



Grammatical Errors and the Realization of Ideational Meaning in EFL Students' Spoken Descriptive Texts: A Transitivity Analysis

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026-09-08 Revised: 2026-09-17 Accepted: 2026-09-23 Keywords: grammatical errors; ideational meaning; meaning resilience; spoken descriptive texts; systemic functional linguistics DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i1.12562 Corresponding Author: Nova Amalia novaa137@students.unnes.ac.id Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, FBS Universitas Negeri Semarang	<i>Speaking with minimal preparation, semi-spontaneous rather than fully spontaneous speech, places significant mental pressure on EFL learners, often leading to grammatical errors as they transition between parts of their speech. Rather than viewing such errors solely as barriers to communication, this study examines how grammatical errors in oral descriptions relate to the conveyance of ideational meaning. Grounded in the theoretical principle of meaning recoverability, the construct "meaning resilience" is suggested in order to measure the degree to which the ideational configuration of a clause can still be recovered despite grammatical errors. The data was obtained from recorded spoken responses of six third-semester EFL students enrolled at Universitas Negeri Semarang through qualitative linguistic/discourse analysis enhanced with descriptive quantitative frequency analysis. The analysis was conducted based on error taxonomy by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) in combination with Transitivity System proposed by Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) on 86 error-containing clauses out of 112 analyzable clauses from six participants. The results suggest that misformation was the dominant type of error (76.5% of error tokens) followed by omission (16.3%). Relational processes dominated error-containing clauses (51.8%), which was attributed to the generic structure of descriptive texts. Most importantly, 55.8% of error-containing clauses were classified as High Resilience, indicating that their transitivity structure remained analytically recoverable despite surface grammatical errors, an analytical interpretation rather than direct evidence of communicative success, while only 2.3% were classified as Low Resilience, where the ideational configuration could not be reconstructed even with reference to context. In this case, grammatical errors did not always prevent the recovery of the ideational meaning for these six students. These results suggest that a functional approach may be useful in assessing the spoken language since these students succeeded in conveying ideational meaning even if they made lexicogrammatical mistakes.</i>

1. Introduction

Among the four skills, speaking is widely recognized as one of the most important and challenging skills for English as a foreign language (EFL) learners worldwide. The shift from a more restricted understanding of language as abstract grammar rules to a more dynamic understanding of language as a resource for creating meaning in the world is noted within the field of Applied Linguistics (Davies, 2007). According to Dulay & Krashen (1982), EFL students experience a significantly heavy cognitive load in the face of spontaneous conversation because there is insufficient time for conscious mental editing of their speech, and only the automatic processing system they have acquired can ultimately express the message, but this also results in transitional grammatical errors.

In order to explain how learners are able to convey meaning despite such problems, a good theoretical approach in this case would be Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The theory suggests that there is a particular organization in language based on the Ideational Metafunction, which uses the Transitivity System (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). With the help of transitivity, speakers construct their reality by choosing certain Processes, Participants, and Circumstances (Thompson, 2014). It is especially important to use this approach when dealing with descriptive texts because successful description of a person, a place, or an object is connected with relational and existential processes. In addition, Eggins (2004) notes that oral language has more grammatical complexity and contextuality than planned writing.

Earlier studies employing the SFL model for language analysis may be clustered into three major groups. Firstly, speaking analyses that rely mostly on data collected from native speakers, politicians, or specialists to determine ideational meaning (Bashir et al., 2026; Fiscarina & Fauzati, 2024; Jing, 2019; Stevani et al., 2023; Xiang, 2022). Although such analyses verify the relevance of using transitivity for spoken language, they rely solely on perfect and well-structured speech ignoring the language of non-native speakers. Secondly, the analyses of EFL learners have been concentrated on writing with the aim to verify its conformity to genre and linguistic conventions (Canna et al., 2024; Hermayanti & Gunawan, 2024; Hamidah & Retnowati, 2026; Rehana et al., 2019).

In such studies, grammatical errors are usually considered as deviations from the textual norms. Finally, conventional Error Analysis has provided extensive documentation on the characteristics, frequency, and reasons of making grammatical errors by EFL learners (Alraimi & Abdalla, 2019; Patarapongsanti et al., 2022; Sudarmono, 2025). However, this traditional approach does not consider how meaning is created through errors.

Despite the considerable research conducted in relation to both grammatical errors and the transitivity system, a substantial gap is present at the point of their interconnection within spontaneous discourse. Much of the current research based on the SFL approach concerning EFL learners is focused on written texts in which errors are considered to be genre mistakes, while analyses of spoken text depend on highly proficient speakers. Therefore, the question of how grammatical mistakes of EFL learners in spontaneous conversation influence ideational meaning still remains unanswered. Based on SFL theory, language can be considered as a choice network. Thus, when a mistake is made by a learner, it should not be seen as a structural one, but rather as a “mis-selection” of the lexicogrammar system to construct certain meaning (Thompson, 2014).

