

MORPHOLOGICAL AND SYNTACTICAL ERRORS IN ENGLISH ESSAYS WRITTEN BY EFL STUDENTS

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Abstract: This research aims at showing morphological and syntactical errors in English Department students' essays. Besides, this research also focuses on seeking factors affecting the errors, which include interlanguage error and intralanguage error. The data of this research were 30 English essays written by English Department students in Jakarta. The data was analyzed using error analysis to describe syntactical and morphological errors found in students' essays and the factors affecting the errors. The results show that the most dominant errors were inflectional errors (120 or 66%) in morphological level and tenses errors (52 or 41%) at the syntactical level. The analysis also revealed that there were 93 or 79% intralanguage errors in morphological level and 102 or 81% intralanguage errors in the syntactical level. These findings imply that the teacher of English as a foreign language (EFL) should be aware of errors made by the students and the cause of errors in writing.

Keywords: writing; EFL; morphology; syntax; error analysis.

Introductions

Successful writing can be seen when the readers receive the information entirely and easily without any missed interpretation. As a productive skill, writing becomes challenging to Indonesian students who perceive English as a foreign language (EFL). Making errors in speaking is one of the scariest events they may want to deal with when producing the English language. Such errors often occur in morphological and phonological items when reading an English text aloud (Fatmawati, 2018).

Nevertheless, the productive skills are not speaking alone; writing skill comes next. The obstacles they may face during the process of writing can be deciding the topic, lack of ideas and data, syntactical errors, vocabularies, and many more. Many university students start writing course with basic proficiency of linguistic features used in writing. They know the coverage of writing such as spelling, grammar, sentence structure, paragraph coherency, but unfortunately, they do not master it yet.

Helping the students write essays and analyze their mistakes and errors may help them revise their writing. Khansir (2012, p. 3) notes that students' linguistic difficulties and needs can be discovered through error analysis that later on will help teachers to handle students' errors in their writing. Afterward, the next strategy can be designed to overcome the errors found in students' writing. The analysis may cover variously from the language processing itself, such as syntax, grammar, and the content of the writing, such as the main idea, coherency (Watcharapunyawong & Usaha, 2012; Yunhadi, 2016).

Several researchers have researched to investigate errors in writing. One of those is Sawalmeh (2013, p. 10), who revealed that most frequent errors found in the essay written by Arabic students are Verb Tense error. Another study reveals that that native Arabic students encountered immense difficulty while attempting to use English articles (Thyab, 2016, p. 3). The source of such difficulty is based on the degree of difference between the Arabic article system and the English article system. A recent study also finds out that Thai EFL students tend to make errors in writing because of their lack of knowledge in grammar and vocabulary (Sermsook et al., 2017). These cases have shown that the errors also occur in Indonesian students as well as other EFL students whose first language interferes with their learning process. Therefore,

in the case of EFL learners, error analysis plays an essential role in this research. It is employed to elaborate common errors made by the students.

Errors in learning a second or foreign language may come from the interference of the first language that is transferred to target language and the interference within the target language itself, such as lack of knowledge of the target language. One of the strategies that learners use when writing in English was to think in the L1 and then to translate into English (Cabrera Solano et al., 2014, p. 40). Intralanguage errors are categorized into four types, namely overgeneralization, ignorance of rules restriction, incomplete application of rules, and false concept hypothesized.

As morphology deals with how a word is formed, it is crucial to know the basic knowledge about the word itself. Words are divided into two types: content word and function word. According to Fromkin, Rodman, & Hyams (2017, p. 39), the content word is the word that represents concepts such as object, idea, thing, and action that can be added by new words. Hence, the content word is also classified as an open class word. Whereas, function words do not have clear lexical meaning or distinct concept associated with them, including conjunctions such as 'and,' 'or,' and 'but'; prepositions such as in and of; the articles the and a/an, and pronouns such as it. Words can also be categorized into lexeme and word form. The lexeme itself is a word that is stored in a mental lexicon which related to word form, For instance, the word 'go' in our mental lexicon relates to the word form 'goes,' 'go,' 'went,' 'going' and 'gone.'

