

## An Error Analysis of Grammatical Errors in EFL Students' Speaking Performance

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### ABSTRACT

This study analyzes grammatical errors produced by Indonesian EFL university students in English-speaking assignments. The data were drawn from students' speaking videos collected during mid-term and final examinations at Universitas Pendidikan Nasional, Denpasar. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the study applies error analysis based on Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's surface strategy taxonomy, which categorizes errors into omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. The analysis identified 50 grammatical errors, with misformation occurring most frequently, followed by omission, addition, and misordering. These errors mainly involved verb forms, subject-verb agreement, comparative constructions, and sentence structure, indicating challenges in grammatical form selection during spontaneous oral production. The findings reflect learners' developing interlanguage and their tendency to prioritize fluency over grammatical accuracy. The study highlights the importance of integrating explicit grammar instruction and systematic corrective feedback into speaking activities to enhance grammatical accuracy.

**Keywords:** *Error Analysis, Grammatical Errors, EFL Students, Speaking Performance*

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### INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the most essential skills in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) because it enables learners to communicate ideas, opinions, and information orally. However, for many EFL learners, achieving grammatical accuracy in spoken English remains challenging. Unlike written production, spoken communication requires learners to produce language spontaneously, often under time pressure, which increases the likelihood of grammatical inaccuracies. As a result, grammatical errors frequently occur in learners' spoken performances, particularly among students who use English primarily in academic settings.

From a second language acquisition perspective, learners' errors are viewed as a natural and systematic part of language development. Corder (1967) emphasized that errors provide valuable insights into learners' underlying linguistic competence and learning processes. Rather than being regarded as failures, errors reflect learners' developing interlanguage – an evolving linguistic system constructed as learners progress toward target language proficiency (Tarone, 1987). Therefore, analyzing grammatical errors, especially in spoken production, can contribute to a deeper understanding of how EFL learners acquire and use grammatical structures in real-time communication.

Error analysis has been widely employed to investigate learners' linguistic difficulties. According to James (1998), error analysis involves identifying, classifying, and explaining errors in learners' language production. One influential framework is the surface strategy taxonomy proposed by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982), which categorizes errors into omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. This taxonomy focuses on changes to the surface structure of language and has been applied to both written and spoken data. However, many studies have predominantly relied on written texts, such as essays, compositions, or examinations, as their primary data sources.

Several previous studies have reported frequent grammatical errors among EFL learners. Fitriani, Nurmayani, and Syarifuddin (2018), for instance, found that misformation and omission errors were the most common grammatical errors produced by Indonesian university students. Similarly, Trawinski (2005) noted that grammatical errors are closely related to the spontaneous nature of language production, where learners tend to prioritize fluency over accuracy. In Asian EFL contexts, Zheng and Park (2013) also identified persistent grammatical errors related to verb usage, comparative constructions, and sentence structure, attributing these errors to learners' interlanguage development.

Despite these findings, existing research has largely concentrated on grammatical errors in written language, while studies that specifically examine grammatical errors in spoken performance remain limited. This gap is particularly evident in research using assessed speaking tasks, such as mid-term and final speaking examinations, which require learners to demonstrate spontaneous oral production under evaluative conditions. Moreover, studies involving non-English major university students are still underrepresented, even though these learners often receive limited instructional exposure to English and may experience greater difficulty in spoken accuracy.

To address these gaps, the present study analyzes grammatical errors produced by Indonesian EFL university students from non-English majors in their English-speaking assignments. Using the surface strategy taxonomy, this study aims to identify the types of grammatical errors occurring in students' spoken performance and to explain the factors contributing to their occurrence.

## METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design supported by quantitative data. The qualitative approach was used to identify and classify grammatical errors found in students' English speaking performance, while quantitative data were used to calculate the frequency of each error type. This design was considered appropriate to provide a systematic description of learners' errors in spoken language and to identify recurring error patterns.

