



A Morphological and Syntactical Error Analysis in English as a Foreign Language Learners' Written Recount Texts: A Surface Strategy Taxonomy Approach

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026-04-07 Revised: 2026-05-19 Accepted: 2026-09-20 Keywords: EFL Learners; morphological errors; syntactical errors; Surface Strategy Taxonomy; recount text writing DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i2.11592 Corresponding Author: Ula Aulia Rahmat auliaula16@gmail.com Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Universitas Islam Nusantara	<i>This study aims to identify and classify the morphological and syntactical errors produced by English as a Foreign Language learners in their written recount texts, and to determine which types of error occur most frequently. It employs a qualitative content analysis with descriptive quantitative support, and the data consist of thirty-seven recount texts written by tenth-grade students of SMAN 9 Garut. Recount texts were selected because the genre obliges every writer to mark past time, to sequence events chronologically, and to refer back to real participants, so that difficulties of word formation and difficulties of sentence construction surface together within a single piece of writing. The novelty of the study lies in a two-stage analytical model. George Yule's account of morphology and syntax is first used to establish the linguistic level at which an error occurs, and Dulay, Burt and Krashen's Surface Strategy Taxonomy is then applied to classify the surface form of that error as omission, addition, misformation or misordering; the sequence is grounded in Corder's Error Analysis Theory and Selinker's Interlanguage Theory. Of the 214 errors identified, syntactical errors were slightly more frequent than morphological ones, and misformation emerged as the dominant surface category, driven mainly by inaccurate past-tense and verb forms. The modelweb allow educators to convert error data into remedial activities and targeted feedback because it not only identifies the extent to which a form deviates from the target but also determine whether the</i>

learner's difficulty lies at the morphological or syntactical.

1. Introduction

Writing in English as a non-native language is among the most challenging linguistic abilities, since students must convert concepts into grammatically correct written expressions (Brown, 2000). In recount text writing, this issue becomes more obvious because students are needed to relate previous experiences in chronological sequence while simultaneously employing suitable past tense forms, sentence patterns, and cohesive methods (Poejilestari, 2020). The problem is not merely that students have limited vocabulary, but that they must control word formation and sentence construction at the same time (Azis, 2021). When learners write sentences such as *'I go to school yesterday'* or *'She studying English last night'*, the errors reveal difficulties in using English morphology and syntax accurately. Such errors are a natural part of language development and provide valuable information about learners' developing language systems (Corder, 1982). Recent error analysis studies also confirm that learner errors are systematic indicators of grammar development rather than random mistakes (Iswati, 2025; Saputra, 2022).

The theoretical problem underlying this study is that many error analysis studies classify learner errors directly into surface categories without first establishing the linguistic area in which the error occurs (Meylinda, 2026; Saputra, 2022). The Surface Strategy Taxonomy is effective for deciding whether an error is omission, addition, misformation or misordering, yet it does not by itself indicate whether the error belongs to morphology or to syntax (Dulay et al., 1982). For this reason the present study adopts a two-stage analytical model.

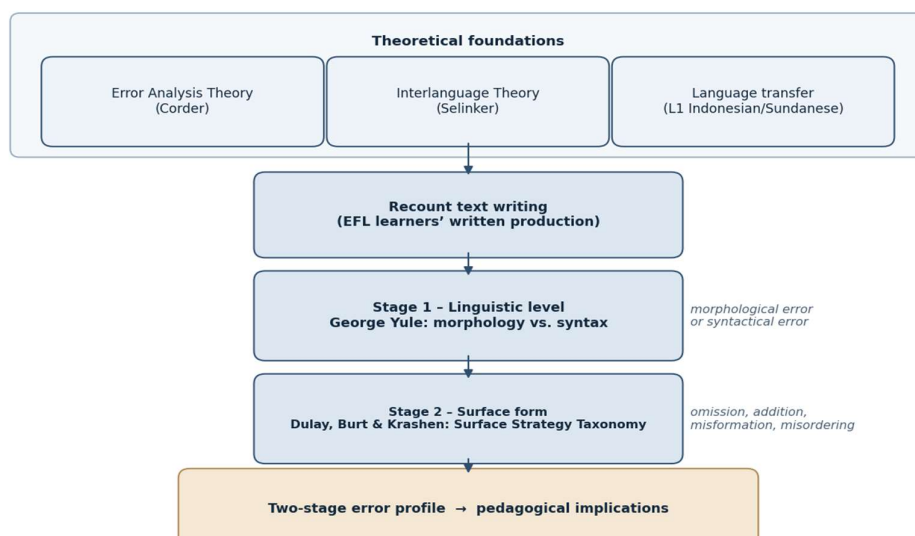
The first stage draws on George Yule's account of morphology and syntax to determine whether the error affects word formation or sentence structure; the second stage applies the Surface Strategy Taxonomy of Heidi Dulay, Marina Burt and Stephen David Krashen to classify the visible form of the error. This ordering follows directly from Corder's position that description must precede explanation, and from Selinker's claim that interlanguage is systematic at every linguistic level (Brown, 2000; Suraprajit, 2021).

