

**Research article**

# Examining Frequent Grammatical Errors in Student Theses: A Case Study of a Private University in Sulawesi

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**Abstract.**

The purpose of this study was to determine the most common grammatical errors found in students' theses at a private university in Southeast Sulawesi, and to consider the possible causes of the students' mistakes. Descriptive qualitative methods were used. Students were recruited through purposive sampling. The theses were analyzed using the Mileys & Huberman's approach. During the data collection process, the writer documented the thesis background and noted any errors that were discovered. 803 errors were found in the background of students' theses. The most common errors were on misformation, which accounted for 547 or 68.12% of all errors, followed by omission errors, which accounted for 128 or 15.94% of all errors. Misordering and addition, on the other hand, accounted for 11.83% and 4.10% of all errors, respectively. The researchers deduced from the error analysis that mother tongue interference and target language causes contributed to these errors (false analogy, misanalysis, incomplete rule application, exploiting redundancy, overlooking co-occurrence restrictions, hypercorrection, overgeneralization, or system-simplification).

**Keywords:** frequent grammatical errors, misformation, misordering, addition, omission

## 1. Introduction

In EFL, errors are often occurred as learning English is not easy and the learners may have difficulties. However, the errors can be used as a device to learn [1] in which the learners can fully grasp and understand the nature of errors as well as explain the rules and possibly correct the errors if identified. Accordingly, this type of research has been extensively conducted in many different contexts, such as in ESL context of Malaysia [2]; [3], Colombia [4], as well as South Africa [5], in EFL setting of Iran [6], Saudi Arabia [7]; [8], Thailand [9], Indonesia [10]; [11]; [12]; [13]; [14], [15], etc. Although they had different focuses of the skills they investigated; some focused on errors found in pronunciation [15], grammar uses in speaking [12]; [11]; [2]; [6], morphological errors [3], and grammar

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uses in students' writing performance [9]; [7]; [13]; [14]; [8]; [5]; [10]; [4]; [6], it is evident that how significant the research related errors in both EFL and ESL settings.

Based on the description above, it is inevitable that many previous researchers preferred to examine the syntactical errors through students' writing compositions and many Indonesian researchers are prominently undergoing this research in EFL context. Likewise, this present research also focused on the students' writing, but different from other previous research, it used thesis background of the students' final project as one of requirements to graduate from undergraduate years which makes this current research distinct as investigating the students' grammatical errors in thesis background is still limited. Therefore, the researcher thought that by investigating the students' thesis background, it would give positive contributions to university leading to be one of the resources for the lecturers to find some alternatives to deal with the students' most problematic issues based on the errors found from this research. Also, this research would help the students to understand the frequent grammatical errors found in the students' thesis background which at the end will make them to avoid such errors when writing a thesis. Accordingly, this research focusing on frequent grammatical errors in students' writing performance was conducted.

## 2. Research Methods

This research was designed as a descriptive qualitative research in which the researcher tried to examine the frequent grammatical errors found in the students' thesis background taking up to 30 samples from different academic year in one private university in Southeast Sulawesi. The data obtained from the thesis background were reduced or chosen, displayed, and interpreted or verified based on the model of Miles & Huberman. The researcher identified the errors through reading the students' thesis background, counted the errors, classified the errors, analyzed the source and causes of the errors, and described the analysis findings [1]. After analyzing the errors, the researcher then tried to draw a conclusion about the factors underlying the errors based on the literature review.

## 3. Result and Discussion

Based on the result of identification, classification, quantification, and analysis conducted by the writer in terms of types of errors based on surface structure taxonomy consisting of omission, misformation, misordering which are also found frequently in

students' speaking performance [12], and addition, the researchers found 803 errors in students' thesis background. Omission is the second type of error that always occurred on students' theses taking up to 128 errors in which such errors were characterized by the absence of plural marker of *-s/-es* of a noun and verb. The least errors made by the students in their thesis are addition up to 33 errors characterized by the presence of an item such as singular and plural marker *-s/-es*, of a noun and verb, and *-ing* form instead of an infinitive. Misformation which is similarly found as the most frequent errors in students' writing [14] is also the most frequent error occurred in this research context taking up to 547 errors characterized the use of the wrong form of morpheme such as the use of infinitive instead of simple past, adjective instead of adverb, an infinitive instead of a gerund, possessive adjective instead of reflexive pronoun, and an adjective instead of a noun. Finally, misordering which was also frequently found in students' descriptive writing with different context [13] was the third error that frequently found in the students' thesis background up to 95 errors marked by the incorrect placement of an adjective and noun, noun phrase, adverb of time, etc.