### Respondents

The respondents of this study were 30 undergraduate students at Universitas Pendidikan Nasional, Denpasar-Bali, who were enrolled in a compulsory English course during the academic semester in which the study was conducted. The respondents were not students of the English Study Program; instead, they came from various non-English majors and joined the English class as part of their general curriculum requirements. Purposive sampling was employed, as the respondents were required to complete English-speaking assignments in the form of recorded videos for both the mid-term and final tests. The data collection was carried out over one academic semester, from August to December. The respondents were EFL learners with varying levels of English proficiency, generally ranging from elementary to intermediate, based on their educational background and classroom performance. Their ages ranged from approximately 18 to 22 years old. All respondents had learned English as a foreign language in formal educational contexts and used English mainly for academic purposes. The speaking videos produced by the respondents served as the primary data source of this study. All data were used exclusively for research purposes, and the respondents' identities were anonymized to ensure confidentiality and adhere to ethical research considerations.

### Instruments

The primary instrument of this study consisted of students' English-speaking video recordings collected from the mid-term and final tests. These speaking tests were administered as part of regular classroom assessment in a compulsory English course at the university level. The tasks required the respondents to produce oral English individually based on predetermined topics related to daily activities, personal experiences, and familiar social

contexts. Such topics were selected to encourage spontaneous language use and to minimize memorization, thereby allowing the respondents' natural grammatical competence to emerge. The speaking performances were recorded in video format to ensure accurate and comprehensive data collection. Video recordings enabled the researcher to repeatedly observe respondents' spoken production and capture complete utterances, pauses, and sentence structures that might be missed in real-time observation. This instrument was considered appropriate for investigating grammatical errors in spoken language, as it provided authentic oral data produced under assessment conditions.

In addition to the video recordings, an error analysis checklist was employed as a secondary instrument to support systematic data analysis. The checklist was developed based on the surface strategy taxonomy proposed by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982). It categorized grammatical errors into four types: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. Each category was accompanied by operational definitions and examples to ensure consistency in identifying and classifying errors. The checklist functioned as an analytical framework that guided the researcher in examining the transcribed data and ensuring that all identified errors were classified according to established theoretical criteria.

### **Procedures**

The data analysis was conducted through several systematic stages adapted from error analysis procedures proposed by Corder (1967) and Ellis (1997). These procedures were designed to ensure accuracy, consistency, and reliability in identifying and interpreting grammatical errors in students' spoken English.

First, the video recordings obtained from the mid-term and final speaking tests were watched repeatedly to familiarize the researcher with the respondents' speaking performances and overall language use. This stage allowed the researcher to gain a holistic understanding of the data before conducting detailed analysis.

Second, all speaking performances were transcribed verbatim to produce written representations of the respondents' spoken utterances. The transcription process focused on grammatical structures and sentence formation, while pronunciation features such as intonation and stress were not included unless they affected grammatical form. Each transcript was checked multiple times against the original video recordings to ensure transcription accuracy.

Third, the transcriptions were examined carefully to identify grammatical errors by comparing the respondents' utterances with standard English grammatical rules. At this stage, only errors that reflected systematic grammatical deviations were included, while occasional slips or performance mistakes were excluded from the analysis.

Fourth, the identified grammatical errors were classified into four categories – omission, addition, misformation, and misordering – based on the surface strategy taxonomy. This classification aimed to reveal how respondents altered the surface structure of English during spoken production.

Fifth, the frequency of each type of grammatical error was calculated to determine dominant error patterns. The frequency data supported the descriptive analysis and allowed for clearer comparison among error categories.

Finally, the identified errors were analyzed to explore possible sources of error, including interlingual factors, such as first language influence, and intralingual factors, such as overgeneralization and incomplete rule application. The results of the analysis were then interpreted and discussed in relation to theories of interlanguage development and second language acquisition.