The distinction itself is not merely terminological. Morphological analysis concerns the internal form of words and morphemes, including tense markers, plural markers, possessive markers and pronoun forms (Purba, 2022). Syntactical analysis concerns the arrangement of words into phrases, clauses and sentences, including auxiliary placement, subject and verb agreement, word order and clause construction (Khan, 2022; Yule, 2010). A single sentence can therefore be misclassified if the two levels are collapsed. In *'I did not went to school'*, for example, the Surface Strategy Taxonomy alone would record an addition, because a past form has been supplied after *did not*; the underlying difficulty, however, concerns the form of the verb and is thus morphological. Without a prior linguistic

classification, the analysis can describe how the surface structure was altered but not where in the grammar the learner's system is incomplete (Dulay et al., 1982; Putri et al., 2024).

The gap addressed by this study therefore lies in the absence of an analytical bridge between linguistic theory and error classification. The present study combines the two directions by using George Yule's morphology and syntax to identify the linguistic area of the error and the Surface Strategy Taxonomy to classify its form. The contribution goes beyond previous taxonomy-only studies in three respects. First, it produces a two-dimensional error profile rather than a single frequency list, so that omission of an auxiliary and omission of a plural marker are no longer counted as the same pedagogical problem. Second, it makes the findings directly actionable, because a teacher can see whether remedial work should target word formation or sentence construction. Third, it allows the dominance of a surface category to be explained rather than merely reported, since the linguistic level of the error indicates which part of the learner's interlanguage system is still unstable (Selinker, 1992; Yule, 2010).

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the two-stage error analysis



Based on this gap, the present study addresses two research questions :

1. What types of morphological and syntactical errors are found in EFL students' recount text writing based on George Yule's morphology and syntax and the Surface Strategy Taxonomy?
2. Which type of morphological and syntactical error occurs most frequently in students' recount text writing based on the Surface Strategy Taxonomy?

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative content analysis (QCA) design supported by simple quantitative frequency calculations. This study employed a qualitative

approach to identify and interpret morphological and syntactical errors in students' written recount texts. Frequency and percentage calculations were used only to describe the distribution of error types. This design was considered appropriate because it focused on interpreting textual data and identifying patterns of learners' errors through Surface Strategy Taxonomy (Corder, 1982; Matwangsaeng et al., 2025).

The participants were 37 Grade X-12 students from SMAN 9 Garut, selected through purposive sampling because they had completed instruction on recount texts and were able to write a recount text independently. All participants were 15–16 years old and had studied English as a compulsory subject since primary school. Sixteen students reported Sundanese as their primary home language, while twenty-one used both Sundanese and Indonesian in daily communication. The class-wide profile of the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic profile of the participants (n = 37)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Class	X-12	37	100.00%
Gender	Female	30	81.08%
	Male	7	18.92%
Daily language	Sundanese	16	43.24%
	Sundanese and Indonesian	21	56.76%
Total		37	100.00%

The writing task was completed individually during a regular English lesson under the supervision of the researcher and the classroom teacher. Students were given 60 minutes to write a recount text describing a personal past experience. To ensure authentic language production, dictionaries, translation applications, and model texts were not permitted during the task. All texts were handwritten and completed under the same classroom conditions (Khan, 2022).

To enhance the credibility of the data analysis, the coding results were reviewed by the first research supervisor, who has expertise in English linguistics. The supervisor examined the identification and classification of the errors based on George Yule's linguistic framework and Dulay et al.'s Surface Strategy Taxonomy. Any ambiguous cases were discussed until consensus was reached before the final coding was established.

alEthical approval was obtained from the school administration and the

English teacher before data collection. All participants provided informed consent, participation was voluntary, and all scripts were anonymised to protect participants' identities. The collected data were used exclusively for research purposes.

The analysis was conducted in two stages. First, errors were classified as morphological or syntactical based on George Yule's linguistic theory. Second, each error was categorised as omission, addition, misformation, or misordering using Surface Strategy Taxonomy (Dulay et al., 1982). Frequencies and percentages were then calculated to describe the distribution of error types (Saputra, 2022).