TABLE 1: The Percentage of Students' Errors Based on the Surface Structure Taxonomy.

No	Error types	Total	Percentage (%)
1.	Omission	128	15.94
2.	Addition	33	4.11
3.	Misformation	547	68.12
4.	Misordering	95	11.83
	Total		100%

Based on the above findings, the researchers then tried to identify the causes of each error type. The errors are frequently caused by mother tongue interference and target language cause (false analogy, misanalysis, incomplete rule application, exploiting redundancy, overlooking co-occurrence restrictions, hypercorrection, over-generalization, or system-simplification) [1].

### 3.1. Error Analysis and Interpretation

#### a. Omission

In this surface structure taxonomy, those errors occurred were frequently caused by the absence of *s/ -es* as the plural markers. The students omitted an *s/-es* in some plural nouns. These sentences contain examples of the types of problem that are common on omission:

1a ...has already been used ...by many teacher in the world. (T1e)

2a ....the researcher found out some problem that faced of students..... (T1h)

3a There were many kind of teachers ' method... (T2f)

4a Although many method applied by teacher as curriculum recommendation, but teacher should applied some technique..... (T2h)

5a Teacher not only mastered technique in writing in general but also create some method unusual. (T2i)

6a The students asked to write....without being given some clue so that it is difficult for them..... (T2l)

7a The knowledge was new to the students and answer some question. (T2x)

8a These four skills are supports by some component namely.... (T3b)

9a Some event can be easily arranged. Based on the problems and some solution presented above, the writer is interested in conducting..... (T4j)

10a NHT enables the students to more opportunity to participate..... (T8p)

Those nouns in the sentences above should be pluralized, because they refer to more than one noun. Besides, there is a plural marker “*some and many*” before the noun. “*Some*” is an expression of quantity that must be followed by a plural countable noun or a singular uncountable noun. Meanwhile, “*many*” must be followed by a plural countable noun. Therefore, the noun phrases above must be: *many teachers, many kinds, many methods, some techniques, some methods, some clues, some questions, some components, some events and some solutions.*

In another case, a sentence in English should have a subject and a verb. In this case, there should be an agreement between the subject and the verb. Subject/ verb agreement is simple: if the subject of a sentence is singular, then the verb must be singular; if the subject of the sentence is plural, then the verb must be plural. An –s on a verb usually indicates that a verb is singular. In the following sentences, the students made errors because they failed to make an agreement between the subject and the verb:

11a. ....cooperative learning approach which meet to the students' involvement in learning. (T1d)

12a. ....especially the teacher who teach English.... (T8h)

13a. Language is a system of arbitrary, vocal, symbols which permit all people in..... (T10a)

14a. English is so important that Indonesian government set it as..... (T10b)

15a. In education, teaching and learning English deal with many aspects..... (T10c)

16a. WH question is interrogative question that elicit specific information.... (T10d)

17a. IGA motivate students to speak...and involve students in... (T16h)

In point 11a, the verb “meet” must be added by an –s, or singularized into “meets” because the subject refers to a singular subject or one cooperative learning approach. So, the correct sentence is “...cooperative learning approach which meet to the students’ involvement in learning”.

In point 12a, the verb should be “teaches” instead of “teach”, because the subject is singular that needs a singular verb as well. In the same cases, in point 13a, 14a, 15a, 16a, and 17a, the verbs are supposed to be singularized because the subjects are singular. It means that the correct sentences are “Language is a system of arbitrary, vocal, symbols which permits all people in....., English is so important that Indonesian government sets it as....., In education, teaching and learning English deals with many aspects....., WH question is interrogative question that elicits specific information..., and IGA motivates students to speak...and involves students in...”

