

Morphosyntax Errors in Undergraduate Research Articles from English Education Department

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Abstract

Since the graduates of English education department are expected to be educators, errors that are still prevalent in their research articles need to be acknowledged as teaching what is essentially flawed language use may lead to damaging results. Therefore, the aim of this research is to inspect prevalent morphological and syntactical errors in undergraduate research articles from English education department and determine the factors causing the errors. The results of the study show that errors are found at both morphological and syntactical levels. The morphological level includes inflection, derivation, preposition, article, possessive determiner, quantifier determiner, copula *be*, and pronoun. Meanwhile, the syntactical level includes passive voice, tense, infinitive, noun phrase, adverbial clause, adjectival clause, auxiliary, and subject-verb agreement. As for the source of errors, both interlingual and intralingual factors are attributed to causing such errors. This study highlights the process of error classification and the trend of frequently-made errors, including their commonality within the EFL context. Several suggestions are also offered in order that English learners can be more attentive to their writings.

Keywords: *error analysis, morpheme, syntax, research article, undergraduate*

INTRODUCTION

English as a foreign language (EFL) has been established as one of the main subjects throughout different educational stages in Indonesia. Starting from the elementary level in elementary school or junior high school, all learners are expected to reach a certain competency level during high school years. Perceptibly, the standard of achievement is higher for those who are majoring in English for their undergraduate study. By the time they graduate, it can be expected that they have an advanced level of English, meaning that they can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects.

Yet, like any kind of learning, making errors when learning English is commonplace. In the process of learning a foreign language, it appears to be estimations of the system used by the native speakers of the language (Brown, 2006). Basically, it means language learners will face two language systems: their native language and the language they are learning, and they go through a process to compare both systems. In line with the notion, according to Ellis (2015), learners are engaged in a process to compare the linguistic features of their language with the input, creating a representation of the target language. Thus, many language learners are incapable to reach a particular linguistic competence in the target language when their language has some sort of differences in

rules (Selinker, 1970, as cited in Ellis, 1994). These rule variations between the learners' first language and the target language are likely to occur among Indonesian students. The learners' first language, either the Indonesian language or one of indigenous languages, indeed has different rules compared to the English language. The rule difference can result in errors made by a learner in language production. To examine such errors, one of the most prominent approaches is by employing error analysis.

Error analysis can be seen as belonging to both applied linguistics and the second and foreign language learning. Richards and Schmidt (2013) define error analysis as the study and analysis of the errors made by second language learners. It can be carried out in order to: (1) identify strategies which learners use in language learning; (2) try to identify the causes of learner errors; and 3) obtain information on common difficulties in language learning, as an aid to teaching or in the preparation of teaching materials. Brown (2006) states that error analysis surges because the fact that learners do make errors, and that these errors can be observed, analyzed, and classified to reveal something of the system operating within the learner. It is consequently understandable that the approach flourishes in the ESL and EFL context.

There have been many studies employing error analysis to investigate the errors made in the writing of specific groups of people. Such studies are found within EFL context across different educational stages. At the level of junior high school, error analysis is used to examine the errors in students' recount texts (Anggraeni & Irwan, 2019; Mutmainah, 2019; Rohmana & Jianggimahastu, 2019; Sari et al., 2014), and descriptive texts (Gayo & Widodo, 2018). At the level of senior high school, the approach is used to investigate errors in students' descriptive text (Saputri, 2018), and narrative text (Anantri, 2017; Anwar, 2010). As for the level of undergraduate studies, there have been attempts to investigate errors made in essays written by second-year Turkish students from English language department (Abushihab, 2014; Taşçı & Aksu Atac, 2018), second-year Arabic students from English department (Hussain, 2019), third-year Tunisian students from business English department (Hamdi, 2011), fourth-year Turkish students from department of Arabic language teaching (Köroğlu, 2014), and translation written by third to fourth-year students of department of English (Abbasi & Karimnia, 2011). Yet, considering the influence of the learners' first language and the data source being undergraduate research articles, the most relevant studies are those of error analyses using the writings of undergraduate students from English department as the data source. These include a study by Mardijono (2003), Subekti (2018), and Wahyuni (2014). Yet, in terms of data source, the closest study in comparison is that of Hidayat (2015). It analyzed the grammatical errors in introduction section (Chapter I) of theses from English Department Students of IAIN Raden Intan Lampung.

