



Grammatical Error Analysis in EFL Student Writing: A Case Study at Universitas Pamulang

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to find out the types of errors made by students in writing an English paragraph and to find out the types of errors that are generally made by these students. Grammatical error analysis is the analysis of errors in sorting out the right word with the desired meaning in the position or position of the sentence. The research used descriptive qualitative approach with analysis method. Data collection techniques used observation and measurement. Data collection tools used observation sheets and written tests. The analysis results found will be classified in the matrix: (1) syntax category and surface strategy, in the form of errors in noun phrase, verb phrase, transformation, and miscellaneous. Then in the surface category, the types of errors that may be found are usually omission errors, additions, form errors, sequence errors, and substitutions. The most dominant syntactic error in students' writing is the error in noun phrase; and (2) in the communicative taxonomy category, the data taken is the result of the first semester English literature students' paragraph writing task. By knowing the types of grammatical errors, it can be used as a reference in providing materials and explanations and also knowing the difficulties that must be corrected immediately. The grammatical errors observed in the student writing tasks are indicative of typical interlanguage phenomena in foreign language acquisition. They highlight specific areas where English rules diverge from the learners' presumed L1, as well as the inherent complexities of mastering English's intricate verb system, article usage, and idiomatic expressions.

Keywords: grammatical errors, types of errors, taxonomy category

INTRODUCTION

Based on direct observation during the teaching and learning process, many students make language errors. Language mistakes in learning a language for someone is something natural. Because no human being learns a language without making mistakes, and with these mistakes, someone will learn the correct rules. According to James (1998) language error is an event of deviation or inaccurate use of elements of language rules.

Language errors are not only found in speech but also in written language. This is viewed from the variety of language based on the means of use, namely oral and written varieties. Written language is bound to linguistic rules, such as spelling, structure, systematics, and writing techniques. If students do not fulfil the rules of written language, linguistic errors occur.

Language error in language learning is something that cannot be avoided. A person's error in language can be a problem if the person understands the concept of error, but on the contrary, it can be a simple thing if the person does not realise his/her error in acting speech or language. Tarigan (1998) explains that language errors are not only made by students who learn a second language (B2), but also by students who learn their first language (B1). This shows that language errors are closely related to language learning, both B1 and B2 learning. Therefore, the errors that occur need to be known and studied in depth, because they are an integral part of the language learning process.

One of the written language errors that students still often make is grammatical mistakes or syntax errors. The scope of syntax errors revolves around errors in diction, phrases, clauses, and sentence structure. Syntax that forms these elements. Language errors are basically caused by the person who uses the language concerned rather than the language he uses. There are three possible reasons why a person can make mistakes in language, namely: (1) being influenced by the language he/she first mastered; (2) the language user's lack of understanding of the language he/she uses; and (3) improper or incomplete language teaching.

Error analysis is a process based on analysing the errors of learners with a targeted object (i.e. language). The targeted language can be the mother tongue as well as national and foreign languages. The analyses of grammatical errors can reveal the successes and failures of learning programmes designed by lecturers. Syntax error analysis can also be used as a tool to measure the language skills of students in general. The results of syntax error analysis can be used as material to explain the parts of syntax errors that students often make, so that in the future similar errors can be reduced.

By examining the errors mentioned above, there are at least three information obtained, namely: (1) as feedback for educators, to what extent the progress has been achieved by students, so that what materials are still left and must be learned; (2) as

evidence for researchers on how a person acquires and learns language; and (3) as input that the error is one of the strategies used by students in acquiring the language (Corder, 1981: 56).

Richards (1984: 187) classifies errors into two categories, namely errors due to the influence of first language elements (interlingual errors) and errors due to the complexity of the target language itself (intralingual errors). Furthermore, Richards divides intralingual errors into four kinds, namely: (1) overgeneralisation, which is an error caused by overgeneralisation of target language elements; (2) ignorance of rule restrictions, which is an error caused by learners ignoring the restrictions of target language rules; (3) incomplete application of rules, which is an error in applying target language rules that are not perfect; and (4) false concept, which is an error in making hypotheses about the concept of target language rules.

The assessment of language errors in the written language of first semester students is very important to be carried out to serve as a benchmark for the development of teaching materials. The findings of this study can be used as input for lecturers as a basis for developing better classes. Encourage students to learn the mistakes they make and know how to correct them. In other words, learning from mistakes. Knowing what is right after making a mistake.