Another problem, a particular agreement occurs in an expression of quantity like *one of*. *One of* is followed by a determiner and a noun phrase, or by a plural pronoun. *Of* cannot be dropped in this structure. After *one of*, a noun phrase must have a determiner, such as *one of the/my/those*. In the following situations, the students failed to apply the rule of this structure:

18a. Reading is one of four skills that students are leaning at school. (T8a)

19a. Novel The White Queen, ....is one example of the author’s literary works actually experienced life in the process British society. (T11g)

In this situation, reading refers to a particular skill. The skills themselves are clearly known by the students. In this case, there are four skills (speaking, writing, listening and reading). The students omitted an article *The* after *Of*. The sentence must be “Reading is one of the four skills that.....”

It is clearly known that there are some literary works of the authors. One of those are Novel The White Queen. Because it refers to the particular noun of a group of noun, the structure should be “Novel The White Queen, ....is one of the examples of the author’s literary works.....” . In point 20a, 21a, 22a, and 23a, the nouns should be pluralized because they refer to particular noun of a group of nouns. *There are many subjects, one of them is English, there are many strategies, one of those is ...., there are many domains, one of them is education.*

Besides the cases above, there are some situations, in which the students did not watch very carefully some general nouns that should be pluralized, even though there

are not any key words such as *many, some, several, various, two, more, etc.* for examples:

24a. People tend to express their idea, their feeling, and their thought through spoken language (T1a)

25a. ....by working together with their friend. (T20f) 26a. Having a good knowledge of vocabulary support student to mastery English. (T24d)

27a. Many teachers have forgotten how to....To make students motivate and enjoyable to study vocabulary, the teacher should be creatively in delivering materials. (T24o)

28a. Among other language skill, writing is....since it involves several component... (T25b)

29a. English is very important...because it is always used in our daily activity to communicate with others. (T28a)

The noun phrases above should be in plural forms although there are not any plural markers, because the noun refers to more than one. In point 24a, because the subject is a plural noun *people*, it means that there will be more than one *idea, feeling, and thought*. Meanwhile, in point 25a, the prepositional phrase *by working together with their friend* indicates that this is a work group of students in a class. In point 26a, we talk about the students in general or in one class, so there should be many students, in point 27a, in the previous sentence, the subject is *many teachers*, in the next sentence, we still have to use *teachers* (in plural form) or change it by the subject pronoun reference *they*. In point 28a, the word *among* and *other* indicate that the noun refers plural noun. Those errors in phrase above could be reconstructed: "their ideas, their feelings, and their thoughts through spoken language, .... with their friends, ....support students to mastery English, ...the teachers ....., Among other language skills,..... and .... our daily activities...."

#### b. Addition

In this type of error, the students added redundant element that should not appear in well-structure utterance. Some of these errors are categorized into regularization and simple addition, for examples:

30a. Although many method applied by teacher as curriculum recommendation, but teacher should applied some technique .....(T2h)

31a. These four skills are supports by some component namely.... (T3b)

32a. English as the foreign language has been put in the curriculum of junior high schools. P. (3c)

33a. Therefore, the students would have a complete writing process and produced a good narrative text. P. (4d)

34a. TTW technique which can involve the students to think....and then discussed it to their friends, making a note, so the students are..... (T7l)

35a. Elizabeth Woodville figures reflect a powerful and ambitious woman, very good, simple and pretentious, many moral values that can be drawn from the figures Elizabeth. (T11m)

36a. it can be guesses the all of the goal of learning will running well. (T12i)

37a. It helps students to understanding not only thing and experiences, but also the language describes these thing and experiences ..... (T14e)

38a. They easily get bored, losing interest after ten minutes or so. (T15e)