It is consequently concluded that there have not been many attempts at investigating errors in undergraduate research articles specifically from English education department. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate morphological and syntactical errors in the English academic writings. Compared to the aforesaid studies,

this study differs in the use of undergraduate research articles from English education department as the data source. The articles come from authors that can be considered as advanced English learners and were based on their undergraduate theses that had gone through multiple revisions, approval by a supervisor and the board of examiner. This research is expected to provide an insight of frequently-made errors in the level of morphology and syntax. Hopefully, the students of English education department could see the insight and be more aware of errors that may still occur in the later stages of a study. Then, they could avoid such errors.

METHOD

This descriptive qualitative study aims to describe the errors that are made in the undergraduate research articles. The data for the research were morphological and syntactical errors from six unpublished undergraduate research articles without predetermined topics from an English education department of a state university in Yogyakarta. The articles were randomly collected from the online repository of the university or directly from the authors. For an ethical reason, the authors of the articles had given their consent of fair usage as the source of data in this research.

The errors collected were then analyzed to determine the type of each and classified using the surface strategy by Dulay et al. (1982) and an adaptation of linguistic category by Gayo and Widodo (2018). Keshavarz's (2012) framework of error analysis was employed to conduct the data collection and analysis. In error identification, the data were acquired by manually examining the six research articles to find the grammatical errors. Every instance of deviation from the standard English grammar was considered an error. In determining the deviation, Swan (2016) and Nuryanto (1990) were used as references. Several other sources e.g., Google N-Grams, corpus, and online dictionaries were also used to reinforce the information from the books. Once the errors had been identified, they were classified into two main categories, which were morphological errors and syntactical errors. The errors were classified further according to different parts of speech or parts of a sentence that they belong to. Then, it was decided whether the errors are caused by omission, addition, misform, or misordering. The errors from each category are then calculated to find out which linguistic category or the surface form can be considered significant. The results were then tabulated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Morphological and Syntactical Errors

This study reveals prevalent errors in the research articles, as shown in Table 1 below. The errors at the morphological level include inflection, derivation, preposition, article, possessive determiner, quantifier determiner, copula be, and pronoun. A quarter of all errors can be attributed to the improper use of inflection. Conversely, only three errors are due to the use of possessive determiner and pronoun, causing less than one

percent of errors. The errors at the syntactical level include passive voice, tense, infinitive, noun phrase, adverbial clause, adjectival clause, auxiliary, and subject-verb agreement. Comparatively lower than those at the morphological level, the highest number of errors occurred in the use of noun phrases while lowest number of errors occurred in using auxiliary verbs and tenses.

Table 1. Research Findings

Linguistic Level	Kinds of Error	Omit	Add	Mis-form	Mis-order	Total	Percentage
Morpheme	Inflection	101	28	6		135	25,4
	Derivation	10	4	14		28	5,3
	Preposition	16	17	36		69	13,0
	Article	52	10	11		73	13,7
	Poss Determiner			3		3	0,6
	Quant Determiner			7		7	1,3
	Copula Be	6		30		36	6,8
	Pronoun	2	1			3	0,6
Syntax	Passive Voice	15		7		22	4,1
	Tense	4		2		6	1,1
	Infinitive	3	8	14		25	4,7
	Noun Phrase	12		16	17	45	8,5
	Adverbial Clause	6		10		16	3,0
	Adjectival Clause	14	7	12		33	6,2
	Auxiliary	2		4		6	1,1
	S-V Agreement			25		25	4,7
	Total	243	75	197	17	532	100,0
	Percentage	45,7	14,1	37,0	3,2	100,0	

Below are the samples of errors to represent each linguistic category as well as its surface strategy. The flawed linguistic elements are highlighted in bold and italic. To simplify the presentation, the suggested corrections are placed next to the errors in brackets. Also, the numbering of data shown in the table according to the classification will use the letter (a) to show the translation in the Indonesian language.

