

AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' WRITING SHORT PARAGRAPH BASED ON MORPHOLOGICAL ERROR THEORY AND SURFACE STRATEGY TAXONOMY

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Abstract

This research aimed to identify and analyze the types of morphological and sentence-level errors in the short paragraph writings of third-semester English Education students at UIN Raden Intan Lampung. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, the study utilized documentation for data collection, with purposive sampling selecting a class with a high frequency of errors. The data, consisting of student-written paragraphs, were analyzed using Surface Strategy Taxonomy (omission, addition, misformation, misordering) and morphological error theory (affixation, internal change, suppletion). The findings revealed that misformation was the most prevalent error (50.60%), followed by omission (32.31%), addition (11.58%), and misordering (5.48%). Morphologically, errors in affixation were the most common. These errors predominantly stem from first language (Indonesian) interference and an incomplete understanding of English grammatical rules. The study implies that English writing instruction should incorporate more explicit and targeted teaching on grammatical accuracy, particularly in word formation and the use of articles and prepositions, to address these persistent challenges and improve students' writing proficiency.

Keywords: Error Analysis; Morphological Error; Surface Strategy Taxonomy; Writing Paragraph; EFL Learners

Introduction

English proficiency has become increasingly important in the era of globalization. It is widely recognized as the primary international language that serves as a bridge for communication across countries and cultures. English is used not only in daily communication but also in many key areas such as science, economics, diplomacy, politics, and education (Emilia & Hamied, 2015;

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Wahyuni, 2022). Its dominant role makes it an essential skill for learners in many non-English speaking countries, including Indonesia.

In the Indonesian context, the necessity for English is strongly felt because of the country's position as a developing nation that must keep up with international advancements. To respond to this demand, the government has included English as a compulsory subject from elementary school through university level. This policy reflects an effort to improve students' intellectual competence and prepare them for academic and professional engagement at both national and international levels (Jin et al., 2023). The continuity of English instruction across all levels of education is also expected to support Indonesia's broader educational objectives.

However, despite these efforts, the teaching and learning of English in Indonesia still face many challenges. One of the main challenges is that English is taught as a foreign language, not as a second language. Most Indonesians speak local mother tongues as their first language and Bahasa Indonesia as their second language, which means that English functions as a third language for many learners (Lou, 2018). This multilingual background often leads to interference, where the structure of the first or second language affects the way students learn English.

The linguistic differences between English and Indonesian make the learning process more complex. English and Indonesian differ in terms of grammar, sentence structure, vocabulary, and word formation. For Indonesian learners, these differences are especially difficult when learning productive skills such as speaking and writing. Unlike receptive skills like listening and reading, productive skills require learners not only to understand but also to produce correct and meaningful expressions in English (Mahshanian et al., 2017).

Among the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, many learners identify writing as the most challenging. Writing requires a high level of accuracy in grammar, vocabulary, and sentence construction. In addition, writing demands logical organization of ideas, coherence, and cohesion in expression. For EFL learners, writing difficulties are often linked to errors in grammar and structure, which may result from interference from the learners' native languages (Fitriani et al., 2019).

Writing is not only about arranging words into sentences but also about constructing meaning through complex cognitive processes. It requires the integration of linguistic knowledge, critical thinking, and the ability to express thoughts in a clear and structured way. Furthermore, in an academic context, writing has an important role as it becomes the main medium for demonstrating knowledge, presenting arguments, and engaging with scholarly discourse (Salija, 2017). This makes writing an indispensable skill for university students, particularly those in English education programs.

One important aspect of writing that deserves attention is morphology, which is the study of the internal structure of words. Morphology examines how morphemes—the smallest units of meaning—combine to form words. Errors in morphology can be found in the use of both free morphemes, which can stand alone, and bound morphemes, which require affixes to form complete words. For instance, misuse of prefixes or suffixes can lead to incorrect word formation, which affects sentence meaning and overall writing quality. These errors are common among EFL learners and reflect gaps in their mastery of word formation rules.

In Indonesia, the influence of the first language can often be seen in students' morphological and grammatical errors. Because Indonesian has different structures compared to English, students tend to apply the rules of their first language when writing in English. This phenomenon leads to interference errors, such as omission of necessary morphemes, misformation of words, or incorrect use of affixes. Such errors not only reduce the accuracy of writing but also make it difficult for students to communicate their ideas effectively.