Given that the population taken is early semester students, this paper focuses on syntactic level errors in the form of sentences. Forming good and correct sentences is an ability that must be presented because a sentence should support an idea or idea. A systematic sentence structure shows an organised way of thinking. In order for the idea or idea to be easily understood by the reader, the syntactic functions of subject, predicate, object, complement, and adverb must be clear. The five syntactic functions are not always present together in a sentence.

There have been many studies related to language errors. One of them is what was done by Yulia, et al. She revealed that language errors that occur do not mean something negative for the learners. It is something that naturally occurs in the language learning process, due to the influence of the first language that is more often used. Therefore, he elaborated on syntactic errors and the scope of syntactic tools that make up these errors. While this paper tries to analyse the grammatical errors found and create strategies to prevent such errors from being repeated. The author considers language errors in language learning as something that cannot be avoided. A person's error in language can be a problem if the person understands the concept of the error. By understanding the error, students must know the right grammar concept. Through this analysis, it is also reviewed how to follow the correct and appropriate grammar concept.

METHODS

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with analysis method. The reason is that research tends to be descriptive and uses analysis. Cresswell (1994) said that qualitative research is descriptive because researchers are interested in process, meaning, and understanding through words or pictures. The data collection technique in the research used observation technique with students' written test as the research instrument. In the written test, students were asked to write a sentence using English. The test was conducted to find out the extent of the initial skills of writing English paragraphs of new students. Also to find out the errors made by students related to the material. The reason is that research tends to be descriptive and uses analysis. Descriptions are made of natural phenomena, without the intervention of an experiment or a treatment. Research starts from data and by utilising existing theory, ends with theory.

The data analysis technique used was descriptive analysis. The researcher identified, described, and classified spelling errors, phrases, nouns, verbs and others contained in a sentence. Furthermore, it explains the sources or causes as well as the communicative impact of these errors. The variable to be studied is a single qualitative variable, namely syntactic errors in writing paragraphs using English. Then, the research population is Unpam English Literature students of academic year 2024/2025 first semester, while the sample to be used is one class randomly selected using cluster random sampling technique from 2 classes.

The collected data has been evaluated then the results are classified into error data. Furthermore, to find out the grammatical errors in the assignment, a matrix based on errors was made. The data in the matrix was analysed based on the types of errors such as; Omission, Addition, Misformation, and Misordering. In the end, the errors were calculated how many of each type of error.

The stages that have been carried out are planning until the realisation of the research proposal. In this stage, it begins with identifying several problems that will be raised, direct observation during the teaching and learning process. The next stage is the implementation of research, namely giving the task of making paragraphs with several topics.

Data Source

The primary data source is student's assignment on the grammatical errors data obtained were then classified in the matrix that had been made. Evaluation of all data then find out the cause. The data was then evaluated, the findings were calculated in the form of percentages. Each data is interpreted and explained based on theory. Then

the cause of the error was evaluated, therefore discussions and interviews were conducted. The details can be seen in the following table:

No	Data	Sentence	Type of error	Cause	Percentage
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After all the data was entered in the matrix. The data was classified into several categories. From 36 students' work, there were 56 errors of various types of grammar errors. After classification, there were 8

Data Collection

Each student was given the task of developing a simple paragraph with some themes; *My Daily Activities, My Hope for President Prabowo, What will I do after finishing this grammar class, The Day before The Lecture starts.*

All the grammatical errors were classified by error type and included in the metrics in this table

After all the data was entered in the matrix. The data was classified into several categories. From 36 students' work, there were 46 errors of various types of grammar errors. After classification, each data is evaluated and dive into that sentence and apply the Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) taxonomy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the analysis of the students' writing samples, a total of 46 grammatical errors were identified. Upon closer inspection, many of these errors appeared to share common characteristics, allowing them to be grouped into eight representative samples. These selected examples were then analyzed to determine the sources of the errors. The analytical framework used in this study follows the error taxonomy proposed by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982), which classifies errors into four main categories: Omission, Addition, Misformation, and Misordering. The eight selected data sets serve as representative illustrations of the broader grammatical patterns found in the students' writing.