Omission

Omission refers to the deletion of English linguistic items that are necessary for the phrase or clause to make sense grammatically and contextually. Below are the samples of errors from each linguistic category.

- (1) the adults may find a deeper and **heavy**(*HEAVIER*) meaning to the jokes
- (2) The school was located in a **suburb**(*SUBURBAN*) area.
- (3) each cycle consisted **Ø**(*OF*)several steps
- (4) The result showed **Ø**(*A*) successful implementation
- (5) English teachers who deal with students who **Ø**(*WERE*) born as digital natives
- (6) Those will support **Ø**(*THEM*) in achieving the learning objectives.

- (7) This research \emptyset (WAS) conducted based on the principles of collaborative action research.
- (8) the use of picture series in reading \emptyset (HAD) improved vocabulary mastery of the students.
- (9) This prompts them \emptyset (TO) get bored easily during the learning process.
- (10) to improve vocabulary \emptyset (MASTERY).
- (11) The next step is \emptyset (WHEN) the teacher give the Domino Words media to the groups
- (12) The evaluator act as the critique, \emptyset (WHO GAVE) suggestions, and constructive opinion
- (13) One of the most popular puzzle that \emptyset (CAN BE) used to be a vocabulary learning media is Crossword puzzle.
- (14) Crossword puzzle **help**(HELPS) the learners in vocabulary learning

The errors at the morphological level happen in the category of inflection, derivation, preposition, article, quantifier determiner, copula be, and pronoun. The errors are caused by the omission of bound morphemes in examples 1, 2 while the rest are caused by the omission of preposition *of* in examples 3, articles *a* in examples 4, copula *were* in examples 5, and pronouns *them* in examples 6. The errors at the syntactical level include errors in passive voice, tense, infinitive, noun phrase, adverbial clause, adjectival clause, auxiliary, and subject-verb agreement. Examples 7 to 14 contain errors caused by omission of one or more linguistic elements as seen in the suggested corrections.

Based on the findings, apparently, omission of linguistic elements has the highest number of errors with a percentage of 45.7% of all errors that were found in the six research articles. Most of the errors can be attributed to the omission of inflectional morpheme. The high number may be in direct correlation to the fact that it covers eight different types: plural, possessive, comparative, superlative, present, past, present participle, past participle. Out of the eight categories, the errors in the use of suffixes indicating pluralism, present tense, and past tense are the highest contributors.

Errors due to omission of inflectional bound morphemes are not uncommon. For instance, omission of elements in verb and noun inflection produces almost half the errors of omission in Kharmilah and Narius' (2019) study. A similar instance also occurs in Sembiring's (2017) error analysis, where verb inflection becomes a major contributor to the errors of omission. Less apparent errors in inflection also occur in studies by Hidayat (2015), Mardijono (2003), and Savitri and Akhiriyah (2016). Even in a wider EFL context, such errors are registered in studies by Abushihab (2014), Amiri and Puteh (2017), Hamdi (2011), Hussain (2019), Köroğlu (2014), and Taşçı and Aksu Atac (2018). The exact number of the particular errors cannot be established, however, considering the various approaches in classification. Nevertheless, the universality in occurrences is undisputable.

Another point to notice is the errors in the use of articles, omission of which becomes the second-highest error due to omission. This category is relatively less obscured in comparison to errors in inflection as it often becomes a standalone category in numerous studies. Errors in the use of articles are even considered high in studies by Abushihab (2014), Köroğlu (2014), Taşçı and Aksu Atac (2018), Wahyuni (2014), and Wahyuningsih (2016). In any case, there have been suggestions as to why articles in English grammar are considered difficult for language learners, especially those whose native languages do not have a similar system (see Biber et al., 2002:67; Swan, 2016:146). For one, definite article, indefinite article, and zero article express diverse meanings. These meanings are difficult to distinguish from one another while also relatively abstract in nature. This degree of complexity and intricacy, however, is seen mostly from a practical point of view. In other words, errors in articles seldom lead to misunderstanding.