At UIN Raden Intan Lampung, English Education students are required to take various writing courses throughout their study. These courses are arranged systematically, beginning with Basic Vocabulary, Intermediate Structure, Advanced Structure, and Morphosyntax, followed by Paragraph Writing, Essay Writing, and Critical Academic Writing. Each course is designed to gradually improve students' writing competence and prepare them for academic tasks, including the completion of their undergraduate thesis. The curriculum shows the importance of writing in the program, as it is considered a core competence for future English teachers.

Despite the structured learning program, many students still face difficulties in writing. Classroom observations and document analysis show that errors continue to appear in students' written work, especially in paragraph writing, which serves as the foundation for more advanced writing skills. Students often fail to produce cohesive and grammatically correct paragraphs. Common errors include problems with sentence structure, incorrect word choice, and misapplication of grammatical rules (Li & Su, 2021). These recurring problems highlight the need for deeper analysis of students' writing performance.

Preliminary studies of third-semester students' short paragraph writing at UIN Raden Intan Lampung reveal that errors can be classified into several types, including omission, misformation, addition, and misordering. For example, students may omit a necessary morpheme, use the wrong word form, or place words in the wrong order within a sentence. These types of errors reflect the challenges students face in applying English language rules accurately (Chen, 2024). Such findings demonstrate the importance of conducting systematic error analysis to better understand the specific areas where learners struggle.

Error analysis in student writing is not only useful for identifying mistakes but also for providing insights into the learning process. Errors can serve as valuable indicators of students' current level of understanding and the influence of their first language. By analyzing errors, teachers can identify patterns of difficulties and adapt their teaching strategies accordingly. Furthermore, error analysis helps researchers and educators to design remedial teaching methods that directly address the students' weaknesses.

This research, therefore, focuses on analyzing morphological and sentence-level errors in the writings of third-semester English Education students at UIN Raden Intan Lampung. The study aims to identify and categorize the errors according to established frameworks such as the Surface Strategy Taxonomy and morphological process theory. By doing so, the research not only reveals the types of errors made by students but also provides an understanding of the underlying causes of those errors (Fatimah, 2021).

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to both theory and practice. Theoretically, they will provide a clearer description of how Indonesian EFL learners struggle with morphology and sentence construction. Practically, the results can be used to improve teaching strategies in writing courses, helping teachers design more effective approaches to address common errors. In the long term, such efforts can support students in developing stronger writing skills, which are essential for their academic success and professional career (Virdyna, 2016).

In conclusion, writing remains one of the most difficult skills for EFL learners in Indonesia. The combination of linguistic differences, language interference, and limited mastery of grammar and morphology creates persistent challenges for students. By investigating the errors in students' writing, particularly at the morphological and sentence levels, this study seeks to shed light on the nature of these difficulties and offer pedagogical recommendations for improvement.

Methods

This research applied a descriptive qualitative method (Creswell, 2013) to identify the morphological errors found in students' short paragraph writing. The qualitative approach was chosen because it provides descriptive data in the form of words and sentences that appear naturally from students' work. In this study, the focus was on the morphological errors that reflect students' stage in learning English and their ability in writing a paragraph. By using descriptive qualitative design, the researcher was able to describe the errors in detail and explain them systematically. The main source of data was the paragraph writing produced by third-semester students of the English Department at UIN Raden Intan Lampung.

The sampling technique used in this study was purposive sampling. This method was chosen because the sample had to meet certain characteristics that were relevant to the purpose of the research. The characteristic in this study was the high frequency of errors made by students. After reviewing several classes, the researcher selected class 3G because the students in this class produced the highest number of errors compared to other classes. Therefore, class 3G was

considered the most appropriate source for data collection. This deliberate choice allowed the researcher to focus on data that could provide meaningful insights into students' writing errors.

The data in this study were taken from documents of students' writing. The words, phrases, and sentences that contained morphological errors were the main focus of the analysis. The primary data were the students' original writing documents obtained from the lecturer who taught the paragraph writing class. The secondary data were obtained indirectly from other sources such as books, journals, internet resources, and related reading materials. These secondary data supported the interpretation and analysis of the findings.

The researcher herself acted as the main research instrument. In qualitative studies, the human instrument is essential because only the researcher can collect, interpret, and analyze the data flexibly according to the research context. In this study, the researcher carefully read the students' documents, coded the errors, and classified them into categories. The researcher's role was central in making sense of the data and constructing the findings.