The first data sample reads: "My worse experience is fell of motorcycle and I'm so in so much pain because I'm bordened the motorcycle." This sentence demonstrates several overlapping errors. The use of "worse" instead of "worst" reflects a confusion between comparative and superlative forms, classifiable as a misformation. Similarly, the phrase "is fell" misuses the present tense auxiliary with a past tense verb, leading to another misformation. The phrase "of motorcycle" is problematic in two ways: the incorrect use of the preposition "of" instead of "off", and the omission of the article "a" before the noun. This results in both a misformation and an omission. The clause "I'm so in so much pain" includes an unnecessary repetition of the intensifier "so" (an

addition) and misuses the present tense "I'm" when the context clearly demands the past tense "I was" (a misformation). The final part of the sentence, "I'm bordened the motorcycle", contains an unclear word choice—likely a misspelling of either "boarded" or "burdened"—combined with an ill-formed structure that obscures the meaning. This, too, is classified as a misformation. The corrected version of this sentence, based on its probable intent, would be: "My worst experience was falling off a motorcycle, and I was in so much pain."

In the second data sample, the sentence is: "...but I can trying to eliminate the traumatic..." The phrase "can trying" combines a modal verb with a gerund, which is grammatically incorrect. Modal verbs should be followed by the base form of a verb, so this constitutes a misformation. Furthermore, the use of "the traumatic" incorrectly treats the adjective "traumatic" as a noun. This is another example of misformation, likely resulting from limited vocabulary or a direct translation from the student's first language. The corrected sentence would be: "...but I can try to eliminate the trauma."

The third data sample is relatively straightforward: "I start wit a very light breakfast." The error lies in the misspelling of the word "with" as "wit", which results in a misformed preposition. This type of error may stem from phonetic spelling habits or typographical mistakes. The corrected sentence is: "I start with a very light breakfast."

The fourth sentence reads: "Before go to collage, I precess some online order at office..." This example contains multiple errors. "Before go" should be "before going", as a gerund is required after the preposition "before", indicating a misformation. The word "collage" is likely a misspelling of "college", another misformation. The verb "precess" is incorrect in this context; the intended word is likely "process", making this another case of misformation due to an incorrect lexical choice. The phrase "some online order" is grammatically awkward, as "order" is countable and requires either "an" for singular or an -s for plural form. This may be interpreted as a misformation, or omission of the article or plural ending. Lastly, "at office" omits the necessary article "the" or a possessive pronoun like "my", and is categorized as an omission. A revised version of the sentence might read: "Before going to college, I process an online order at the office."

The fifth data sample is: "...after I'll finished all my job as online admin and I still have 1 hour 30 minutes." Here, "I'll finished" represents a tense confusion, where a future auxiliary is combined with a past participle, which is an incorrect verb phrase structure and thus a misformation. The phrase "all my job" also demonstrates misformation, as "job" should be pluralized or rephrased as "my entire job". The expression "as online admin" omits the article "an", qualifying as an omission. Finally, the time expression "1 hour 30 minutes" is grammatically valid but unnatural in informal usage, where "an hour and a half" would be more idiomatic. This final point is classified as a misformation due to a non-idiomatic structure. The corrected sentence would be: "...after I finish all my jobs as an online admin, and I still have an hour and a half."

Through this analysis, it becomes evident that most errors stem from issues with verb tense consistency, article usage, lexical selection, and morphological form. These are typical challenges for learners of English as a foreign language and align with the

types of errors predicted by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's taxonomy. By categorizing these mistakes, educators can better understand learners' developmental patterns and design targeted instructional strategies to address them.

The sixth data sample contains the sentence: "*After that, I must to scarch in internet or wonder to anyone who knows the info about how to work in another country.*" This sentence demonstrates several types of grammatical errors and serves as a strong example of how interlanguage interference and limited lexical knowledge can affect learner output.

The phrase "*must to scarch*" illustrates two distinct issues. First, the use of "must" as a modal verb requires that it be followed directly by the base form of the verb, without "to." The insertion of "to" between "must" and the main verb constitutes an error of addition. Second, the word "scarch" is a misspelling of "search," resulting in a misformation. This likely stems from a phonetic approximation or influence from L1 spelling conventions.

The next phrase, "*in internet*", also contains two grammatical inaccuracies. The preposition "in" is incorrectly used in place of "on," which is the standard preposition used with the internet. This is a case of misformation due to prepositional misuse. Furthermore, the noun "internet" typically requires the definite article "the" when used in English, and its omission here falls under the category of omission. Both errors are commonly influenced by the structure of the learner's first language, particularly when the L1 does not use articles or employs different prepositions for similar contexts.