### **Data analysis**

The data were analyzed using error analysis procedures adapted from Corder (1967) and Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982). The analysis focused on identifying and classifying grammatical errors found in the respondents' spoken utterances based on the surface strategy taxonomy, which consists of omission, addition, misformation, and misordering.

*First, the transcribed speaking data from the mid-term and final tests were examined carefully to identify grammatical errors. Each utterance was*

compared with standard English grammatical rules to determine deviations that could be categorized as errors rather than performance mistakes. Only errors that occurred consistently or reflected systematic patterns were included in the analysis.

Second, the identified errors were classified into four categories: omission errors, which involve the absence of required grammatical elements; addition errors, which involve the presence of unnecessary elements; misformation errors, which occur when incorrect grammatical forms are used; and misordering errors, which involve incorrect word order within a sentence.

Third, the frequency of each type of grammatical error was calculated to identify dominant error patterns. The frequency data were then used to support the descriptive analysis and to illustrate the distribution of errors across the categories.

Finally, the results of the error classification were interpreted to explain possible sources of the errors, such as interlanguage development, overgeneralization of grammatical rules, and the influence of spontaneous speech production. The findings were presented descriptively and supported by selected examples from the respondents' speaking data.

To ensure the reliability of the analysis, the error classification process was conducted systematically. Each transcribed utterance was examined more than once to minimize misinterpretation. Ambiguous cases were discussed by rechecking the grammatical context and comparing them with standard English grammar references. Errors that occurred repeatedly across different respondents were considered representative of learners' grammatical difficulties rather than isolated performance slips.

Furthermore, the analysis focused on grammatical errors that affected sentence structure and grammatical accuracy, excluding pronunciation errors and lexical choice unless they directly influenced grammatical form. This approach was adopted to maintain consistency with the surface strategy taxonomy framework. The classified errors were then tabulated to identify patterns and dominant error types, which formed the basis for further interpretation in the discussion section.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

This section presents the results of the grammatical error analysis conducted on students' speaking assignments collected from the mid-term and final tests. A total of 50 grammatical errors were identified and classified using the surface strategy taxonomy, which includes omission, addition, misformation, and misordering.

#### *Distribution of Error Types*

The analysis shows that all four types of grammatical errors occurred in the students' spoken production. Table 1 summarizes the overall distribution of error types identified in the dataset.

Table 1. Distribution of Error Types

Error Type	Frequency	Percentage
Misformation	20	40%
Addition	15	30%
Omission	10	20%
Misordering	5	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>

Misformation errors were the most dominant, accounting for 40% of the total errors. This was followed by addition errors (30%), omission errors (20%), and misordering errors (10%). The dominance of misformation errors indicates that students frequently selected inappropriate grammatical forms when producing spoken English. From the total dataset, 10 representative utterances were selected for in-depth analysis. These data were chosen because they clearly illustrate recurring grammatical problems and reflect the most frequent error types found in the students' speaking performances.

## Analysis of Representative Data

## Data 1

Utterance: *We are going to show you how it's looks like*  
 Correct form: *We are going to show you what it looks like*  
 Error type: Misformation

This error is categorized as misformation because the student uses an incorrect grammatical form, namely *how* instead of *what*, in a noun clause. In English, *what it looks like* is the correct and fixed structure. The error is likely influenced by first language transfer, as Indonesian commonly uses the structure *bagaimana kelihatannya*.

## Data 2

Utterance: *Let's walks around*  
 Correct form: *Let's walk around*  
 Error type: Addition

This error is classified as addition because the student unnecessarily adds the third-person singular marker *-s* to the verb *walk*. The expression *let's* must be followed by a base verb. This error reflects overgeneralization of present tense agreement rules.

## Data 3

Utterance: *There is pasta, spaghetti, mochi, sushi and ice tea*  
 Correct form: *There are pasta, spaghetti, mochi, sushi, and iced tea*  
 Error type: Misformation

This utterance is classified as misformation because the student selects the singular existential form *there is* instead of the plural *there are*. The error shows difficulty in subject-verb agreement during spoken production. The use of *ice tea* instead of *iced tea* also indicates limited awareness of lexicalized adjective forms.