Addition

Addition is the form of errors where unnecessary linguistic items are added into a phrase or a clause. The error of addition happens when the extra elements produce faults grammatically or contextually.

- (15) to use English as a **means**(*MEAN*) of communication
- (16) If the deck is **emptied**(*EMPTY*),
- (17) the second one was done **during**(*OMITTED*) on April 9, 2019
- (18) these problems should be overcome by finding **an**(*OMITTED*) enjoyable learning techniques
- (19) Better results are obtained if the learners' individual learning style and pace are respected and **they are**(*OMITTED*) given enough time to carry out the required memory processing.
- (20) they would most likely **to**(*OMITTED*) encounter various problems during the processes
- (21) using pictures can be the aid **of help**(*OMITTED*) for the students
- (22) The learning aids **which**(*OMITTED*) can help students in the learning process more easily and can spark students' interest to in the learning.

The errors at the morphological level happen in inflection, derivation, preposition, article, and pronoun. Examples 15 and 16 show the addition of unnecessary bound morphemes while examples 17 to 19 display the need to omit one or more unneeded linguistic items. As for the syntactical level, the errors happen in the linguistic category of infinitive, noun phrase, adjectival clause, and subject-verb agreement. All the examples, 20 to 22 show that there are additions of linguistic elements that need to be omitted in order to make the sentences grammatically correct.

Error caused by addition of unnecessary linguistic items has the third-highest number of errors after omission and misformation. Still, the major contributor to these errors comes from addition of inflectional bound morphemes, as seen in Kharmilah & Narius

(2019) and Wahyuningsih (2016). Anyhow, this study puts forward a suggestion as to why the errors in inflection are high. The number can be attributed to the extensive use of written language to describe and explain what the research is about, especially considering that the research articles are either action research or research and development. Action research involves describing the subject, the problem, the actions conducted as well as the results of the implementation. Meanwhile, it can be expected that an article of research and development include the description of a needs analysis, the developed product, and an expert judgment. In short, the extensive use is also followed by the high number of errors.

Misformation

Misformation is a form of error caused by misuse of an appropriate form of linguistic elements, resulting in flawed sentences. It also includes errors of archiform, defined as “the selection of one member of a class of forms to represent others in the class” by Dulay et al. (1983: 160). James (1998: 108) describes such errors as “misselection,” which may happen in the form of bound morphemes to phrases.

- (23) the technical quality and **programing**(PROGRAMMING) quality is “Very Good”
- (24) The next contains some words that are very **closed**(CLOSELY) related to the topic
- (25) Based on the interview **from** (WITH) the English teacher
- (26) by the help of **the**(A) UX designer
- (27) Studying languages means learning **its**(THEIR) vocabulary
- (28) Vocabulary itself according to Nation (2010) **are**(IS) the knowledge of form, meaning and use.
- (29) This study **has** (was) done in five stages
- (30) Most of the students were willingly **stayed**(STAYING) during the first recess
- (31) The average scores for each post-test improved due to the use of picture series that helped students **understood**(UNDERSTAND) better
- (32) There are many classifications made by experts in **language**(LINGUISTIC) area about the kinds of vocabulary.
- (33) **While** (AFTER) the actions were done, this research found several results
- (34) Domino Words has things that need to be considered which **is**(ARE/INCLUDE) the complex instruction and the word category
- (35) The motivation **would**(COULD) be both intrinsic and extrinsic.
- (36) the materials **was**(WERE) validated