Table 2. Operational framework of the two-stage error analysis

Stage	Theoretical basis	Analytical focus	Output
First stage	George Yule, morphology and syntax	Determining whether the error affects word formation or sentence structure	Morphological error or syntactical error
Second stage	Dulay, Burt, and Krashen, Surface Strategy Taxonomy	Determining how the surface structure is altered	Omission, addition, misformation, or misordering
Final stage	Qualitative Content Analysis with frequency calculation	Interpreting patterns and calculating percentages	Dominant error type and pedagogical implication

3. Result

Two-stage identification of morphological and syntactical errors

The result section is organised according to the two-stage analytical model used in this study. The data consisted of 37 recount texts written by Grade X-12 students. After the texts were read and coded, 214 error instances were identified. Each error was first classified as either a morphological error or a syntactical error based on George Yule's explanation of morphology and syntax. After that, each error was classified into omission, addition, misformation, or misordering based on the Surface Strategy Taxonomy by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen. This procedure allowed the findings to show both the linguistic area of the error and the way the surface structure of the error was altered (Yule, 2010).

Two findings emerge from the first pass through the data. Of the 214 errors, 96 were morphological and 118 were syntactical, the former affecting verb forms, plural markers, possessive markers and word forms, the latter affecting auxiliary

use, sentence structure, subject and verb agreement and word order. Before each category is examined in detail, Table 3 summarises the error subtypes in order of frequency, so that the overall shape of the data is visible at a glance.

Table 3. Summary of error subtypes in order of frequency

No.	Error subtype	Frequency	Percentage
1	Past-tense and verb-form error	56	26.17%
2	Auxiliary or <i>be</i> error	39	18.22%
3	Word-order error	28	13.08%
4	Pronoun and possessive error	24	11.21%
5	Plural-marker error	20	9.35%
6	Subject and verb agreement error	20	9.35%
7	Sentence-structure or clause error	18	8.41%
8	Preposition or article error	9	4.21%
	Total	214	100.00%

The findings show that past-tense and verb-form errors were the most frequent subtype, followed by auxiliary errors and word-order errors. Together, these three categories represented more than half of all identified errors.

Table 4. Coding matrix for morphological and syntactical errors

No.	Erroneous form	Correct form	Linguistic area	Surface category	Explanation
1	We <i>bring</i> food and tools for agenda halal bihalal.	We brought food and tools for the halal bihalal agenda.	Morphological error	Misformation	The verb bring is incorrectly used in a past recount context.
2	After halal bihalal we <i>eat</i> food for lunch.	After halal bihalal, we ate food for lunch.	Morphological error	Misformation	The present verb eat should be changed into the past form ate.
3	I very happy.	I was very happy.	Syntactical error	Omission	The auxiliary verb was is omitted from the

					sentence structure.
4	I went to <i>go</i> Bandung with my mother.	I went to Bandung with my mother.	Syntactical error	Addition	The phrase to go is unnecessary after the verb went.
5	The city very crowd and many car.	The city was very crowded, and there were many cars.	Syntactical error	Omission	The verb was and the structure there were are omitted.
6	There are many <i>book</i> on the table.	There are many books on the table.	Morphological error	Omission	The plural marker s is omitted from the noun books.
7	<i>Mother I</i> lose handphone.	My mother lost her handphone.	Syntactical error	Misordering	The possessive phrase is arranged according to Indonesian word order.
8	My father <i>buy</i> three <i>ticket</i> for we.	My father bought three tickets for us.	Morphological error	Misformation	The verb form, plural noun, and object pronoun are incorrectly formed.
9	<i>Me and her</i> brings so many items.	She and I brought many items.	Syntactical error	Misformation	The subject form and verb agreement are incorrect.
10	We <i>go to</i> home at night.	We went home at night.	Syntactical error	Addition	The preposition to is unnecessary

					before home in this structure.
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The table demonstrates that the same error can be read through two complementary lenses. The sentence '*We bring food and tools*' is a morphological error because the incorrect element is the verb form *bring*, which should be changed to *brought* in a past recount context. It is also misinformation because the learner uses the wrong verb form in the surface structure. By contrast, the sentence '*I very happy*' is a syntactical error because the problem lies in the absence of the auxiliary verb *was*. It is also an omission because an obligatory element is absent. This type of presentation allows the analysis to answer both research questions more precisely (Dulay et al., 1982).

Table 5. Distribution of linguistic areas based on survey coding

Linguistic area	Frequency	Percentage	Interpretive note
Morphological errors	96	44.86%	Errors affecting word forms, morphemes, tense markers, plural markers, possessive forms, and pronoun forms.
Syntactical errors	118	55.14%	Errors affecting sentence structure, word order, auxiliary verbs, subject and verb agreement, and clauses.
Total	214	100.00%	The figures were obtained from coding 37 students' written recount texts.

