

Grammatical Errors of the Ninth-Grade Indonesian EFL Students' Writing

Azzahra Muharmah¹, Umar Fauzan²

¹²UIN Sultan Aji Muhammad Idris Samarinda

azzahramuharmah12@gmail.com¹, umar.fauzan@uinsi.ac.id²

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Abstract

Language serves as a crucial medium for communication, enabling the transmission of ideas and information. English, as a global lingua franca, plays a pivotal role in various domains, including trade, technology, academia, and diplomacy. The significance of English proficiency extends to its role as a medium of instruction in educational settings worldwide, facilitating access to global knowledge. Within English education, language acquisition encompasses four key skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among these, writing is often considered the most challenging skill due to its complex cognitive and linguistic demands. Writing requires mastery of grammatical rules, vocabulary, and formal aspects, which are essential for effective communication. Grammar, as the foundation of sentence structure, plays a critical role in ensuring clarity and coherence in written texts. This paper explores the challenges of writing in English, particularly in the context of grammatical errors in students' writing, and discusses the importance of understanding the components of language. The study also examines the writing process, emphasizing stages such as planning, drafting, editing, and finalizing, and highlights the distinction between errors and mistakes in language use. By focusing on grammatical errors and their sources, such as interlingual and intralingual transfer, the paper underscores the need for effective pedagogical strategies to improve students' writing skills. The analysis concludes that a comprehensive approach to language instruction, with a focus on grammar and writing structure, is crucial for enhancing students' proficiency in English writing.

Keywords: Grammatical Error, Writing, Recount Text

1. INTRODUCTION

Language plays a pivotal role in communication, serving as a medium to share information and ideas. It is evident that people use language to communicate with one another (Muklis et al., 2020). Language users often use a form of language to convey information (Susilowati & Harida, 2023). Therefore, using language to transmit information is the fundamental component of communication. Nowadays, English is one of the international languages applied for communication worldwide.

English serves as a lingua franca in numerous countries worldwide, both as a native language and a second language. There are currently billions of English speakers and learners across the world (Bayyurt & Altınmakas, 2024). Its prevalence extends beyond everyday communication, with English being widely used in fields such as trade, technology, academia, and diplomacy. The importance of English proficiency in these contexts underscores its significance as a global language.

Within the realm of education, English holds a crucial position as the medium of instruction in many institutions worldwide. Its widespread usage underscores its importance as a tool for global communication and collaboration. The pivotal role of English in education, particularly in accessing global knowledge and literature (Krashen, 1982). English literature, in particular, offers a wealth of literary works that contribute to cultural enrichment, intellectual growth, and enriching the English education experience.

A comprehensive understanding of English education not only involves the exploration of literature but also requires a deep knowledge of the language itself. English education encompasses the study of language structure and usage, including the developmental of four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Skills are classified into two different types: receptive skills and productive skills (Willis & Willis, 2013). Receptive skills refer to how people derive meaning from the discourse they see or hear. To master these skills, learners must be able to identify the most significant aspects of what they sense. They should not just listen or read but also understand what is being said in the texts or audio. The other is productive abilities. It involves writing and speaking. The term "productive" refers to learners producing a product of English, either spoken or written. Learners must express their opinions on a particular topic. Each skill plays a distinct yet interconnected role in language acquisition and proficiency. Mastery of these skills is vital for academic success, as they form the foundation for effective communication and comprehension. To support these skills, learners also need to master English components.

A detailed understanding of these components is crucial for achieving fluency and accuracy in the language. Language components are divided into three categories: phonology, or the language's sound system; lexis, or the words or phrases that express concepts, word choices, spelling, and so on; and structure, or how words or bits of words are strung together to form acceptable sentences or phrases (Ur, 1999). The three components are widely known as pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. Among these components, grammar plays a significant role in ensuring clarity and precision in communication.

A detailed understanding of grammar allows learners to construct sentences correctly and convey their intended meaning effectively. Grammar is necessary in language acquisition, it underscores significance in producing well-structured and coherent communication (Friederici, 2002). Mastering grammar is a crucial component of learning a new language since it serves as the basis for comprehension, successful communication, and language competency in a foreign language (Shokirovna, 2023). As a result, grammar is considered necessary for learning a language because it is a fundamental element that makes communication intelligible and organized.