In point 30a, whenever you see modals such as *will, would, shall, should, can, could, may, might, or must*, you should be sure that the verb that follows it is in the base form. In this example, *applied* should be the base form *apply* because it follows *should*. In point 32a, the verb *be* in any of its forms (*am, is, are, was, were, be, been, being*) can be followed by another verb. This verb should be in either the present participle or the past participle form. In this example, *supports* should be *supported* because it is after *are*. The student adds an *-s* instead of *-ed* because this is in passive voice form. In point 33a, the student adds an *-s* after *school* because he/ she wants to pluralize the noun *school*. The main point that must be paid attention is that *junior high school* is a collective noun that refers to many *high schools*. As what has been explained in example 30a, modals will always be followed by the base form of verb. In this example, the student has applied the rule correctly, *would have a complete writing process*, but in the other case, she/ he added redundant element *-ed* after *produce*. *Have* and *produce* have a parallel structure because they appear after *would*. The problem in point 34a, the student added an *-ed* after *discuss* and *-ing* after *make*. The verbs *think, discuss, and make* have the same structure, so they should be written in the base form of verbs *discuss and make*. The example in point 35a, the word *figures* should be *figure*, because it refers to one person Elizabeth Woodville. The case in point 36a has been explained in point 30a and 32a. The verb *be* should be followed by the verb in either the present participle or the past participle form. Therefore, the sentence should be *it can be guessed*. Meanwhile, *will running* should be *will run* because the verb *running* follows *will* that should be in the base form of verb. In point 37a, an addition *-ing* form after the verb *understand* should be dropped out. After *help*, we can use *object + infinitive*, or *to infinitive*. *To* will always be followed by an infinitive. In this case, we use *to understand* instead of *to understanding*. In point 38a, the phrases *get bored*

and *losing interest* have a parallel structure. Therefore, they must the same structure *get bored* and *lose interest*.

### c. Misformation

In constructing sentences, sometimes we use the wrong form of a structure or morpheme. Sentence English is different from that of in Indonesian. There are some considerations when we construct sentences in English such as *tenses, preposition, arciform, subject/ verb agreement, and so forth*. The most common errors made by the students in this surface structure taxonomy are the use of present forms instead of past forms. The following sentences are some examples of errors in this type:

39a. Based on the statement above, the researcher is interested to.....(T1j)

40a. This study investigates the students' achievement in.... (T4a)

In these errors, the students fail to change the form of the verbs in to past tense. They do not change as they wrote in their proposal. In point 39a, the phrase *based on the statement above* becomes the backgrounds why the student was interested to choose the title. Therefore, the sentence should be *based on the statement above, the researcher was interested to.....* In point 40a, the student should use *investigated* instead of *investigates*. The use of *investigated* refers to the time of conducting the research. We know that a sentence in English should have a subject and a verb. The most common types of problems that the writer encounters in students' theses background are related to subjects and verbs; perhaps the sentence is missing either the subject or the verb or both, or perhaps the sentence has an extra subject or verb. The followings are some examples of this error:

41a. It reasonable because writing as one of forth skill, has important position..... (T2j)

42a. Students found learning English very difficult. (T2m)

43a. Based on the explanation above, the writer interested to know.....toward student writing ability...(T2bb)

44a. ....and third, they also difficult to got specific information of.... (T8g)

45a. Teaching English is now focused on improving students' learning competence. It means that should be able to use.....(T1c)

Those sentences above are missing the verb. In point 41a, we should notice that the sentence has a subject *It* but needs a verb. However, *reasonable* is not a verb, but it is an adjective. The verb should be *is* because there is an adjective *reasonable*. Therefore, the sentence should be *It is reasonable because....* In point 42a, 43a, and 44a, they are missing a verb as well. There should be a verb *was* in point 42a and 43a, and *were* in point 44a. Therefore the sentence should be *students found that learning English was*



*very difficult, ....the writer was interested to know...., and ...they were also difficult to...*  
 In point 45a, there should be a subject after the adjective clause connector *that* and before *should*. In this case the subject refers to *the students*. Therefore, the sentence should be *....it means that the students should be able to use....*

In turning proposal sentences into thesis sentences, not all of the verbs must be changed into simple past form. When we talk about permanent situation, or about things that happen regularly or all of the time (not just around now), we usually use the simple present. In the following examples, the verbs should not be changed into simple past form, because, basically, the contexts describe a permanent situation:

46a. The knowledge was new to the students and answer some question. (T2x)

47a. Inquiry based learning was... to the learner. (T2y)

48a. Generally there were four skills that students' must be mastered in learning English. p. (2a)

In point 46a and 47a, the verbs *was* should be *is* because they describe the knowledge and Inquiry based learning. Meanwhile in point 48a, the verb *were* should be *are*. The failure of students to recognize the *parts of speech* will affect on their sentence production. In sentences below, the students could not differentiate the verb, adjective, noun and adverb. Therefore, they could not produce sentences well and correctly. For examples:

49a. By having enough vocabulary the students will not have difficult to convey their...(T3d)

50a. ...second, they had difficult to identify generic structure of ....(T8g)

51a. In language skill, reading is belong to receptive skill, (T8d)