Figure 3. Distribution of morphological and syntactical errors based on survey

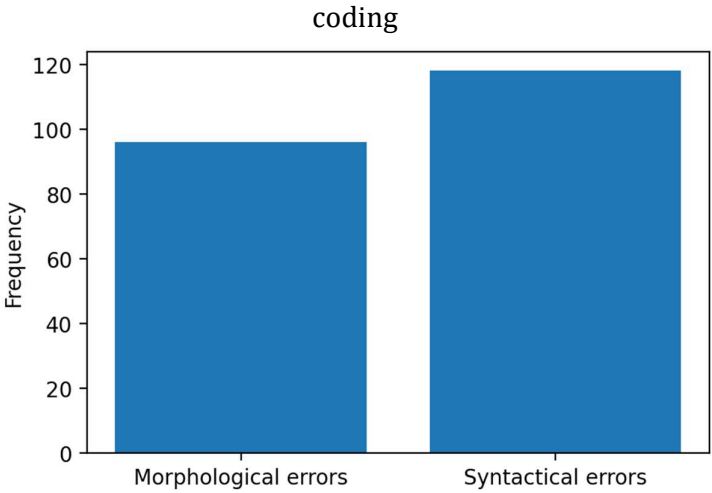


Figure 3 displays the same distribution graphically. Syntactical errors form the larger share of the corpus, although the margin over morphological errors is modest rather than decisive. The proximate reason is visible in the data themselves: a syntactical error can be triggered by more than one kind of element within a single clause, since auxiliaries, subjects, agreement and word order are all liable to be affected at once, whereas a morphological error is confined to the internal form of one word. A sentence such as *'The city very crowd and many car'* accordingly generates two syntactical entries while *'many book'* generates only one morphological entry. The wider explanation of this asymmetry is taken up in the Discussion.

Classification of errors based on Surface Strategy Taxonomy

The next analytical display concerns the classification of errors through Surface Strategy Taxonomy. This taxonomy was applied after the researcher identified the linguistic area of each error. The category of omission shows that learners left out obligatory grammatical elements. The category of addition shows that learners inserted unnecessary elements. The category of misformation shows that learners used incorrect linguistic forms. The category of misordering shows that learners arranged words or morphemes in an incorrect sequence. These four categories provided a practical way of describing how the learners' written English deviated from standard English forms (H. Saputra, 2022).

Applying the taxonomy to the same 214 items yields the distribution set out in Table 6. Misformation is the largest category, followed by omission, misordering and addition. In other words, the learners in this corpus were more likely to supply a wrong form than to leave an element out, to insert an unnecessary element or to place elements in the wrong sequence (H. Saputra, 2022; Nadia, 2024).

Table 6. Distribution of Surface Strategy Taxonomy categories based on survey coding

Surface Strategy	Frequency	Percentage	General
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Taxonomy category			interpretation
Omission	71	33.18%	Learners omit obligatory items such as auxiliaries, subjects, plural markers, prepositions, or linking verbs.
Addition	23	10.75%	Learners add unnecessary items such as redundant prepositions, double verbs, or unnecessary auxiliaries.
Misformation	92	42.99%	Learners use incorrect forms such as wrong verb forms, wrong pronouns, wrong noun forms, or wrong structural forms.
Misordering	28	13.08%	Learners place words, phrases, or morphemes in an incorrect order.
Total	214	100.00%	The figures were obtained from coding 37 students' written recount texts.

Figure 4. Percentage of Surface Strategy Taxonomy categories based on survey coding

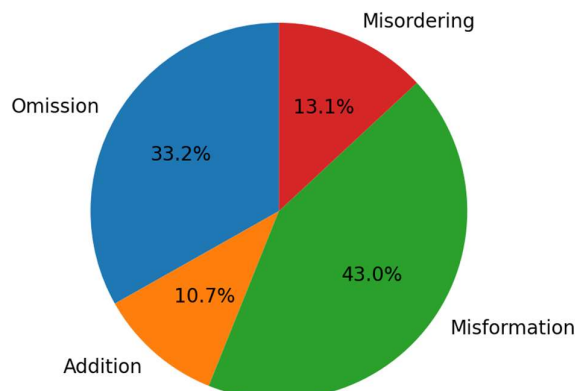


Figure 4 presents these proportions visually. The dominance of misformation is closely bound up with the genre: a recount obliges the writer to convert every present-tense verb into a past form, and each such conversion is an opportunity to supply a form that is present but incorrect. Omission, by contrast, arises chiefly where the missing element carries little semantic weight, as with the copula and the plural marker. Why misformation should be so much more frequent than the other three categories is considered further in the Discussion.

Table 7. Relationship between linguistic area and surface category based on survey coding

Linguistic area	Omission	Addition	Misformation	Misordering	Total
Morphological errors	30	12	53	1	96
Syntactical errors	41	11	39	27	118
Total	71	23	92	28	214

Table 7 brings the two analytical stages together. The rows record the linguistic area of the error according to George Yule's morphology and syntax, and the columns record its surface category according to Dulay, Burt and Krashen's taxonomy. Two asymmetries stand out. Misformation is heavily concentrated in the morphological row, where it accounts for 53 of the 96 items, whereas misordering is almost entirely absent from it, with a single case. Conversely, misordering is a substantially syntactical phenomenon, with 27 of its 28 occurrences falling in that row. Omission is the only category distributed across both areas in comparable numbers (Dulay et al., 1982).