Some people believed that learning to write was the most difficult skill. Writing skills are complex and challenging to teach, involving mastery of not only grammatical and rhetorical methods but also intellectual and judgmental elements (Heaton, 1990). Writing skills are difficult for learners to acquire because of the three stages of writing that need to be done (Baharudin et al., 2023). Learners are concerned about their writing because they face a variety of challenges in the realm of writing, including a lack of proficiency, motivation, understanding, etc (Budjalemba & Listyani, 2020). It is shown in learners' performance in writing classes, such as structuring ideas, encountering arguments, paraphrasing, synthesizing, summarizing, and grammatical errors. In summary, writing is considered a difficult skill since it includes various complex procedures and requires a high level of cognitive and linguistic proficiency. Writing is frequently used in foreign language classes as a convenient means to engage with characteristics of a language other than the writing itself (Ur, 1999). To simplify, writing requires other abilities and an awareness of its components. Writing cannot be accomplished without focusing on the formal aspects. Ur mentioned proficient writing, proper spelling and punctuation, acceptable grammar, and vocabulary selection. Writing requires far higher levels of linguistic proficiency. A better understanding of the components is required to develop good writing. Oshima and Hogue combined these difficulties with writing into a set of corrective symbols that address both grammar and formal aspects of grammatical errors (Oshima & Hogue, 2007). This approach gives a realistic framework for recognizing and correcting errors, resulting in improved general writing skills.

2. WRITING SKILL

Yule's perspective underscores the complexity of writing acquisition, implying that it involves more than simple mimicry of spoken language but rather a conscious and deliberate engagement with graphic representation (Yule, 2010). Therefore, we must make conscious and purposeful efforts to comprehend and creatively alter linguistic symbols when we write. Brown stated that writing is merely a pictorial representation of spoken language in which authors express their ideas and thoughts as a consequence of their experiences and reflections (Brown, 2001). This suggests that writing is a means by which people express the ideas and understandings they acquired from their experiences in life.

To summarize, both provide essential insights into the nature of writing as a complex skill that goes beyond the simple transcription of spoken words. These perspectives draw attention to the complexity of writing and the range of methods that go into its creation and expression.

The writing process is a systematic method that assists writers in developing their ideas from the beginning to the completion of the process. According to Harmer, the writing process consists of four steps: planning, drafting, editing (reflecting and revising), and final drafting (Harmer, 2004). In the planning stage, ideas are generated, arranged, and composed, which Harmer emphasizes as the foundation of the entire writing endeavor. Writers engage in brainstorming sessions, research, and analysis to gather relevant information and generate ideas. They consider the purpose of their writing, the target audience, and the message they aim to convey. Techniques such as outlining, mind mapping, or freewriting are often employed to organize thoughts and create a coherent framework for the writing piece. Harmer highlights the importance of thorough planning, as it allows writers to clarify their intentions and set a clear direction for their writing. This step is essential because it lays the groundwork for effective communication and sets the tone for the writing process.

The next stage, drafting, involves transforming the ideas created during the planning stage into a written document. Writers begin to develop their ideas by constructing phrases and paragraphs that articulate their thoughts. Harmer emphasizes the creative aspect of drafting, encouraging writers to experiment with language and structure without getting overly concerned with the finer details at this point. The primary goal during this stage is to put thoughts on paper and create a rough outline of the writing work. In this phase, writers have the freedom to play with language, tone, and style as they compose the first draft of their work. Harmer's approach to drafting is important because it fosters creativity and allows writers to explore different ways to express their ideas without the pressure of perfection.

Editing, which encompasses reflection and revision, is the stage where writers critically evaluate their draft and make necessary improvements. Harmer underscores the iterative nature of this process, emphasizing the importance of self-assessment and feedback from peers or instructors. Writers reflect on the effectiveness of their writing in achieving its intended purpose, considering aspects such as coherence, clarity, and audience engagement. Revision involves revisiting the draft, identifying areas for enhancement, and making strategic changes to refine the content and structure. Harmer advocates for a systematic approach to editing, encouraging writers to scrutinize their work from multiple perspectives and iteratively refine their writing until it achieves its full potential. This stage is crucial as it helps writers polish their work and ensure that their ideas are communicated effectively.

Finally, the final draft represents the result of the writing process, where writers produce a completed version of their work ready for dissemination. Harmer emphasizes the importance of attention to detail in this stage, particularly in grammar, punctuation, spelling, and overall presentation. Writers meticulously review their work, incorporating the revisions and enhancements made during the editing process to ensure coherence and effectiveness. The final draft undergoes a final round of scrutiny to eliminate errors and inconsistencies, presenting a refined and polished representation of the writer's ideas. Harmer notes that the completion of the final draft is a significant achievement, marking the realization of the writer's creative vision and the culmination of their efforts. This final stage is essential because it ensures that the writing is polished, professional, and ready for its intended audience.

Jeremy Harmer's writing process guides writers from the beginning to the finished product. Planning is the first step in creating a strong foundation, and drafting is the next step in creating the original content through imagination. The work then undergoes editing to ensure coherence and efficacy, resulting in the final draft that stands as the result of all of these efforts. In order to produce high-quality writing, this organized method highlights finding a balance between creativity and precision.