52a. The use of pictures are more efficient and practice than words. (T4i)

In point 49a and 50a, they used *difficult* instead of *difficulty*. The verb *have* and some of its forms (*has and had*) will be followed by object, and the object must be in form of noun. While in point 51a, the students thought that *belong* is an adjective, so he/ she put *is* before *belong*. *Belong* is a verb, in this case, there should not be *is* before it. The sentences should be *reading belongs to receptive skill*. In point 52a, the words *efficient* and *practice* are parallel, they are categorized into adjective. However, the word *practice* in this case is not an adjective but it is a verb. The adjective form of *practice* is *practical*. Therefore, it should be *....more efficient and practical than words*.

In English sentences, there should be an agreement between the subjects and the verbs. The verbs should not agree with the object of preposition. An object of

preposition is a noun or a pronoun that comes after a preposition such as *in, at, of, to, by, behind, and on* to form a prepositional phrase. The examples of errors in this part:

53a. The use of pictures are more efficient and practice than words. (T4i)

54a. According to the writer's experience was found lack ability of reading because some factors, one of them was bored activity. (T14g)

55a. In cognitive theory showed anything we experience or learned..... (T24m)

In point 53a, *pictures* is the object of preposition *of*. We should look for the subject and verb. The subject of the sentence is *the use* and the verb is *are*. However, the verb *are* should agree with the subject *the use*. Because *the use* is in singular form, the verb *are* should be in singular form as well. Therefore the sentence should be *The use of pictures is more efficient and practical*. In point 54a, the student did not pay attention to put a subject in the sentence. There should be a subject of the sentence. The phrase *according to the writer experience* is not a subject but it is a prepositional phrase. In point 3, the phrase *in cognitive theory* is not a subject but it is a prepositional phrase. Therefore, there should be a subject before *showed* or the preposition *in* must be dropped out to form a subject *cognitive theory*.

In some errors, the use of preposition takes a part in it. Prepositions are not normally used before infinitives in English. After verb/ noun/ adjective + preposition, we usually use the *-ing* form of the following verbs:

56a. So, vocabulary is most important thing in mastery English. (T3e)

57a. It was less important for students.....and the first exercises should be ones that allow student to write without concerns about .....(T2d)

In this case, the adjective *mastery* and the verb *concerns* should be in verb-ing form, *mastering* and *concerning*, because they come after preposition *in* and *without*.

The problems in pronouns (*subject, object, possessive adjective, possessive pronoun, and reflexive pronoun*) are the common errors made by the students. A subject pronoun is used as the subject of a verb. An object pronoun can be used as the object of a verb or the subject of preposition. Possessive adjectives and pronouns both show who or what "owns" a noun. However, possessive adjective and pronoun do not have the same function, and these two kinds can be confusing. A possessive adjective describes a noun: it must be accompanied by a noun and it must agree with the subject pronoun. A possessive pronoun takes the place of a noun: it cannot be accompanied by a noun. Reflexive pronouns (*myself, yourself, himself, herself, itself, ourselves, yourselves, and themselves*) are used to talk about actions where the subject and object are the same

person. It can also be used as subject or object emphasize, to mean “that person/ thing and nobody/ nothing else.

The following sentences are some examples of errors based on the explanation above:

58a. it found problems that almost \_\_\_ students have low vocabulary. (T3h)

59a. As a result she concluded that.... Therefore, based on his findings....(T3k)

60a. As an English teacher we must make decision to choose language teaching method..... (T5k)

61a. If students are having problem in....., he/ she can write it down. (T7b)

62a. Then, student itself or possibly the reader will understand it. (T7c)

In point 58a, the subject *it* should be *the researcher/ the writer/ he/ or she* because it refers to the person conducting the study. In point 59a, the possessive adjective *his* does not agree with the subject pronoun *she*. It should be *her* as the possessive adjective of subject pronoun *she*. In point 60a, the noun phrase *an English teacher* refers to someone. The context of this sentence, the student wants to include himself/ herself as the English teachers. Therefore, because the student has used *we* as the subject pronoun, the noun phrase as *an English teacher, we must....* must be changed into *as English teachers, we must....* In point 61a, the subject *students* refers to more than one person. The singular subject pronoun *she/he* is incorrect because it refers to the singular person. The pronoun reference should be replaced by *they*. Therefore, the sentence should be *If students are having problem in....., they can write it down*. In point 62a, the reflexive pronoun *itself* should be replaced by *himself or herself* because *itself* refers to a thing not a person. If the *student* is plural *students*, the reflexive pronoun will be *themselves*.