## Data 4

Utterance: *Does anyone know where we are today on which beach?*  
 Correct form: *Does anyone know which beach we are on today?*  
 Error type: Misordering

This error is categorized as misordering because the sentence elements are arranged in an incorrect order. In indirect questions, English does not require auxiliary inversion. The learner's sentence reflects confusion between direct and indirect question structures.

## Data 5

Utterance: *Today we would like review this café and the food*  
 Correct form: *Today, we would like to review this café and the food*  
 Error type: Omission

This error is classified as omission because the infinitive marker *to* is omitted after the expression *would like*, which requires a *to + verb* construction. This suggests incomplete mastery of verb complementation patterns.

## Data 6

Utterance: *I am agree with your opinion*  
 Correct form: *I agree with your opinion*  
 Error type: Addition

This error is categorized as addition because the learner unnecessarily inserts the auxiliary verb *am* before the verb *agree*. In English, *agree* functions as a lexical verb and does not require a linking verb.

## Data 7

Utterance: *I can speak English more good*  
 Correct form: *I can speak English better*  
 Error type: Misformation

This error is classified as misformation because the student uses the adjective *good* instead of the comparative adverb *better* to modify the verb *speak*. This reflects difficulty in distinguishing between adjective and adverb forms in comparative constructions.

## Data 8

Utterance: *The price is more cheaper*

*Correct form: The price is cheaper**Error type: Addition*

This utterance is categorized as addition because two comparative markers (*more* and *-er*) are used simultaneously. In English, only one comparative form should be applied. The error indicates overgeneralization of comparative rules.

Data 9

*Utterance: I do not go to this beach last week**Correct form: I did not go to this beach last week**Error type: Misformation*

This error is classified as misformation because the student incorrectly uses the present tense auxiliary *do* instead of the past tense *did*. The presence of the temporal marker *last week* requires a past tense construction.

Data 10

*Utterance: I so happy today**Correct form: I am so happy today**Error type: Omission*

This error is categorized as omission because the linking verb *am* is omitted. The absence of *be* verbs is common among Indonesian EFL learners, as such verbs do not exist in Indonesian sentence structure.

### Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the respondents produced various types of grammatical errors in their English-speaking assignments, namely omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. The presence of these error types indicates that, although the respondents were generally able to convey their intended meaning, grammatical accuracy in spoken English remains a considerable challenge. This finding suggests that communicative success in speaking does not necessarily reflect grammatical competence, particularly among EFL learners who use English primarily for academic purposes.

The occurrence of grammatical errors in the respondents' spoken performances reflects the characteristics of developing interlanguage. As proposed by interlanguage theory, learners construct a transitional linguistic system that gradually evolves as they receive input and produce output in the target language. The errors identified in this study are not random but systematic, indicating that the respondents are actively applying and testing grammatical rules during spoken production. This supports the view that errors should be interpreted as evidence of language development rather than linguistic deficiency.

Moreover, the dominance of grammatical errors in speaking tasks highlights the inherent complexity of oral language production. Unlike written tasks, speaking requires learners to produce language spontaneously while simultaneously managing content planning, lexical retrieval, and grammatical encoding. Under such conditions, learners often prioritize fluency and meaning transmission over grammatical accuracy. This tendency becomes even more pronounced in assessment-based speaking tasks, such as mid-term and final tests, where time constraints and evaluative pressure may increase cognitive load and reduce learners' ability to monitor grammatical forms.

In the context of non-English major university students, limited exposure to English outside the classroom may further contribute to the persistence of grammatical errors. Since these learners have fewer opportunities to practice English in authentic communicative settings, their grammatical knowledge may remain declarative rather than procedural. As a result, grammatical rules that are understood theoretically may not be consistently applied during spontaneous speech. This condition helps explain why grammatical errors continue to occur even among students who have studied English for several years.