The phrase "*wonder to anyone*" is another clear misformation. In English, "wonder" expresses curiosity or reflection, not the act of asking or inquiring. The student seems to be attempting to convey the act of asking someone, for which the correct verb would be "ask." The use of "to" with "wonder" is also erroneous in this context. This reflects a lexical choice error, possibly influenced by L1 equivalence or a misunderstanding of verb usage and collocation in English.

Additionally, the phrase "*the info*" employs an informal abbreviation. While "info" is acceptable in casual conversation, it is inappropriate for formal or academic writing. Its use in this context constitutes a misformation, as the word choice is unsuitable for the register expected in academic settings.

A corrected and more natural version of the sentence would be: "*After that, I must search on the internet or ask anyone who knows the information about how to work in another country.*"

The seventh data sample states: "*At noon I organizing my study materials and cheking my schedule for the day. and checking homework so worked on. while review some notes from the...*" This sample presents a cluster of grammatical issues that reflect both morphological and structural weaknesses in the learner's language use.

The first part, "*I organizing*" and "*I cheking*", shows a consistent omission of the auxiliary verb "was," which is required when forming the past continuous tense. Without the auxiliary verb, these constructions are incomplete and grammatically incorrect. These are clear cases of omission. The spelling error in "cheiking," omitting the second

"c," is categorized as misformation and is likely due to phonetic spelling or limited exposure to correct orthography.

The phrase "*and checking homework so worked on*" is particularly problematic. It lacks syntactic clarity and contains an ill-formed relative clause. The student likely intended to express that they were reviewing or working on homework they had previously completed, but the construction "*so worked on*" fails to communicate that effectively. This is a misformation due to faulty clause structure and verb tense agreement. It also lacks a necessary relative pronoun (e.g., "that I had worked on"), which contributes to its incoherence.

The clause "*while review some notes*" again misuses the base verb "review" where the present participle "reviewing" is required after "while." This is a misformation in verb form. Such errors often arise from direct L1 influence or an incomplete understanding of English participial structures.

Finally, the sentence ends with "*some notes from the...*", which is incomplete. This results in a breakdown of cohesion and leaves the reader without a full sense of meaning. While this cannot be cleanly categorized within Dulay et al.'s taxonomy, it may be interpreted as an extreme omission or a discourse-level error, where the sentence lacks a complete thought due to the missing object of the prepositional phrase.

Taking all these elements into account, a revised and more grammatically coherent version of the sentence would be: "*At noon, I was organizing my study materials and checking my schedule for the day. I was also checking the homework I had worked on, while reviewing some notes from the...*"

This example highlights how a single sentence can reflect multiple layers of grammatical difficulty, often stemming from an incomplete grasp of auxiliary usage, verb tenses, clause structuring, and formal vocabulary. These issues are frequently influenced by the learner's native language and the early developmental stage of second language acquisition.

The eighth and final data sample reads: "*Before I sleep I charged my phone first.*" This sentence, while relatively simple on the surface, contains a notable grammatical issue related to tense consistency. The first clause, "*Before I sleep,*" uses the simple present tense, which typically signals either a habitual action or a reference to a future event. In contrast, the second clause, "*I charged my phone first,*" employs the simple past tense, indicating a specific event that has already occurred. The combination of these two different time frames within a single sentence causes confusion and disrupts the temporal logic.

According to Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's taxonomy, this is an instance of misformation. The dependent clause beginning with "Before" should align temporally with the main clause to maintain grammatical coherence. In this case, the student likely intended to describe a past sequence of events: they charged their phone before they went to sleep. The correct verb form in the clause "Before I sleep" should therefore also be in the past tense: "Before I slept."

Such errors are often influenced by the learner's native language, especially if their first language expresses temporal relationships using context or sequencing markers rather than strict verb tense agreement. Learners might also confuse habitual structures (e.g., "Before I sleep, I always read") with descriptions of specific past events, resulting in inconsistent tense usage.

The corrected version of this sentence, assuming it refers to a specific past occurrence, would be: *"Before I slept, I charged my phone first."* Alternatively, if the learner intended to describe a routine habit, the sentence should be phrased as: *"Before I sleep, I always charge my phone first."*

Reflecting on the eight representative data samples discussed, it is evident that the majority of student errors fall under the category of misformation. These errors involve incorrect verb structures, inappropriate word choices, and inconsistent tense usage. In many cases, spelling mistakes also contributed to misformed words that altered or obscured meaning. The use of unnecessary elements, such as the insertion of "to" after a modal verb, also occurred and is categorized as addition. Errors involving missing grammatical components, such as auxiliary verbs or articles, were less frequent but still significant.