The verb *be* in any of its forms (*am, is, are, was, were, be, been, being*) can be followed by another verb. This verb should be in either the present participle or the past participle form. The verb *be* which followed by past participle is termed as *passive form or passive sentence*. Each of the following sentences contains a verb formed with *be*:

63a. They should be give practice in three levels of materials such as .... (T5b)

64a. Language can be connect one another that live in different places and cultures. (T6a)

65a. In teaching English, reading is the first skill should be introduce to students..... (T8c)

66a. Then it can be conclude that IGA has advantages... (T16h)

67a. Based on the explanation above, the researcher inspired to improve students' writing ability by.... (T7k)

In point 63a, 65a and 66a, the verbs *give and introduce* should be changed into past participle form *given and introduced*, because they are formed with the verb of *be* and they are into passive form. In point 64a, the verb of *be* should be dropped out, because the context refers to an active form. Therefore, the sentence should be *Language can connect one another.....* In point 67a, there should be a verb of *be* before the past participle *inspired*. The verb of *be* must agree with subject and time. Because the subject is *the researcher* and refers to the past even, so the appropriate verb of *be* is *was*. Therefore the sentence should be *Based on the explanation above, the researcher was inspired to improve students' writing ability by....*

Generally, an adverb rather than an adjective will come directly after a verb because the adverb is describing the verb. However, we must be very careful if the verb is a *linking verb*. A *linking verb* is followed by an adjective rather than an adverb. There are some linking verbs that should be followed by adjectives instead of adverbs: *appear, be, become, feel, look, prove, seem, smell, and taste*. for example:

68a. This condition seems inconsistency to be used a particular time to complete the teaching. (T13j)

In this example, the noun *inconsistency* comes after the linking verb *seem*.

#### d. Misordering

This type of errors is characterized by the incorrect placement of morpheme or group of morphemes in utterance. This type of errors was placed in the third frequently found in students' writing which has different result with Muhsin's research (2018) who found this type errors as the least found. The following sentences represent some errors in this type of surface structure taxonomy:

69a. Learning speaking skill... requires the students to not only know the structure and semantic rules of the target language, but also requires them to know the ability..... (T1b)

70a. both the language used, \_\_nature of fiction and factual, that sometimes drove to the gate of literary and dramatic. (T11b)

The paired conjunctions *both...and, either... or, neither...nor, and not only...but also* require parallel structures. The sentence in point 69a is incorrect because *know the structure and semantic rules of the target language* is not parallel to *requires them to know the ability.....* Meanwhile, in point 70a, there should be connector *and* to parallelize

the paired conjunction *both...and...* the sentence should be *both language used and nature of fiction and factual,....*

In the same cases, this type of error occurs in the following sentences:

71a. Teacher not only mastered technique in writing in general but also create some method unusual. (T2i)

72a The ambiguity inherent in literature, both the language used, \_\_\_nature of fiction and factual, that sometimes drove to the gate of literary and dramatic. (T11b)

73a. This technique is hoped to solve the problem because usually students get difficulty to develop their idea in writing....(T6e)

74a Linking literature with idea or ideologies surely not be easy to disentangle. (T11e)

Sometimes in written expression, adjectives and adverbs are incorrectly used. Adjectives have only one job: they describe nouns or pronouns. While adverbs have three different uses: they can describe verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs. Therefore, adjective should come before nouns. And adverbs come after subject, after verbs, and before adjectives. In point 71a and 72a, the phrase *method unusual* and *the ambiguity inherent* above have incorrect placement. *Method* and *ambiguity* are nouns, while *unusual* and *inherent* are adjectives. Therefore, they should be *unusual method* instead of *method unusual* and *the inherent ambiguity* instead of *the ambiguity inherent*. Meanwhile, in point 73a, the clause *because usually students get....*, should be *the students usually get ....* After *because* is an adverb connector, there should be a clause after it. In point 6, the placement of adverb and adjective is incorrect. The right placement is *Linking literature with idea or ideologies is surely not easy to disentangle*.