The basic units of analysis in morphology are morphemes (Bauer, 1983, p. 13). Morphemes, as the smallest unit of grammar, make the core of a language. Many linguists draw definitions of morphology. One of those is Lieber (2015, p. 2), who perceives morphology as the study of word transformation and how its transformation is formed to be used in a sentence. This perception is agreed by Aronoff and Fudeman (2005, p. 2), who define morphology as the mental system found in word formations and its structure.

Morphology that refers to the process of changing word without changing significant meaning and referent (Ermanto, 2016, p. 1; Humaidi, 2018). When the inflectional word is formed, it deals with grammar and its properties (Stump, 2001, p. 1). Additionally, Fromkin et. Al. (2017, p. 50) states that "Inflectional morphemes represent relationships between different parts of a sentence. For example, -s expresses the relationship between the verb and the third person singular subject; -ing expresses the relationship between the time the utterance is spoken (e.g., now) and the time of the event." The second is derivational morphology that changes the part of speech or the underlying meaning of a word. Also, when affixes are added into the base, the new word with a new meaning is derived (Fromkin et al., 2017, p. 44). The last is a compound word that comes when two separate words with different meanings are joined to make a new word. Fromkin (2017, p. 57) explains that "In English, the rightmost word in a compound is the head of the compound. The head is the part of a word or phrase that determines its broad meaning and grammatical category. Thus, when the two words fall into different categories, the class of the second or final word determines the grammatical category of the compound: noun + adjective = adjective, as in headstrong, verb + noun = noun, as in "pickpocket."

The syntax is the pattern of language, and it is a part of grammar that represents the speaker's knowledge of how the sentence is constructed (Fromkin et al., 2017, p. 77). In addition to that, syntax refers to the rules of how words are combined to form phrases, clauses, and sentences. More simply, syntax can be defined as the arrangement of words in a sentence. O'Grady & Archibald (2015, p. 164) categorized syntax into two categories, namely lexical categories and non-lexical categories. Noun, Verb, Adjective, Adverb, and Preposition belong to Lexical categories while determiners, auxiliary, conjunctions belong to the non-lexical category.

The syntax is not only focusing on how words are ordered in a sentence, but also on how the words are ordered in a clause and phrase. In other words, Syntax is about the arrangement of word structure and word order or a set of rules that is constructed to create well-formed sentences in a language — phrase as a basic constituent of clause or sentence. A clause is the constituent of a sentence that comes in two types, namely the main clause and subordinate clauses. The main clause can stand alone to give meaning (Washington, 2019). A sentence is a group of words based on specific rules to give meaning. In English, sentence mostly comes from the pattern of S = V or Predicate. However, some sentences have a hidden verb, which can be found in the direct sentence. For instance, "sit!" that means (you) sit! Sentences are categorized into three tenses. They are present tense, past tense, and future tense. The sentence can also be categorized based on its form, such as direct sentence, question, or negative sentence, and imperative



sentence. The area of this research is on the syntactical and morphological errors that occur in English essays written by English Department students of Sekolah Tinggi Bahasa Asing Pertiwi, Jakarta. Syntactical error is predictably occurring mostly because of a lack of knowledge in sentence structure, while morphological error occurs when there is an incorrect form of a word.

Method

The data source of this research is 30 English-written essays comprising from three to five paragraphs written by English Department students of Sekolah Tinggi Bahasa Asing Pertiwi, Jakarta. The topic of the essay is a review of a favorite movie. The goals of this research are to find out syntactical errors and morphology errors in the students' essays. Syntactical errors will be categorized based on the syntactic types, namely tense, preposition, adverb, adjective, subject-verb agreement, gerund, and to-infinitive. While morphological errors will be analyzed based on three types of morphology, i.e., inflectional morphology, derivational morphology, and word compounding. The data will be analyzed using qualitative data analysis. Qualitative research requires organizing, counting, and explaining the data (Creswell, 2011; Shepherd, 1997).