Figure 5. Surface Strategy Taxonomy categories by linguistic area

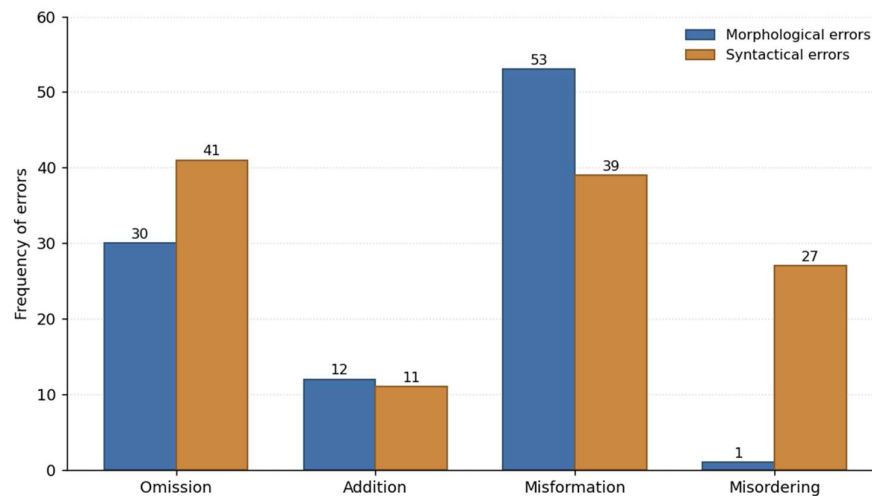


Figure 5 renders the cross-tabulation as a clustered bar chart, which makes the two asymmetries immediately legible. The near-absence of morphological misordering is not an artefact of coding: morphemes within an English word have very few positions available to them, so a learner has little scope to place them in the wrong order, while a clause offers many possible orderings and therefore many opportunities for misordering to occur.

Figure 6. Distribution of detailed error subtypes based on survey coding

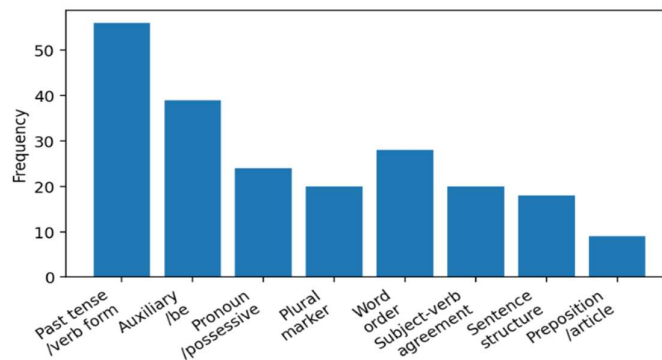


Figure 6 breaks the corpus down into the eight subtypes already listed in Table 3. Past-tense and verb-form errors form the tallest column by a clear margin, and the next two columns, auxiliary errors and word-order errors, belong to the syntactical area. The chart therefore confirms at subtype level what Table 7 showed at category level: the learners' difficulties cluster around the past-tense verb on the one hand and around the architecture of the clause on the other.

Representative excerpts from the participants

The counts above are grounded in the texts of individual writers, and the

excerpts below are drawn from different participants in order to show that the patterns are not confined to a few weak scripts. One participant, recounting a school celebration, wrote *'We bring food and tools for agenda halal bihalal'* and, a few lines later, *'After halal bihalal we eat food for lunch'*: both verbs are supplied but neither is marked for past time. A second participant, describing a family journey, produced *'I went to go Bandung with my mother'*, in which the past form is correct but an additional infinitive has been inserted. A third wrote *'The city very crowd and many car'*, where the copula and the existential structure are both absent. A fourth produced *'Mother I lose handphone'*, an English rendering of an Indonesian possessive order. A fifth wrote *'Me and her brings so many items'*, in which the subject pronoun and the agreement marker are both incorrect. Taken together, the excerpts illustrate that morphological and syntactical difficulties co-occur across the cohort rather than being distributed between stronger and weaker writers.

4. Discussion

Morphology and syntax as the first level of analysis

The first crucial finding from the analytical model is that before using the Surface Strategy Taxonomy, morphology and syntax must be kept apart. A clear foundation for spotting mistakes that impact word formation is provided by George Yule's description of morphology as the study of forms. inappropriate verb forms, missing tense markers, missing plural markers, possessive marker errors, and inappropriate word forms are frequently found in learner writing. Because recount texts demand students to narrate prior occurrences, they inherently encourage morphological errors. In addition to recalling the event, the learner must convert present verb forms into past verb forms. When the verb is irregular, as in *go* becoming *went*, *sight* becoming *saw*, and *write* becoming *wrote*, this criterion is very difficult (Nadia, 2024).