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that grammatical accuracy in spoken English develops gradually and requires targeted instructional support. The identification of omission, addition, misformation, and misordering errors provides a foundation for a more detailed examination of each error type, which is discussed in the following sections. By analyzing

these errors in depth, the study offers insights into learners' spoken interlanguage and highlights areas that require pedagogical attention in English-speaking instruction.

#### *Misformation Errors*

Misformation errors were identified as the most frequent type of grammatical error in this study. These errors occurred when respondents used incorrect grammatical forms in place of the correct ones. Common instances include the misuse of verb forms ("*it's looks like*"), incorrect comparative constructions ("*more good*," "*more cheaper*"), and inappropriate verb agreement ("*I am agree*").

The frequent occurrence of misformation errors indicates that respondents have developed partial knowledge of English grammatical rules but encounter difficulties in applying them accurately during spontaneous speech. For example, the use of "*it's looks like*" reflects confusion between the copular construction "*it is*" and the verb phrase "*it looks like*," suggesting that learners are aware of both structures but fail to differentiate their grammatical functions in real-time production. Similarly, comparative errors such as "*more good*" and "*more cheaper*" demonstrate learners' incomplete understanding of English adjective comparison rules, particularly the distinction between one-syllable adjectives and adjectives that require the *more* marker.

These findings support Dulay et al. (1982), who argue that misformation errors often result from overgeneralization and incomplete rule application. Learners tend to apply a single grammatical rule broadly without fully recognizing its limitations. In the context of spoken language, such errors are further amplified by the cognitive demands of real-time speech, where learners must simultaneously attend to content, vocabulary, and grammar.

Furthermore, the dominance of misformation errors aligns with previous studies conducted in Indonesian EFL contexts. Fitriani et al. (2018) reported that misformation errors were the most frequent grammatical errors in students' speaking performances, particularly in verb usage and adjective forms. This similarity suggests that misformation errors are a persistent challenge among Indonesian EFL learners, especially those with limited exposure to English outside the classroom.

#### *Omission Errors*

Omission errors were the second most common type of error identified in the respondents' spoken data. These errors involved the absence of obligatory grammatical elements, such as auxiliary verbs, infinitive markers, articles, or verb inflections. For instance, in the utterance "*Today we would like review this café and the food*," the omission of the infinitive marker "*to*" results in an ungrammatical construction.

The prevalence of omission errors may be attributed to the communicative nature of speaking tasks, where learners prioritize meaning over grammatical completeness. Elements such as infinitive markers and auxiliary verbs often carry limited semantic meaning and therefore may be perceived as less important by learners during oral production. As a result, these elements are more likely to be omitted, especially when learners speak under time pressure.

Ellis (1997) explains that omission errors are characteristic of learners at early and intermediate stages of second language acquisition, as their attentional resources are primarily allocated to message conveyance rather than form accuracy. In spontaneous speaking situations, this tendency becomes more pronounced due to increased cognitive load. For non-English major students, who may have limited practice in spoken English, the omission of grammatical elements reflects an incomplete automatization of grammatical rules.

#### *Addition Errors*

Addition errors were also observed in the respondents' spoken utterances, although they occurred less frequently than misformation and omission errors. These errors involved the insertion of unnecessary grammatical elements, such as additional verb inflections or redundant markers. An example of this error type can be seen in the utterance "*Let's walks around*," where the verb "*walk*" is incorrectly marked with the third-person singular suffix *-s*. Addition errors indicate learners' attempts to apply grammatical rules, even in contexts where such rules are not required. In this case, the respondent appears to overgeneralize the rule that

verbs in the present tense require an -s ending, without considering that "let's" is followed by the base form of the verb. This pattern reflects learners' developing grammatical awareness and their efforts to produce grammatically accurate sentences.

According to James (1998), addition errors are a natural part of interlanguage development, as learners actively test hypotheses about the target language. Rather than indicating regression, such errors demonstrate learners' engagement with grammatical rules. In spoken production, where self-monitoring is limited, these overgeneralized forms are more likely to surface.