Errors attributed to misformation at the morphological level include inflection, derivation, preposition, article, possessive determiner, and copula be. In example 23 there is a distinction between programing and programming. Programing refers to ‘broadcasting’ or ‘screening’ while programming refers to ‘software design.’ The one supposed to be used is the latter. Examples 24 show misuse of word class that is supposed to be an adverb. Therefore, the suggestion for the correction is *close*. Meanwhile, examples 25 to 28 show the needs to correct some of the linguistic items

using those written as suggested corrections. As for the errors at the syntactical level, they include passive voice, tense, infinitive, noun phrase, adverbial clause, adjectival clause, auxiliary, and subject-verb agreement. Examples 29 to 36 cover wide areas or errors with various forms of suggested corrections. The similarity of them all, however, is that the errors affect or are affected by other items in the sentence. For instance, example 31 illustrates the misuse of the word *understood* that is supposed to be in the form of infinitive with or without *to* because it follows the verb *help*.

Misformation becomes the second-highest contributor of error found in the research articles. The use of preposition has the highest number of errors due to misformation. Studies within the EFL context prove that this problem happens universally to English learners (e.g. Abbasi & Karimnia, 2011; Abushihab, 2014; Hussain, 2019; Savitri & Akhriyah, 2016; Wahyuningsih, 2016). Despite the authors' familiarity with the basic concept of prepositions, they still find it difficult to use proper prepositions in a more complex context. In other words, EFL learners are not sure of the semantic scope of certain prepositions (Hamdi, 2011).

Misordering

Misordering happens when linguistic elements within a phrase or clause are not in the correct order according to the natural construction or standard English.

(37) The main cause of this problem is the ***lack interest of students***(*STUDENTS' LACK OF INTEREST*)

Errors that can be attributed to misordering happen in the word order of noun phrases. As shown, the suggested correction for example 37 is *students' lack of interest*. The sample highlights that errors in misordering understandably only happen at the syntactical level as constituents of a phrase or a clause may have unclear relationships with each other. This confusion may lead to errors that affect the overall structure of a phrase, a clause, or even a sentence. Misordering may occur in these instances.

Source of Errors

The findings reveal that the errors are caused by both interlingual and intralingual. Interlingual errors refer to the interferences in the target language caused by the first language. In this case, the errors in the English writings are influenced by the rules in the Indonesian language. Apparently, errors that can be attributed as interlingual are caused by the literal translation strategy (Dulay et al., 1982). Table 2 illustrates such errors in comparison with their Indonesian translations.

Table 2. Interlingual Errors

Aspects of error	Error	Bahasa
Verbs	(38) students will difficult to communicate	(38a) Siswa-sisw iakan sulit untuk berkomunikasi
	(39) the students will automatically success in learning vocabulary	(39a) Siswa-siswi tersebut akan secara otomatis sukses dalam belajar kosa kata
Conjunctions	(40) The cards will follow the theme of the learning materials which make the teacher cannot randomly choose categories.	(40a) Kartu-kartu tersebut akan mengikuti tema dari materi pembelajaran yang membuat guru tidak bias secara acak memilih kategori-kategori.
Pronouns	(41) the player must draw one card from deck until found the card that can give the suitable word	(41a) pemain tersebut harus mengambil satu kartu dari tumpukan sampai menemukan kartu yang dapat memberikan kata yang sesuai
Adverbial Phrases	(42) The most important is they found it easy to understand the materials	(42a) Yang paling penting adalah mereka merasa mudah memahami materi
Adjective Clauses	(43) since it is easy to make the media which make them can hone and enrich their vocabulary	(43a) karena mudah untuk membuat media tersebut yang membuat mereka dapat meningkatkan dan memperkaya kosakata mereka

Examples 38 and 39 illustrate the use of an adjective and a noun instead of verbs. Therefore, the suggested corrections are *find it difficult* instead of *difficult* and *succeed* instead of *success*. Example 40 is supposed to use coordinating conjunction *so* instead of *which make*. Example 41 shows the need for a pronoun in the adverbial clause. The suggested correction is *they find* instead of *found*. Example 42 shows how an adverbial phrase suit the context and syntactical construction instead, in the form of *most importantly*. Finally, sample 43 illustrates how the use of a verb and its object pronoun does not suit the context and the construction of a relative clause. The sample of errors shown in Table 2 is in line with Krashen's (1981) findings that the strongest impact of the first language is in the construction of multiple words word order and in the phrase created through word-for-word translations while the weakest influence is in bound morphology. This notion is also supported by studies of error analysis in ESL and EFL contexts, e.g. Alasfour (2018), Hashim (2015), Köroğlu, (2014), all of which determine that the native language of the learners interfere with the learners' academic writings.