The most important benefit of this initial stage is that it identifies the exact point of trouble prior to applying surface categorization. The first step distinguishes between word-internal faults (such as uninflected verbs or missing plural suffixes) and clause-level structural errors (like missing copulas or inverted word orders) rather than treating all deviations as general grammatical errors. This differentiation offers a clearer diagnostic profile for training and avoids overlapping interpretations (Irawansyah, 2024; Yule, 2010).

Therefore, a one-stage Surface Strategy Taxonomy analysis is not as appropriate as the two-stage approach. The results may indicate how many errors are omission, addition, misformation, and misordering if the researcher solely uses Surface Strategy Taxonomy, but they might not indicate if learners' challenges are more closely associated with word formation or sentence structure. The first step is required since the article specifically looks at syntactical and morphological mistakes. Making the analytical process logically consistent is necessary. For this reason, the article's theoretical framework has to incorporate George Yule's morphology and syntax (Yule, 2010).

The relevance of George Yule's theory can also be seen in the pedagogical interpretation of findings. If students make many morphological errors, teachers may need to strengthen instruction on regular and irregular past tense forms, plural forms, possessive constructions, and word formation. If students make many syntactical errors, teachers may need to strengthen instruction on sentence patterns, auxiliary verbs, subject and verb agreement, word order, and clause construction. This means that the theory not only helps classify data, but it also helps transform the findings into practical teaching implications (Matwangsang et al., 2025).

Surface Strategy Taxonomy as the second level of analysis

Once the language area of the problem has been identified, Surface Strategy Taxonomy is applied. According to Dulay, Burt, and Krashen, learners' mistakes can be seen in how language's surface structure is changed. The fundamental premise is that students may add unneeded items, omit necessary items, misform items, or arrange items incorrectly (Dulay et al., 1982). Students' written sentences have observable forms that may be analyzed, fixed, and categorized, making this proposition immediately applicable to learner writing. Because the taxonomy does not need the researcher to infer the learner's intention before characterising the error's form, it is a useful tool. It begins with what is said in the sentence (Dulay et al., 1982).

Misformation and misordering behave differently again. Misformation presupposes that the learner has recognised the obligation to mark past time and has attempted to meet it; forms such as *buyed* for *bought* show a rule that has been noticed but not yet delimited. Misordering presupposes that the learner possesses the necessary elements but arranges them according to a template imported from the first language, as in *'Mother I lose handphome'* for *'My mother lost her handphome'*. Both categories therefore represent partial rather than absent knowledge, which is exactly what Selinker (1992) means by an interlanguage system in transition (Dulay et al., 1982; Yule, 2010).

The strongest value of the Surface Strategy Taxonomy is that it gives the researcher a systematic vocabulary for describing learner errors. Instead of simply saying that a sentence is wrong, the researcher can state that the error is a morphological misformation, syntactical omission, morphological addition, or syntactical misordering. This level of description is more academically useful because it connects the linguistic area and surface form. It also allows the final results to be counted and compared. The researcher can determine which category occurs most frequently and explain why that category may be dominant in students' recount text writing (Meylinda, 2026; Saputra, 2022).

The relation between Surface Strategy Taxonomy and the research questions is direct. The first research question asks what types of morphological and syntactical errors are found. This question requires the researcher to identify

errors and explain their types. Surface Strategy Taxonomy helps classify the visible forms of those errors. The second research question asks which type occurs most frequently. This question requires frequency calculation. Surface Strategy Taxonomy provides countable categories, so the researcher can calculate the number and percentage of omission, addition, misformation, and misordering errors. Thus, the taxonomy supports both description and calculation (Corder, 1982; Dulay et al., 1982).

However, Surface Strategy Taxonomy should not be used alone in this article because it does not define morphology and syntax. It classifies errors according to the way the surface structure changes, not according to the linguistic level affected by the error. That is why George Yule's theory is placed before Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's taxonomy. The order of theories must follow the order of analysis. First, the researcher asks whether the error is morphological or syntactical. Second, the researcher asks whether the error is omission, addition, misformation, or misordering. This sequence makes the research design coherent (Dulay et al., 1982; Yule, 2010).

Interpretation of the result displays

The displays presented in the previous section answer the two research questions, and the point of interest here is not the figures themselves, which have already been reported, but what they imply. The first question concerned the linguistic areas involved. That syntactical errors slightly outnumbered morphological ones is best explained by the internal economy of the clause. An English clause requires the writer to manage several dependencies simultaneously, and a failure in any one of them, whether the copula, the auxiliary, the agreement marker or the order of constituents, produces a separate deviation. A word, by contrast, offers a single site of failure. The margin between the two areas is consequently not evidence that the learners find syntax harder in some absolute sense; it reflects the fact that syntax simply gives them more places in which to go wrong (Azis, 2021; Khan, 2022).