This research employs some procedures. First, the researcher reads the essays thoroughly and identifies morphological and syntactical errors. The researcher categorizes the morphological errors into inflectional, derivational, and compounding words errors and the syntactical errors into tense, preposition, adverb, adjective, subject-verb agreement, gerund, and to-infinitive. Next, the researcher identifies the factors affecting the errors based on interlanguage and intralanguage errors. Furthermore, last, the researcher calculates both morphological and syntactical errors then present them into a diagram and table.

Results and Discussion

A. Morphological Errors

One hundred seventeen utterances are consisting of errors. From those utterances, it is found that there are 181 morphological errors. In detail, there are 120 Inflectional and 59 derivational, and two compound words are found. The calculation is shown in Table 1.

Tabel 1. Morphological Errors

Morphological errors	Frequencies	Percentages
Inflection Morphology	120	66,3%
Derivational Morphology	59	32,6%
Compound Word	2	1,1%
Total	181	100,0%

Based on the findings, it is shown that inflectional error is the most dominant error found in students' essays. It relates to the grammatical feature such as subject-verb agreement and tenses. In this research, the most inflectional errors have occurred on the miss election of the verb. A verb is an important part that contributes to meaning to the sentence or clauses (Miller, 2002, p. 47). The samples of errors found in the findings are:

- 1) We can see that Chris Gardner's suffering **begin** with an uncertainty of his job
- 2) he **accepts** in stockbroker office
- 3) This movie **telling** about a boy **who** name is Dre Parker.
- 4) Cheng **Began** to **teasing** a joke in their school.

In sample (1), 'We can see that Chris Gardner's suffering begin with an uncertainty of his job,' the selection of verb is incorrect as the noun phrase, Chris Gardner's suffering, refers to a singular noun. Singular noun requires s to follow the verb. Thus, the verb of the sample (1) should be 'begins.' In sample

(2), the error is on the selection of a verb for passive form. The pronoun (he) does not accept the broker office. Instead, he is accepted to join broker office. Thus, the acceptable sentence is 'He is accepted in broker office.' Next, in the sample (3), there is a miss election of a verb in the simple present tense. The writer used Verb-ing in the simple present tense and 'who' for the connector to the next clause. The connector 'who' is not acceptable because it is supposed to be followed by a predicate instead of a noun. Therefore, the correct sentence should be 'This movie tells about a boy named Dre Parker'

Derivational errors are also often found in students' essays. There are 59 derivational errors or 33% of all morphological errors. The errors found in derivational errors are the miss election of part of speech, preposition, and conjunction. Here are the samples of derivational errors found in students' writings:

- 1) Because of his **persistent**, slow but sure, he starts to find his luck.
- 2) He met one girl **who** name is Meiyong.
- 3) This film is packed with **complete** and **reasonable**.
- 4) It was released for the first time in 1994 of the city Los Angeles.
- 5) This movie **tell** us about a kid who gets culture shock after **moved** from the US to China because of his mother's duties.

In sample (1), there is a miss election of the word 'persistent.' The suitable word is persistence (n) instead of persistent (adj). Next, in the sample (2), there is a miss election of connector 'who.' It is because 'name' is the possession of Meiyong, therefore the suitable word to replace 'who' is 'whose.' The miss election of suffixes is also found in sample (3), where the writer chooses the wrong words for the adverbial. Hence, suitable words should be completely and reasonably. In sample (4), the miss election also occurs on preposition in which 'of' is supposed to be replaced by 'in' and the complete sentence should be 'It was released for the first time in 1994 in the city of Los Angeles'. Moreover, last in the sample (5), the writer put the wrong gerund. As stated in the sentence, the word 'move' comes after the word 'After'; therefore, the verb should be a gerund, 'moving.'

B. Syntactical Errors

There are 126 Syntactical errors are found in students' essays. The errors are classified into 52 tenses, 41 Subject-Verb agreement, twelve adverbials, nine adjectives, six prepositions, three to-infinitives, and three gerunds. The calculation of syntactical errors is presented in Table 2, presented below.