The technique of collecting data was documentation. The researcher collected students' paragraph writing papers from class 3G after obtaining permission from the lecturer. The documents were read carefully and repeatedly to identify errors. The errors were coded and categorized based on surface strategy taxonomy, especially morphological errors. The researcher then prepared tables that represented each type of error. To ensure accuracy, the findings were validated by an English lecturer from the same institution who acted as an expert validator.

The technique of analyzing data was carried out in several stages. First, the data were collected from students' writing documents. After that, the researcher identified errors in their writing and classified them according to the type of morphological error such as affixes, compounding, or suppletion, and sentence errors such as omission, addition, misformation, or misordering. Once the errors were classified, the researcher calculated the percentage of each type of error to find out which errors appeared most frequently. Finally, the results were reported in descriptive form to present the findings clearly and draw conclusions.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, the researcher emphasized credibility as the main criterion. Credibility was achieved through triangulation, especially investigator triangulation. This process involved collaboration with another English lecturer to review and validate the results of the analysis. By using triangulation, the researcher reduced the possibility of bias and increased the accuracy of the findings, making the study more reliable and trustworthy.

Findings and Discussion

After analyzing the data, the researcher found that third-semester students of the English Department at UIN Raden Intan Lampung produced errors in all four categories of the Surface Strategy Taxonomy. The results indicate that misformation was the most frequent error type, while misordering appeared least often. This finding shows that students face difficulties in multiple areas of grammar, but most prominently in word choice and form.

Omission

Omission errors accounted for 32.31% (53 errors) of the total. Students frequently left out important elements such as articles, prepositions, pronouns, auxiliary verbs, and other word parts. For example, in the sentence "In back my house has a biggest yard. Me and my friends usually played football, bycycle, badminton, etc." several elements are missing, including the article "the" and the preposition "at." The corrected form is "At the back of my house, there is a big yard. My friends and I usually played football, rode bicycles, played badminton, and more."

The high occurrence of omission errors shows that learners often construct incomplete sentences. The most common problems were missing articles, prepositions, and pronouns. These errors may arise because in Indonesian language, the use of articles and prepositions is simpler or different from English. As a result, learners sometimes fail to transfer the correct grammatical elements into their writing.

Addition

Addition errors represented 11.58% (19 errors). This type of error occurs when students insert unnecessary words or morphemes, which make sentences unclear or ungrammatical. For example, the sentence "...go to there because Pahawang Island near from our home" contains unnecessary prepositions "to" and "from." The correct form is "...go there because Pahawang Island is near our home."

Although addition errors are fewer compared to omission, they still show that learners are confused about what grammatical elements are required in English. This often results from literal translation from the first language, where sentence structures are different.

Misformation

Misformation errors were the most dominant, with 83 instances (50.60%). This error type occurs when learners use the wrong form of a word. For example, the sentence "...in the first floor, usually me and my family kidding and laugh together" contains multiple misformations. The pronoun "me" should be "I," and the verbs should be "joke and laugh" instead of "kidding and laugh."

Other examples include the incorrect use of comparative and superlative forms, wrong verb tenses, or inappropriate word choices. For instance, "Visit to Malioboro is happier for me" should be corrected to "Visiting Malioboro makes me happy." The high number of misformation errors indicates that students often try to translate directly from their first language, leading to wrong word choices and grammatical confusion.

Misordering

Misordering errors were the least frequent, only 5.48% (9 errors). They usually appeared in the incorrect placement of adjectives, adverbs, or auxiliary verbs. For example, "Clara Beach so look beautiful" should be "Clara Beach looks so beautiful." Another example is "...while see view sea," which should be "...while enjoying the sea view."

Although less common, misordering still shows learners' difficulty in understanding the proper structure of English sentences. These errors often reflect interference from the students' first language, where word order is different.

Overall, the analysis of Surface Strategy Taxonomy demonstrates that the most serious problem for students is misformation, followed by omission. This suggests that learners need more practice with the correct use of English grammar, especially in word choice and sentence structure.

Besides errors in sentence structure, students also made errors in morphological processes, particularly in affixation, internal change, and suppletion. These errors are closely related to misformation, as learners often use the wrong word form instead of the correct one.

Affixation

Affixation errors were very common. Students often omitted necessary inflectional affixes or misused derivational affixes. For example, "Cinema has many chair" should be "Cinema has many chairs." Similarly, "The second floors use to keep thing" should be corrected to "The second floor was used to keep things."

These errors show that students have difficulty applying plural markers, past tense markers, and adjective/noun transformations. The misuse of affixation demonstrates that students are still developing their awareness of how English grammar requires consistent use of morphemes to show number, tense, or word class.