In another cases, the students misordered the position of some words, as showed in following sentences:

75a. ....also they can continue to learn ..... (T9i)

76a. Language is used in the literature \_\_\_ usually ambiguous, (T11a)

77a. That such a scene murder or bloodshed which cause viewers or reader happy but also nause. (T11k)

78a. This condition seems inconsistency to be used a particular time to complete the teaching. (T13j)

The problem in sentence 75a above is the order of *also* in the sentence. *Also* usually goes with the verb, in 'mid-position'. In this case, it should be put after *can*. The correct sentence is ....*They can also continue to learn....* The order of the sentence in point 76a above must be *language used in literature is usually ambiguous*. The verb *is* should be put before the adverb *usually*. It can also be corrected by using relative clause *which*.

In point 77a, causal conjunction *so...that* and *such...that* should be well organized in the sentence. However, in the example above, there is an error occurred in ordering the sentence. The right order is *such a scene murder or bloodshed that cause viewers or reader happy but also nausea*. In point 78a, an adverb of time should be put in front of the sentence or at the end of the sentence. The adverb of time a particular time should be reordered at the end of the sentence. It should be *This condition seems inconsistent to be used to complete the teaching in a particular time*.

### 3.2. The Possible Causes Underlying the Errors

Based on the data analysis, the researchers decided the possible causes underlying the errors including the L1 interference, target language characteristics, communication strategy-based errors, and induces errors which are in line with some previous researchers [3]; [8] who revealed that mother tongue intervention and target language causes become the main factors of students producing errors in English learning.

#### a. Mother Tongue Interference

Most of errors occurred on students' theses were caused by mother tongue interference. These errors frequently occurred in misformation and in omission. They are the absence of singular and plural markers of nouns and verbs and the use of present forms instead of past forms.

*Incorrect Sentence : ...has already been used ...by many teacher in the world. p (1e)*

*Correct Sentence : ...has already been used ...by many teachers in the world. p (1e)*

...by many teacher in the world is a prepositional phrase. However, the noun *teacher* in the phrase *many teacher* should be pluralized because it refers to plural noun. Besides, there is a plural marker *many* that comes before the noun *teacher*. These kinds of errors occur because Indonesian grammatical is totally different from English grammatical. Indonesian does not have any grammatical structure of pluralizing the noun when it refers to the plural noun. In this case, the students tend to be influenced by their mother tongue interference.

*Incorrect Sentence : Based on the observation in..., the English teacher still uses traditional approach. The students still read...and I ook for.. also answer the question. The teacher never changes with the other technique....p. (9c)*

*Correct Sentence textit: Based on the observation in..., the English teacher still used traditional approach. The students still read...and I looked for.. and also answered the question. The teacher never changed with the other technique....p. (9c)*

All the verbs (uses, look, answer, and changes) above should be turned into past form, because they refer to past event. In the sentence above, the phrase *based on the observation in* proves that this event is conducted in the past. In this case, the verb should be in past forms (used, looked, answered, changed) as well.

The students applied Indonesian grammatical structure that there are no differences among of verbs even though they occur in different times.

#### b. Target Language Causes

In this type causes of errors, those errors caused by this type are frequently derived from omission and misformation.

##### False analogy

False analogy appears when the learners wrongly assumes that an item behaves like another one.

*Incorrect Sentence : ....., and failed to provide a change.....and develop...to the students itself. P. (7j)*

*Correct Sentence : ....., and failed to provide a change.....and develop...to the students itself. P. (7j)*

A reflexive pronoun *itself* should be *themselves* because it refers to the *students*. The use of relative pronoun *itself* happens because of false analogy in which the student assumes that the reflexive pronoun *itself* can be used in general term.

##### Misanalysis

In the following example, the error is caused by the failure of student to identify the subject of the sentence.

*Incorrect Sentence : Language is a system of arbitrary, vocal, symbols which permit all people in.....p. (10a)*

*Correct Sentence : Language is a system of arbitrary, vocal, symbols which permits all people in..... p. (10a)*

In analyzing a sentence, the students have to be able to identify the subject and predicate of sentence. The predicate of a sentence must agree with the subject the sentence. If the subject is singular, the verb must be in singular form. On the other hand, if the subject is in plural form, the verb must be in plural form as well. In this case, the student fails to identify subject of the sentence. He/ she thinks that the subject of the sentence is *symbols* because it comes before the predicate *permit*. However the subject of the sentence is *language*, and it is in singular form. That is why, it requires a singular form of predicate *permits*.