3. ERROR AND MISTAKE

Errors and mistakes were not the same thing despite their similarities. However, the majority of people continue to misunderstand how both terms are defined. Edge proposed that mistakes could be broadly classified into two categories: slips (mistakes that students could self-correct and therefore required additional explanation for) and attempted (mistakes where students tried to say something but did not yet know how to say it). According to Hubbard, mistakes can be attributed to a variety of factors, including transitory memory loss, disorientation, slips of the tongue, and a lack of knowledge about the target language (English) (Hubbard, 1991). Edge and Hubbard both emphasize that mistakes are temporary, situational lapses in performance, with Edge categorizing them as slips or attempted errors and Hubbard attributing them to factors like memory loss or slips of the tongue, highlighting their correctable nature.

Ellis distinguishes between mistakes and errors by attributing errors to a learner's knowledge gaps, meaning they occur due to incomplete understanding or lack of mastery of the language (Ellis, 1997). Mistakes, however, are seen as occasional lapses in performance despite knowing the correct form. Brown highlights the distinction between mistakes and errors, explaining that mistakes are random occurrences, often referred to as slips, where learners fail to use their known language system properly (Brown, 1994). Errors, on the other hand, represent systematic issues within a learner's interlanguage, signaling developmental challenges. Ellis and Brown distinguish mistakes as temporary lapses and errors as systematic issues, with Ellis linking errors to knowledge gaps and Brown to developmental challenges in interlanguage.

The distinction between errors and mistakes is crucial in educational discourse. While errors reflect systemic issues in language proficiency and are often difficult for students to self-correct, mistakes can be categorized into slips and attempted errors, providing clarity in understanding learners' linguistic challenges.

There were several reasons why an error happened. Among the most apparent causes was interference from the native tongue. Examining error causes was an approach to preventing students from making the same errors. Recognizing the challenges that students face when learning a language requires an understanding of the reasons behind mistakes. Brown classified the error's cause into four categories, there are interlingual transition, intralingual transition, context of learning, and the communication style (Brown & Lee, 2015).

Interlingual transition refers to errors that happen when learners transfer rules or structures from their native language L1 to the target language L2. For instance, an Indonesian learner might say, "My age is 30 years" instead of "I am 30 years old," influenced by the structure of Bahasa Indonesia. Second, intralingual transition involves

errors stemming from the target language itself, where students misunderstand or misapply its rules. For example, an Indonesian student might say, "I go to shopping yesterday" instead of "I went shopping yesterday," not because of influence from their native language, but due to confusion about English verb tense rules. Third, the context of learning can also lead to errors, particularly in environments where language is taught through rote memorization of vocabulary and grammar with little emphasis on practical usage. Finally, differences in communication styles between the learner's native language and the target language can also cause errors, especially in areas like pragmatics and politeness strategies. For example, an Indonesian learner may say, "Give me that pen," instead of the more polite, "Could you please pass me the pen?" because of differences in politeness conventions between Bahasa Indonesia and English.

By recognizing these distinctions, educators can tailor their teaching methods to address specific challenges faced by the students. Moreover, this analysis underscores the importance of focusing on linguistic structures and comprehension rather than merely memorization, as emphasized in the context of the learning category. While communication style also plays a role in language acquisition, its exclusion from this analysis is warranted as the focus here is on accuracy within written recount texts. Ultimately, by understanding the underlying causes of errors, educators can implement strategies that foster more effective language acquisition and usage.

4. GRAMMATICAL ERRORS IN WRITING

Grammar is a critical component of language acquisition. Greenbaum and Nelson define grammar as the set of rules that allow us to integrate words into larger entities within our language (Nelson & Greenbaum, 2002). They note that some word combinations are permissible while others are not, illustrating grammar's role in guiding correct usage. Grammar serves as a crucial bridge between the system of sounds or written symbols and the system of meaning, making it fundamental to language.

According to Ellis, grammar traditionally focuses on the rules that govern the formation and interpretation of words, phrases, and sentences (Ellis, 1997). This approach highlights grammar's role in structuring language and ensuring accurate communication. Ellis emphasizes that understanding these rules is essential for both producing and interpreting coherent language. Thus, grammar is a key aspect of effective language use and comprehension.

Both Greenbaum and Nelson and Ellis underscore the significance of grammar in language acquisition and usage. Greenbaum and Nelson highlight grammar as the set of rules that integrate words into meaningful structures, emphasizing its role as a bridge between symbols and meaning. Ellis complements this by focusing on grammar's traditional role in governing the production and interpretation of linguistic elements. Together, these perspectives illustrate that grammar is foundational to both understanding and effectively using language.