Internal Change

Errors in internal change appeared when students failed to apply irregular forms. For example, "I choose after junior high school" should be "I chose after junior high school." This error shows that learners often generalize regular rules (adding -ed for past tense) and neglect irregular verbs that require vowel changes. Such mistakes are common because irregular verbs must be memorized, and many learners are not yet fully familiar with their forms.

Suppletion

Suppletion errors occurred when students used regular patterns with irregular words. For example, “...there is three bedrooms” should be “...there are three bedrooms.” Another example is “...and tell about her young story,” which should be “...and told me stories from her youth.”

These errors show that students are not yet able to apply irregular forms correctly. Since suppletive forms like go → went or is → was cannot be predicted, students often apply regular rules incorrectly, producing forms such as goed instead of went.

Discussion

The findings reveal that the most frequent errors made by students are misformation and omission. Misformation shows that learners often supply incorrect word forms, influenced either by direct translation from their first language or by incomplete knowledge of English grammar. Omission, on the other hand, indicates that learners are not fully aware of the importance of articles, prepositions, and pronouns in English sentence structure.

The errors identified in the study reveal critical insights regarding learners' grammatical competencies, particularly in relation to misformation and omission. Misformation errors, where students supply incorrect word forms, can substantially stem from direct translation influences from their native language as well as gaps in their understanding of English grammatical structures. Research indicates that a learner's vocabulary development is crucial for their ability to produce correct word forms, highlighting the interplay between vocabulary size and grammatical competence. Similarly, the presence of frequent omission errors suggests a lack of awareness about the importance of articles, prepositions, and pronouns within English syntax. Such omissions reveal gaps in learners' understanding of the structure and function of these grammatical elements.

Addition and misordering were less frequent, but they still highlight the influence of first language interference and lack of awareness of English syntactic rules. Furthermore, the finding that addition and misordering errors are less frequent does not diminish their significance; these errors reflect the persistent influence of the learners' first language on their English language usage. The misordering of words can particularly be correlated with the syntactic differences between languages, such as the contrast between English and Indonesian word order. This underlines the necessity for learners to gain a clearer grasp of English syntactic structures distinguishable from their native grammar. Considerable evidence suggests that learners benefit from explicit instruction concerning the intricacies of English syntax and its divergence from their first language, reinforcing the idea that tailored instruction can mitigate language interference issues.

Errors in morphological processes also indicate that students have not mastered the use of affixation, internal change, and suppletion. Most mistakes are linked to irregular verbs, plural forms, and word class transformations. Moreover, errors related to morphological processes, especially concerning irregular verbs and transformations, indicate a significant need for learners to develop a deeper understanding of affixation, as well as awareness of the differences between regular and irregular forms. A robust vocabulary contributes significantly to grammatical mastery (Zeng, 2022). Instruction focusing specifically on common irregular patterns and affix rules is crucial, as evidenced by findings that underscore the importance of vocabulary knowledge in relation to English proficiency (Duklim & Hasan, 2024). Developing productive knowledge of affixation will empower learners to navigate the complexities of English morphology more effectively.

In general, the results show that students are still in the process of developing grammatical competence. Errors are part of this learning process, but systematic patterns—especially in misformation and omission—point to specific areas where instruction should focus. In conclusion, the patterns observed in grammatical errors underline not only the students' ongoing journey towards grammatical competence but also emphasize the necessity for enhanced instructional strategies. Structured grammar exercises that concentrate on recognizing and correcting misformation and omission errors, along with a strong focus on morphological rules,

are needed to support learners in overcoming these challenges. Tailored and context-rich language exposure can further facilitate their understanding of how to apply these rules in real-world communication scenarios, ultimately enhancing their proficiency in English.

Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the third-semester students of English Education at UIN Raden Intan Lampung committed various errors in their short paragraph writing, categorized under the Surface Strategy Taxonomy and morphological error theory. The most significant challenge for students was misformation (50.60%), indicating a profound difficulty in selecting the correct word forms, often due to direct translation from their first language (Indonesian). This was followed closely by omission errors (32.31%), particularly of articles, prepositions, and pronouns, highlighting a lack of awareness of these essential syntactic elements in English. The errors in morphological processes, especially affixation, further confirm that students struggle with the application of plural markers, tense markers, and derivational rules.

Overall, the errors are systematic and point to the strong influence of L1 interference and the students' ongoing developmental stage in acquiring English grammatical competence. These patterns reveal specific gaps in their understanding that require targeted pedagogical intervention to overcome.

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