The second question concerned the dominant surface category, and the dominance of misformation deserves closer interpretation than a frequency count can give. Misformation is a category of attempted compliance: the learner has understood that the recount requires past time and has produced a form to signal it, but the form selected is wrong. In interlanguage terms this is the signature of a rule that has been acquired in outline and overgeneralised in application, which is why *goed* and *buyed* appear beside correct irregular forms in the same script. The dominance of misformation is thus a developmental rather than a deficit finding: it indicates learners who are actively hypothesising about English morphology rather than avoiding it (Prasetyo et al., 2022; Selinker, 1992).

The discussion must also consider the nature of the recount text. Since recount text tells past events, the most predictable source of error is past tense usage. This expectation was confirmed by the survey because past tense and verb

form errors formed the largest subtype. Students wrote sentences such as '*Last year, I go to the beach*', '*We bring food and tool's*, and '*After halal bihalal we eat food for lunch*'. These examples show that students often recognised the past time context but failed to use the correct past form. This pattern explains why misformation became the dominant category in the survey data (Poejilestari, 2020).

The two-stage model has a practical implication for teachers. When correcting students' writing, teachers can first ask whether the error is related to word form or sentence structure. After that, they can identify whether the learner omitted, added, misformed, or misordered an item. This method can make feedback clearer. Instead of writing only wrong tense or wrong grammar, teachers can write morphological misformation or syntactical omission and then provide the correct form. Such feedback may help learners understand not only that their sentence is wrong, but also why it is wrong (Corder, 1982).

The two-stage model also has a methodological implication for future research. Researchers who study learner errors should avoid using one taxonomy to answer all analytical needs. A taxonomy of error surface forms cannot automatically explain the linguistic level of the error. Likewise, a theory of morphology and syntax cannot automatically classify the way the error appears on the surface. Combining the two theories produces a stronger analytical framework. This is the main contribution of the present article (Yule, 2010).

Placed beside comparable international work, the findings are both confirmatory and distinctive. Analyzing Thai undergraduate essays, and Matwangsang et al. (2025), working with Thai secondary writers, likewise report misformation as the leading surface category, which suggests that the pattern is not peculiar to Indonesian learners. Khan (2022), working with Saudi learners of Arabic-speaking background, reports a rather different profile in which article errors are far more prominent, an unsurprising divergence given that Arabic possesses a definite article while Indonesian and Sundanese do not. Kazazoğlu (2020) reaches the closest position to the present study, arguing from Turkish data that first-language interference shapes the specific shape of learner error. The distinctive element here, however, is not the frequency ranking but the layered classification: none of these studies reports whether the misformation they observe is lodged in the word or in the clause, and it is that information which determines what a teacher should do next (Saputra, 2022; Yule, 2010).

Interlanguage, language transfer and the writing process

The two-stage classification describes learner errors accurately, but it does not by itself explain why Indonesian learners produce these particular errors and not others. Three theoretical perspectives are needed at this point. Interlanguage Theory supplies the first. Selinker (1972) treats learner language as a system

governed by its own rules, and the data bear this out: the same writer produces *went* correctly in one clause and *buyed* in the next, which is intelligible only if the learner is operating a rule of past-tense formation that is real but not yet bounded. The presence of *goed* and *buyed* alongside accurate irregular forms is therefore evidence of systematicity, not of carelessness.

Language Transfer Theory supplies the second perspective, and it accounts for the specific profile of errors observed here (Selinker, 1992). This theoretical explanation is strongly supported by the demographic profile of the participant (Table 1), which show that all 37 students rely on Sundanese (43.24%) or a combination of Sundanese and Indonesian (56.76%) as their daily communication languages, with none using English at home. Neither Indonesian nor Sundanese inflects the verb for tense; past time is signalled lexically, through adverbs such as *kemarin* or *tadi*, rather than morphologically. A learner whose first language marks time in this way has no procedural habit of altering the verb itself, which explains why past-tense and verb-form errors form the single largest subtype in the corpus. Indonesian likewise does not mark the plural with a suffix, using reduplication or a quantifier instead, which explains the omission of the plural marker in '*many book*'; it has no obligatory copula, which explains '*I very happy*'; and it places the possessor after the possessed, which explains the ordering of '*Mother I lose handphone*'. Each of the dominant error subtypes, in other words, corresponds to a point at which the grammars of the first and the target language diverge (Kazazoglu, 2020; Odlin, 1990).