The table below summarizes the types of errors identified, their frequency (expressed as percentages), and the potential influence of the learners' first language (L1):

No	Type of Error (Dulay et al. Taxonomy)	Percentage	Possible L1 Interference
1	Misformation (spelling/word choice and grammatical structure)	13.04%	Possible
2	Misformation (verb phrase incorrectly formed)	6.52%	—
3	Misformation (spelling error resulting in unintended word)	8.69%	—
4	Misformation (misspelling leading to meaningless or unclear word)	8.69%	Possible
5	Misformation (verb phrase misformed by mixing tense/auxiliaries)	17.39%	Possible
6	Addition (inserting "to" after modal verb where not required)	8.69%	Possible
7	Misformation (spelling mistake in single word)	8.69%	—
8	Misformation (tense mismatch between dependent and main clause, e.g., "Before I sleep" vs "charged")	6.52%	Possible

This data supports the conclusion that misformation is the most dominant error category among the student samples, particularly in relation to verb tense usage, word formation, and sentence construction. Furthermore, many of these errors can be attributed, at least in part, to the influence of the students' first language. Understanding these error patterns is crucial for language instructors, as it helps in designing more effective interventions focused on tense control, appropriate vocabulary usage, and error-aware instruction in EFL writing classes.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of grammatical errors in student writing tasks consistently revealed a spectrum of challenges, predominantly manifesting in five key areas. These patterns underscore common hurdles encountered by foreign language learners, often stemming from the interplay between their native language structures and the complexities of English grammar.

Foremost among the observed inaccuracies were Verb Form and Tense Errors. Students frequently struggled with maintaining consistent verb tenses, particularly within complex sentences, and exhibited difficulty in correctly forming verb phrases, as seen in the omission of auxiliary verbs for continuous tenses or the incorrect conjugation of verbs after modals. These issues frequently point to L1 interference, where direct translation of verb conjugation rules may lead to erroneous constructions. Furthermore, overgeneralization of rules (e.g., misapplying the "to-infinitive" structure) and incomplete acquisition of nuanced English verb morphology also contributed significantly to these errors.

Similarly, Article and Determiner Errors were pervasive, primarily characterized by the omission or incorrect usage of "a," "an," and "the." This common challenge is largely attributable to L1 interference, as many languages do not employ articles in the same manner as English, or lack them entirely. The inherent complexity of English article rules further compounded these difficulties for learners.

Preposition Errors also featured prominently in the data. Students consistently made incorrect choices of prepositions, highlighting a critical area of difficulty. This is strongly linked to L1 interference, as prepositions seldom translate directly across languages, forcing learners to rely on memorization rather than transferable rules. The idiomatic nature of many English prepositional phrases and a tendency to prioritize

memorization over conceptual understanding of prepositional usage were also significant contributing factors.

Beyond structural grammar, Word Choice and Spelling Errors impacted the clarity and formality of the writing. These lexical inaccuracies encompassed confusion between similar-sounding words (homophones), incorrect adjectival forms, and general misspellings. Such errors often stem from phonetic spelling, limited vocabulary, and a potential influence of informal communication, where abbreviations and colloquialisms are commonly used but are inappropriate for academic contexts.

Finally, the analysis identified recurring issues with Sentence Structure and Cohesion. Students occasionally struggled to construct clear, concise, and complete sentences, leading to awkward phrasing, redundancy, and incomplete thoughts. This suggests a lack of holistic grammatical awareness regarding clause combination, pronoun usage, and parallelism. It can also be a manifestation of thinking in L1, where direct translation of complex ideas results in structures that do not naturally fit English syntax, and a tendency to focus on content over form, inadvertently sacrificing grammatical accuracy for message delivery.

In summation, the grammatical errors observed in the student writing tasks are indicative of typical interlanguage phenomena in foreign language acquisition. They highlight specific areas where English rules diverge from the learners' presumed L1, as well as the inherent complexities of mastering English's intricate verb system, article usage, and idiomatic expressions. Addressing these error patterns systematically through targeted pedagogical interventions will be instrumental in fostering significant progress in the students' English writing proficiency."

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