Table 2. Syntactical Errors

Categories of syntactical errors	Frequencies	Percentages
Tense	52	41%
Preposition	6	5%
Adjective	9	7%
Adverb	12	10%
To infinitive	3	2%
Gerund	3	2%
Subject-verb agreement	41	33%
Total	126	100,0%

According to the findings, the most significant syntactical error found in the essays is on the tenses, then followed by subject-verb agreement, adjectives, adverbials, prepositions, gerund, and to-infinitive. Students make repeated mistakes in choosing the proper verb for a particular tense. As previously mentioned by Miller (2002, p. 47) that verbs take substantial control over the sentence structure, therefore the sentences made by the students are not comprehensible. Students often commit errors in choosing the tenses, such as the examples below:

- 1) He has mother who always **loved** him.
- 2) I choose learning English not only because I really **liked** that language.
- 3) Problem **arises** when he accused of killing a six years old little girl.



In sample (1) and (2), the student chooses past form verb, loved, in the simple present tense. Hence, the correct sentence is, 'He has a mother who always loved him.' Whereas in the sample (3), the students choose the present verb in the simple past tense. Thus, the correct sentence is 'Problem raised when he was accused of killing a six years old little girl.'

As mentioned previously, that errors in Subject-verb agreement take the second biggest number found in students' essays. Here are the samples of errors found:

- 1) She **believe** that with Rafli, she will be happy.
- 2) Religious education and ethics **is** not just a companion curriculum.
- 3) Yong Goo **is** really **love** his daughter.

In sample (1), the student does not put suffix s in the verb 'believe' for the singular subject, the correct sentence is 'She believes that with Rafli, she will be happy.' While in sample (2) there is miss election of being for plural subject, the correct sentence is

'Religious education and ethics are not just a companion curriculum.' Moreover, in the sample (3), there are two predicates in the sentence in which one of them, be 'is' not suitable for the sentence. Hence, the correct sentence is, 'Yong Goo really **loves** his daughter.'

Another syntactical error in students writing is found in adjectives where there are some errors in forming the adjective phrase. The errors happen by either miss election or omission word or affixes. The errors in the adjective phrase are found in the samples below:

- 1) Kungfu Panda is definitely one of my **favorites movie**
- 2) Everything about it is just so **sparkly**
- 3) Arlo is **cowardly** dinosaur.

In sample (1), there is an unnecessary addition of suffix-s in the adjective word 'favorite.' While in the sample (2) and (3) there are miss-elections of words where the students chose adverbial word instead of the adjective word. There are also syntactical errors in the adverbial level. The errors occurred when the students tend to form the adverbial phrase. The sample is as follows:

- 1) This film is packed with complete and reasonable
- 2) **Beside** from the interesting story.
- 3) I will get many advantages such as gives me access to the world of entertainment like **an** internet.

In sample (1), there is a miss election of a word where the students choose adjective words instead of the adverbial word. While in the sample (2), there is an unnecessary addition of the adverb 'from,' which should be omitted. Then, in the sample (2), there is an error in choosing the noun for the adverb of degree 'many' where the noun 'advantage' should be added by the suffix -s. Other errors are found in prepositions that mostly occurred because of miss election of the word. These are the samples:

- 1) The name **from** this country is Beijing.
- 2) It was released for the first time in 1994 of the City Los Angeles.
- 3) Doraemon became **Nobita** best buddy.

The preposition 'from' in the sample (1) should be replaced by the preposition 'of' should be replaced by 'in.' While in (3), the phrase 'Nobita best buddy' should be formed into possessive preposition 'Nobita's best buddy.' Other ill-formed sentences are also found in gerund and To-infinitive. The gerund is the -ing form of a verb that changes the verb into a noun, while To-infinitive is the best form of a verb that cannot be added by any suffix. Here are the samples:

- 1) Rafli who choose to wait for the right time to **declared** his love
- 2) I found my obstacles too, like how to **spelling** words
- 3) **Beside** that I should keep **to study** English.
- 4) **Watched** this movie bring me to my favorite movie all the time
- 5) **Learn** English is not easy.

Sample (1) and (2) are the samples of error in to-infinitive where the students put suffix -ed after the verb to declare and suffix -ing after the verb "to spell." Whereas, sample (3), (4) and (5) are the samples of error in gerund. In sample (3), the verb 'keep' is always followed by a gerund. Thus, the correct sentence is 'Besides, I should keep studying English.' In sample (4) and (5), the errors occurred because the students do not put gerunds in the first sentence to change the verb into a noun. the revised sentences are 'Watching this movie brings me to my favorite movie all the time,' and 'Learning English is not easy.'