Grammatical errors are defined by Baker as an improper, unconventional, or contentious usage in prescriptive language (Baker, 1900). Baker highlights that these errors disrupt the conventional rules of grammar and can lead to confusion or misinterpretation. Such errors often arise when language is used in ways that deviate from

established norms or guidelines. By identifying and correcting these mistakes, the clarity and effectiveness of communication can be significantly improved.

A grammatical error, according to Burt and Kiparsky, is one that deviates from grammatical standards and can result in poor interpretation of language (Burt & Kiparsky, 1994). They emphasize that such errors disrupt the grammatical structure of sentences, potentially hindering comprehension and coherence. These deviations can manifest in various forms, including incorrect verb tenses or sentence fragments. Addressing and rectifying these errors is essential for enhancing the quality and precision of written expression.

According to Ellis, grammar functions as a framework for language that allows users to produce and interpret sentences meaningfully (Ellis, 1997). In this context, grammar includes elements essential for creating accurate sentence structure, such as verb tense, subject-verb agreement, and word order, while excluding elements that do not impact sentence construction directly, such as capitalization or typographical errors. Ur's focus on "structure" emphasizes grammar as the foundation of sentence composition, separate from vocabulary or pronunciation (Ur, 1999). This distinction supports the researcher's selective approach in categorizing errors strictly related to grammar rather than phonology or vocabulary issues, aligning with Ur's view of grammar as the rules governing sentence structure. Guided by Ellis and Ur, the researcher chose specific error categories to focus exclusively on structural errors that impact grammatical correctness, ignoring other aspects like phonology and lexis.

Grammatical errors in English writing among EFL learners are a recurring issue, as highlighted by several studies. Aini & Ashadi (2022) underscore the importance of teacher feedback in addressing these errors, pointing out that sociocultural influences shape how students learn and apply grammatical rules. Their findings suggest that errors often arise from students' reliance on native language structures when constructing sentences in English. Similarly, Andryanti (2023) identifies frequent grammatical issues in recount texts, such as incorrect verb tense usage and subject-verb agreement errors. These errors reflect students' limited grasp of English grammar, particularly when translating ideas from their native language.

Specific patterns of grammatical errors are well-documented in recount texts and other forms of writing. Asni & Susanti (2018) found that eighth-grade students commonly struggle with the correct use of pronouns and past tense verbs. These challenges are echoed in the work of Fakhrudin, Dzulfikri, and Mustofa (2023), who observed that lexical errors, often intertwined with grammatical mistakes, can obscure the intended meaning of students' writing. Fauzan, Aulya, and Noor (2020) extend this analysis to exposition texts, where article misuse, prepositional errors, and faulty word order are prevalent. These findings highlight the need for targeted interventions to help students internalize grammatical norms and avoid repeated mistakes.

Addressing grammatical errors requires a comprehensive approach that combines awareness, practice, and feedback. Linarsih, Irwan, and Putra (2020) emphasize that interference from Indonesian grammatical structures can lead to persistent errors in English writing, necessitating explicit instruction to overcome these influences. Floranti and Adiantika (2019) suggest that increased exposure to authentic English texts and

focused grammar exercises can enhance students' accuracy. Additionally, Giawa, Tampubolon, and Sipayung (2024) advocate for error analysis as a diagnostic tool to identify patterns and inform teaching strategies. Together, these studies highlight the importance of proactive measures in reducing grammatical errors and improving EFL learners' writing competence.

5. CONCLUSION

Writing is a complex cognitive process that involves various stages, including planning, drafting, revising, editing, and finalizing. This process helps writers develop and organize their thoughts to effectively communicate ideas in written form. Grammar, which refers to the system and structure of a language, plays a crucial role in ensuring that writing is clear and accurate. It includes rules for sentence structure, word choice, verb tense, subject-verb agreement, punctuation, and other language elements.

However, errors are an inevitable part of the writing process. Grammatical errors are mistakes made in the application of grammar rules. These errors can stem from various sources, such as lack of knowledge, confusion about language rules, or careless mistakes. Grammatical errors can include issues with verb tense, subject-verb agreement, word order, punctuation, and the correct use of articles, prepositions, and conjunctions.

In academic settings, one type of writing commonly studied is the recount text. A recount text is a type of writing that describes events or experiences in chronological order. It is essential for students to understand its structure and purpose to write clearly and coherently. The recount text is often used to practice the application of various writing skills, such as sequencing ideas, maintaining logical flow, and using appropriate grammar and vocabulary.

By mastering these elements, students can improve their writing skills, produce more accurate texts, and minimize errors. Understanding the sources of errors and how to address them is an essential part of the learning process.

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