#### *Misordering Errors*

Misordering errors were the least frequent type of error identified in the data; however, they remain significant, particularly in more complex sentence structures such as indirect questions. An example of this error is found in the utterance "Does anyone know where we are today on which beach?", where the placement of the phrase "on which beach" disrupts the expected word order in English.

These errors suggest that respondents experience difficulty in organizing sentence elements according to English syntactic rules, especially when producing longer utterances. The structure of indirect questions in English differs substantially from that of direct questions, requiring learners to suppress subject-auxiliary inversion. This syntactic complexity poses a challenge for learners during spontaneous speech.

Additionally, first language influence may contribute to misordering errors. Indonesian sentence structure allows for more flexible word order compared to English, which may lead learners to transfer L1 patterns into their English utterances. This finding is consistent with Zheng and Park (2013), who reported that EFL learners in Asian contexts often struggle with English syntactic ordering, particularly in complex sentence constructions.

#### *Overall Interpretation*

Overall, the grammatical errors identified in this study are systematic rather than random. They reflect the respondents' developing interlanguage and the cognitive demands of spoken language production. As Trawinski (2005) suggests, speaking tasks often require learners to balance fluency and accuracy, and grammatical accuracy is frequently compromised in favor of communicative effectiveness.

From a pedagogical perspective, these findings highlight the importance of integrating explicit grammar instruction into speaking activities. Providing targeted feedback on frequent grammatical errors and offering opportunities for repeated oral practice may help learners gradually improve their grammatical accuracy without hindering fluency.

#### *Pedagogical Implications*

The findings of this study provide several pedagogical implications for English instruction, particularly for non-English major university students. Since misformation and omission errors were the most frequent, English instructors should place greater emphasis on grammatical forms that commonly appear in spoken discourse, such as verb forms, comparative constructions, and verb complementation.

Integrating grammar instruction into speaking activities may help learners improve grammatical accuracy without reducing fluency. For instance, instructors can design speaking tasks that focus on specific grammatical targets and provide immediate corrective feedback. Additionally, repeated speaking practice accompanied by reflective feedback can help learners become more aware of their recurring grammatical errors.

Furthermore, assessment-based speaking tasks should balance fluency and accuracy. Allowing short preparation time before speaking or providing post-task feedback sessions may reduce learners' anxiety and cognitive load, leading to improved grammatical performance. These strategies may be particularly beneficial for non-English major students who have limited exposure to English outside the classroom.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study examined grammatical errors produced by Indonesian EFL university students in English-speaking assignments collected from midterm and final examinations.

Using error analysis based on the surface strategy taxonomy, four types of grammatical errors were identified: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering, with misformation occurring most frequently, followed by omission, addition, and misordering. The predominance of misformation errors suggests that students possess partial grammatical knowledge but experience difficulty selecting appropriate grammatical forms during spontaneous oral production. Errors related to verb forms, subject-verb agreement, comparative constructions, and sentence structure indicate that learners are still in the process of internalizing English grammatical rules, while omission errors reflect a tendency to exclude less salient grammatical elements under time constraints, and addition and misordering errors demonstrate overgeneralization and challenges in constructing syntactically accurate sentences. These findings confirm that grammatical errors are a natural and systematic aspect of second language acquisition rather than random mistakes, reflecting learners' developing interlanguage and the cognitive demands of spoken communication, in which fluency is often prioritized over grammatical accuracy. From a pedagogical perspective, the results highlight the importance of integrating explicit grammar instruction into speaking activities, providing focused feedback on recurring errors, and designing tasks that balance fluency and accuracy to improve grammatical performance without compromising communicative effectiveness. However, this study is limited by its small number of participants and its focus on a single academic context; therefore, future research may involve larger samples, different proficiency levels, or instructional interventions aimed at reducing grammatical errors in spoken English.

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