salle University-Manila, Philippines
leah.gustilo@dlsu.edu.ph

APPENDIX

SCORE OF 6: A writer in this level shows highly-advanced proficiency with excellent quality in both content and surface-level items. The essay

1. addresses the prompt **specifically and effectively, resulting in an outstandingly well-argued/elaborated message content;**
2. provides appropriate and sufficient details to support a thesis statement or illustrate points in all parts of the task (intro, body, conclusion);
3. displays consistently efficient use of language—using effective and varied syntactic structures (e.g. subordination and coordination; simple and complex sentences; etc) and appropriate word choice/word form (nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs are appropriately used);
4. exhibits clear organization and skilfully arranged ideas--(intro, body, and conclusion are effectively developed; no irrelevant ideas/deviations from the topic, use of transitions);
5. **contains no errors in grammar but has very minor lapses in punctuation and spelling.**

SCORE OF 5: A writer in this level shows reasonably **advanced proficiency** although the output may contain minor lapses in quality. The essay

1. addresses the prompt **specifically, resulting in a reasonably argued/elaborated message content;**
2. provides **appropriate and sufficient details to support a thesis statement or illustrate points in all parts of the task** (intro, body, conclusion);
3. displays **competence in the use of language**: using varied syntactic structures and appropriate word choice/word form
4. exhibits clear organization and smooth flow of ideas--(appropriate paragraphing, fully developed paragraphs, no irrelevant ideas/deviations from the topic);
5. **has almost no errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling.**

SCORE OF 4: A writer in this level shows adequate proficiency in spite of lapses in quality. The essay

1. **addresses the prompt adequately but fails to fully develop some parts of the prompt (some points are not fully explained or elaborated);**
2. **provides adequate details to support or illustrate its claims;**
3. **shows inconsistent skill in the use of language in sentence structure and word choice.**
4. exhibits adequate organization and some degree of coherence.
5. contains some grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors.

SCORE OF 3: A writer in this level shows a developing proficiency and produces an output with one or more of the following problematic items:

1. inadequate details
2. obviously weak vocabulary or inappropriate word choice/word form
3. monotonous or problematic sentence structures
4. limited organization and development of ideas
5. contains quite a number of grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors but the message/content is still comprehensible

SCORE OF 2: A writer in this level shows little proficiency and produces an output with one or more of the following serious problems:

1. inappropriate or insufficient details
2. limited vocabulary or inaccurate word forms
3. consistent and major problems in sentence structures
4. poor organization and serious problems in the development of ideas
5. somewhat unclear message due to serious problems in grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

SCORE OF 1: A writer in this level shows **very little proficiency** and produces an output with one of more of the following severe problems:

1. little or no point of view to illustrate its claim
2. grave errors in vocabulary/word usage
3. persistent errors in sentence structures
4. incomprehensible due to persistent errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling
5. highly disorganized and incoherent; the essay is very short

SCORE OF 0: The writer was unable to develop/finish the essay or has written something that completely deviates from the topic.