#### Incomplete rule application

*Incorrect Sentence : In teaching English, reading is the first skill should be introduce to students.....p. (8c)*

*Correct Sentence : In teaching English, reading is the first skill should be introduced to students.....p. (8c)*

The sentence above is kind of passive voice. The general pattern in constructing the passive sentence is *the auxiliary verb of be* that is followed by a *past participle* (be + past participle/verb-3). In this case, the student applied incomplete rule of passive voice. The verb *introduce* should be in past participle form *introduced*, because it comes after the auxiliary verb *be* and refers to the passive sentence.

#### Exploiting redundancy

*Incorrect Sentence : Language is used in the literature \_\_\_ usually ambiguous,...p. (11a)*

*Correct Sentence : Language used in the literature is usually ambiguous. ...p. (11a)*

In the sentence above, the placement of the auxiliary verb *is* should be after object of preposition *literature* and before the adverb of frequency *usually*. Basically, the sentence above is the result of combination of two sentences *language is used in the literature* and *language is usually ambiguous*. When combining two sentences like this, we need to take one omit the auxiliary verb in the first clause.

#### Overlooking co-occurrence restrictions

*Incorrect Sentence : The ambiguity inherent in literature. P. (11b)*

*Correct Sentence : The inherent ambiguity in literature. P. (11b)*

Adjectives have only one job; they describe nouns or pronouns. Because they describe the noun, they have to come before the noun. In this case, the student ignores the fact that adjectives should come before a noun and he/ she puts the adjective *inherent* after noun *ambiguity*.

#### Hypercorrection (monitor overuse)

*Incorrect Sentence : ...but no one students want to asked teacher and it made teacher did not knew what..... P. (26d)*

*Correct Sentence : ...but no one students wanted to ask teacher and it made teacher did not know what..... P. (26d)*

The verb *asked* and *knew* should be in the base forms (*ask* and *know*). These errors happen because the student is over cautious. He/ she learnt that the verbs of past event should be in past form. In this case he/ she applied the past form of verbs, even in a place where they should not be applied.



Overgeneralization, or system-simplification

*Incorrect Sentence : Having good skill in speaking as a aspect that determines the speaker.....p. (12l)*

*Correct Sentence : Having good skill in speaking as an aspect that determines the speaker.....p. (12l)*

Article *a* is an article that describes a singular noun. The article *a* is used before a noun with the preceding letter is a vowel or the sound is vowel. This error happened because the students over generalize the use of article *a* instead of *an*.

## 4. Conclusion

Based on the surface structure taxonomy in terms of types of errors, the most frequent error occurred on students' theses background was Misformation. There were 547 errors found by the writer in this surface structure taxonomy. These kinds of errors were characterized the use of the wrong form of morpheme such as the use of infinitive instead of simple past, adjective instead of adverb, an infinitive instead of a gerund, possessive adjective instead of reflexive pronoun, and an adjective instead of a noun. Omission is the second type of error that always occurred on students' theses. There were 128 errors found by the writer of this type of error. These errors were characterized by the absence of plural marker of *-s/-es* of a noun and verb. The third error that frequently found in the students' theses background was Misordering. The writer found 95 errors on students' theses background. These errors were marked by the incorrect placement of an adjective and noun, noun phrase, adverb of time, etc. The least errors made by the students in their theses are Addition. There were only 33 errors found by the writer in his analysis. These errors were characterized by the presence of an item such as singular and plural marker *-s/-es*, of a noun and verb, and *-ing* form instead of an infinitive. In line with types of errors occurred on students' theses background above, those are mostly caused by mother tongue interference and target language causes. The errors caused by mother tongue interference frequently occur in omission and misformation, such as the absence of *-s/-es* as the plural markers, and the use of present forms instead of simple past forms. Meanwhile, the errors caused by target language causes are derived from misformation and misordering. They are divided in some categories: false analogy, misanalysis, incomplete rule application, exploiting redundancy, overlooking co-occurrence restrictions, hypercorrection, and Overgeneralization, or system-simplification.

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