Intralinguage error takes the dominant part that affects the errors in both morphological and syntactical levels. It happened mostly because there is a lack of knowledge in the target language, English. It can be seen from the result of the findings that the most errors in morphological level are inflectional errors, and in syntactical level is the tenses. Both inflectional and tenses relate to grammatical rules. Therefore, it can be concluded that students' lack of grammatical rules can be the primary cause of the errors committed by the students. Here are some samples of intralinguage errors:

- 1) That is what makes the story interesting, and I **loved** it.
- 2) They **managed** to **built** up their universe and unite it.
- 3) Everything about it is just so **sparkly**

In sample (1), there is a miss election of a verb where there are two tenses in one condition. 'What makes story interesting' refers to present tense while the verb in the sentence 'I **loved** it' refers to- past tense. Thus, there is inconsistency in choosing proper tense. Sample (2) shows that the student might have an unclear idea in using a to-infinitive form. He/she chooses V3 after 'to' instead of V1.

C. Factors Affecting Errors

As previously mentioned in sections A and B, 117 utterances are consisting of morphological errors and 126 utterances consisting of syntactical errors. Most errors come from interlanguage errors. The calculation is presented in Table 3:

Table 3. Factors Affecting Errors

Types of Error	Factors	
	Intralinguage	Interlanguage
Morphological level	93 errors	24 errors
Sytactical level	102 errors	24 errors

Last, there is miss election of the adjective verb. It is seen that the student has limited vocabulary in English so that he/she cannot choose the proper word or part of speech. Besides the intralinguage error, Interlanguage also affects the errors in students writing. Interlanguage error comes from negative transference from mother language (Kaweera, 2013, p. 10). Here are the samples of interlanguage errors:

- 1) As a **foreign people**, Mr. Todd didn't understand about Indians culture.
- 2) He wrote on the **booknote** which was written by Voldemort
- 3) This movie **telling** about a boy **who name is Dre Parker**

In sample (1), it is seen that the student uses 'foreign people' as in Indonesian we call foreigners as "orang asing," and in the sample (2), there is negative transference in compounding two words. 'Booknote' is translated from 'buku tulis' which is not acceptable in English. Last, in the sample (3), the student aims to explain that the name of the boy is Dre Parker; however, he/she translate the utterance in Indonesian style 'anak laki-laki yang bernama Dre Parker' or 'a boy who name is Dre Parker.'

Conclusions

According to the result of the research, some conclusions are drawn as follows:

- (a) The number of morphological errors is 181 items, including 150 inflectional, 59 derivational, and two compound words.
- (b) The number of syntactical errors is 126 items, including 52 tenses, 41 Subject-Verb agreement, twelve adverbials, nine adjectives, six prepositions, three to-infinitives, and three gerunds.
- (c) The number of morphological errors (181 errors) is more prominent than syntactical errors (126 errors).
- (d) The number of intralinguage errors in morphological level is 93 (79%) of 117 errors.
- (e) The number of interlanguage errors in morphological level is 24 (21%) of 117 errors.
- (f) The number of intralinguage errors in the syntactical level is 102 (81%) of 126 errors.
- (g) The number of interlanguage errors in syntactical level is 24 (19%) of 126 errors
- (h) The number of intralanguge interference is more significant than interlanguage interference due to a lack of grammatical knowledge in the target language, English.



There are some limitations to this research. First, this research is limited to the errors based on categories of morphology, i.e., derivational, inflectional, compound words, and syntax, i.e., tenses, focus only on one university that does not represent all English Department students in Indonesia. Therefore, Future research is also suggested to research other universities. The last one is that this research is conducted at one period that makes the result may change in the future. Therefore, similar research is expected to be conducted in the future, which cover topics specific to S-V agreement, adverbials, adjectives, prepositions, to-infinitive, and gerunds. By researching can develop this research by conducting error analysis using surface strategy, namely omission, addition, misformation, and misordering.

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