Intralingual Errors

Intralingual errors happen due to the authors' creativity in creating sentences. The creativity, however, at times does not obey the grammatical rules of the English language.

Table 3. Intralingual Errors

Types of Errors	Aspects of Errors	Errors
Overgeneralization	Verbs	(44) This paper will focuses on major classes: nouns, verbs, and adjectives.
		(45) Meanwhile, the manner of articulation is concerns about how the sounds are made.
Ignorance of rule restriction	Articles	(46) The curriculum currently used in the Indonesian education system is the Kurikulum 2013
		(47) when a card drawn has a picture or is labeled animal, the player can write a MOUSE on the board
	Infinitives	(48) used to help the learning process becomes easier (49) word games also help them in understanding new words
Incomplete application of rules	Inflections	(50) teaching pronunciation is one of obligation of English teachers.
		(51) The researcher also asked about some suggestion
False concept hypothesized	Inflections	(52) The subject's total number is 27 students
		(53) the observation was in the third stages

From Table 3, it can be concluded that the four types of intralingual errors as suggested by Richards (1971) can still be found in the undergraduate research articles. As for the suggested correction, examples 44 and 45 do not need the suffix *-es* and copula *is* respectively. As for examples 46 and 47, the articles in bold and italic are supposed to be deleted. In examples 48 and 49, the words in bold and italic are supposed to be in the form of infinitives, with or without *to*, because they came after *help*. Examples 50 and 51 show the need for suffix *-s* for the word *obligation* and *suggestion*. As for example 52, the suggested noun phrase is *total number of the subjects* while example 53 shows unnecessary use of suffix *-s* because of improper use of plural form.

CONCLUSION

This study provides two points to conclude the findings. The first one is that the errors can be found at both the morphological and syntactical levels. The morphological errors include inflection, derivation, preposition, article, possessive determiner, quantifier determiner, copula be, and pronoun. The syntactical level includes errors in passive voice, tense, infinitive, noun phrase, adverbial clause, adjectival clause, auxiliary, and subject-verb agreement. All surface forms of error can be found as well, although the number greatly varies. The second point to recognize is how the errors can be attributed to both the interference of learners' first language and the learning of the target language itself.

Furthermore, these findings reveal two issues that need to be acknowledged: the process of error classification in the study and the existence of frequent errors that follows the amount of use. The linguistic classification used in this study follows that of another error analysis and apparently it was not based on a well-established linguistic classification. It resulted in errors that can be classified into multiple categories while some others are not suitable for existing ones. Hence, a modification was needed in spite of the prevailing issues. Regarding the implication of the findings, it can be established that the high number of errors follows a high amount of use of such elements or constructions in the academic writings. The six undergraduate articles are either action research or research and development; two kinds of research of which describing something is a huge part. Therefore, so far there is no cause for concern.

The results of this study are not meant to discourage English learners to write. Instead, they simply need to be more attentive to what they write. For instance, how the suffixes tend to be overlooked, causing inflection to generate the highest number of errors. When in doubt, it is necessary that authors look for references to find out whether the particular word order, grammatical construction, or function of a specific linguistic item are frequently used. To prevent such errors from resurfacing, English learners are encouraged to turn on MS Word language feature as it will highlight simple grammatical mistakes as well as misspellings, employ free websites that check grammar, and proofread the writing multiple times. The findings can also be used by English teachers to prioritize what grammatical aspects to emphasize in the teaching and learning process.

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