Process Writing Theory supplies the third perspective and shifts attention from the product to the conditions under which it was made (Hyland, 2004). Writing is a recursive activity of planning, translating and reviewing, and the cognitive load imposed by the translating phase is heaviest for writers who must attend to content and to form at the same time. Under the single-draft conditions in which these recount texts were produced, the learners' attention was largely absorbed by the retrieval of events and vocabulary, leaving little capacity for the monitoring that would have caught an unmarked verb or a missing copula. This does not excuse the errors, but it does suggest that some of them are performance failures under load rather than gaps in competence, and that a drafting-and-revision cycle would reduce their number without any additional grammar instruction (Misa, 2022).

Limitations of the proposed analytical framework

The two-stage model is not without difficulties of its own, and four should be acknowledged. The first is the possibility of overlap between the two linguistic areas. Subject and verb agreement is the clearest case: '*Me and her brings so many items*' can be read as a morphological error, because the verb carries the wrong inflection, and equally as a syntactical error, because the inflection is determined by a relation between constituents. The present study resolved such cases through the decision rule described in the methodology, but the rule is a convention rather

than a discovery, and a different research team applying a different convention would produce slightly different counts.

The second limitation concerns the unit of analysis. A single clause may contain several deviations, as in *'My father buy three ticket for we'*, and a decision has to be taken about whether this constitutes one error or three. The choice affects frequencies directly, and any comparison between studies must therefore establish that the same convention has been used. The third limitation is that the model describes the surface and the level of an error but remains silent about its cause; the transfer explanations offered above are inferences from the structure of Indonesian and Sundanese rather than findings established by the coding itself. Confirming them would require retrospective interviews with the writers or a contrastive design, neither of which was undertaken here (Corder, 1982).

The fourth limitation concerns the interpretative nature of the coding process. Although the coding was reviewed by an expert in English linguistics to improve the credibility of the classifications, the identification of morphological and syntactical errors still involved a degree of linguistic interpretation. Ambiguous cases may therefore be classified differently by other researchers applying different coding conventions. Future studies are encouraged to employ multiple independent coders throughout the coding process and report inter-rater reliability statistics (e.g., Cohen's kappa) to further strengthen methodological rigour and transparency.

Pedagogical implications for recount text writing

This type of analysis has important implications for teaching recount writing. The high frequency of morphological errors, particularly in past-tense and irregular verb forms, suggests that instruction should place greater emphasis on verb accuracy. Teachers can provide regular verb transformation exercises followed by short recount-writing tasks to help learners apply grammatical forms in meaningful contexts (Prasetyo et al., 2022; Matwangsaeng et al., 2025).

The prevalence of syntactical errors indicates the need for greater attention to sentence construction. Teachers should provide sentence reconstruction activities using learners' own erroneous sentences to strengthen auxiliary use, word order, clause construction, and plural or possessive marking. Such activities help learners develop more accurate sentence patterns while maintaining meaningful writing practice (Azis, 2021).

The findings also demonstrate that error analysis can serve as a diagnostic tool for classroom instruction. Teachers can identify recurring error patterns and design remedial activities based on learners' needs. Written corrective feedback can be organised using the proposed two-stage model through codes such as M-Mis (Morphological Misformation) and S-Om (Syntactical Omission). These codes help learners identify the linguistic level and type of error while enabling teachers to monitor students' progress more systematically (Saputra, 2022).

The proposed two-stage model was applied only to recount texts; therefore, its applicability to other genres remains uncertain. Future studies are encouraged to apply the framework to narrative, descriptive, and argumentative writing to examine whether the distribution of error types changes across genres. Such comparisons would help determine whether the observed error patterns reflect learners' linguistic competence or the characteristics of the writing task itself.

5. Conclusion

This article concludes that a two-stage theoretical framework is necessary to address morphological and syntactical problems in the written recount texts of EFL learners. George Yule's linguistic levels and Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's Surface Strategy Taxonomy are combined to create a model that effectively classifies both the location of the problem in the grammar and how surface errors appear. A total of 214 errors were found in 37 recount texts written by students in the tenth grade, including 96 morphological faults (44.86%) and 118 syntactical errors (55.14%).

Misformation was the most common surface strategy type (42.99%), followed by addition (10.75%), omission (33.18%), and misordering (13.08%). Past-tense and verb-form errors were the most common subtype errors, followed by word-order problems and auxiliary omissions. Both negative language transfer from the participants' native languages (Sundanese and Indonesian) and the intrinsic complexity of English sentence structure are reflected in these mistake patterns. In terms of pedagogy, these results emphasize the necessity of focused grammar education that uses a two-stage diagnostic method and focuses on web transformations, sentence structure, and remedial feedback.

The data used in this study were limited to the recount genre and came from a single cohort of students in Grades X–12. As a result, the results cannot be applied to every EFL situation. In order to test the two-stage model's wider applicability, it is advised that future studies use sizable participant samples from a variety of competency levels and apply it to various writing genres including narrative, descriptive, or argumentative texts.

6. References

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