This paper seeks to fill this gap through the introduction of the notion of “Meaning Resilience”. Based on the theoretical framework of meaning recoverability, which holds that linguistic form could get disrupted while meaning can still be recovered, Meaning Resilience in this study is the degree of recovery possible for the ideational configuration of a clause containing an error. Notably, this concept should not be confused with any

existing terms in spoken-language research. Comprehensibility, for instance, relates to the degree of comprehension of what is being communicated, as judged by the listener; Meaning Resilience, on the other hand, relates to whether the structural form of the SFL, the relations among the Process, Participants, and Circumstances, can be reconstructed from a clause with a grammatical error.

In this way, the concept of Meaning Resilience is also distinct from intelligibility in that the latter refers to the comprehensibility of the phonological or lexical structure of an utterance for the hearer, while Meaning Resilience takes it for granted and examines only the transitivity structure of the utterance. Moreover, Meaning Resilience can be distinguished from communicative effectiveness or communicative competence, which are generally measured in terms of the pragmatic response of the listener or the sociolinguistic proficiency of the speaker, whereas Meaning Resilience does not depend at all on listener evaluation or speaker competence but only on structural analysis of transitivity.

Likewise, the construct is not identical to functional adequacy, which refers to whether an utterance satisfies its overall communicative function in a particular situation, but rather Meaning Resilience pertains strictly to whether the ideational configuration of a single clause can be analytically reconstructed independent of any contextual appropriateness. Lastly, Meaning Resilience cannot be confused with meaning negotiation, since the latter describes an interaction process wherein the individuals involved work together to solve their communication problem, whereas Meaning Resilience is a structural property of a clause's transitivity configuration, independent of any interactional repair.

In order to explicitly describe this relation, the present study suggests an analytical model for linguistic form and ideational effect as follows: Grammatical Error → Affected Lexicogrammatical Realization → Transitivity Configuration → Degree of Ideational Recoverability → Meaning Resilience. For example, if a student fails to use the copula in the sentence "The beach very beautiful", the conventional method of Error Analysis will note the missing element. The transitivity approach, on the other hand, shows that the Carrier and the Attribute have been successfully articulated.

Therefore, in order to fill this gap, the present study seeks to investigate the link between grammatical errors and the expression of ideational meaning in spoken descriptive texts made by EFL learners. In other words, by combining the taxonomy of Error Analysis proposed by Dulay & Krashen (1982) with the Transitivity System of Halliday & Matthiessen (2014), this study is able to identify grammatical errors and at the same time, determine how much meaning remains when there are lexical-grammatical discrepancies. In particular, this study aims at answering the following research questions:

(1) What kinds of grammatical errors can be observed in the spoken descriptive texts of EFL university students? (2) How is the ideational meaning (which is realized in terms of processes, participants, and circumstances) realized in clauses that contain such grammatical errors? (3) To what degree do these grammatical errors impede the realization of ideational meaning and, thus, display the property of meaning resilience? What makes this study distinctive is its change of perspective from error detection to meaning realization, which provides for a functional way of assessing the spoken meaning-making capacity of EFL learners.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

The methodology adopted for the study is qualitative linguistic/discourse analysis, accompanied by quantitative frequency analysis in order to investigate the influence of errors in grammar on the formation of ideational meaning in oral descriptive texts of EFL

learners. The reason for choosing this approach is that it allows an in-depth analysis of learners' use of language without resorting only to frequency of error (Creswell, 2009), whereas the additional frequency analysis gives clear and reproducible results concerning patterns in the data set. In this study, the qualitative analysis of texts/documents approach is employed to analyze linguistic patterns in the speech of learners (Morgan, 2022). In order to examine linguistic patterns in the speech produced by the learners, this research design serves as a solid basis for understanding "Meaning Resilience" using Error Analysis and the SFL Transitivity System.

In the context of this research, speaking can be more appropriately characterized as being semi-spontaneous or minimally prepared, rather than truly spontaneous. Participants have been asked to jot down 2-3 key words in a minute prior to speaking, but they were specifically instructed not to write a complete script; nevertheless, this short period of preparation leaves the possibility of a certain amount of pre-planning open. That is why the term semi-spontaneous will be used in this work.

2.2 Participants

Participants for this study included third semester students from the study programs English Education and English Literature of Universitas Negeri Semarang. Six students were involved in this study, deliberately selected from both study programs as illustrated in Table 0.

Table 0. Participant Profile

Participant Code	Study Program	Semester	Age Range	Relevant English-Learning Background
S1	English Education	3 rd	18-19	Junior high school; extensive exposure through English songs and Western movies
S2	English Education	3 rd	18-19	Junior high school; senior high school
S3	English Education	3 rd	18-19	Junior high school; senior high school; self-study; English course
S4	English Literature	3 rd	18-19	Junior high school; senior high school; self-study
S5	English Literature	3 rd	18-19	Junior high school; senior high school; online interaction with English-speaking people
S6	English Education	3 rd	18-19	Junior high school; senior high school; English exposure through teaching English to young children

In this study, the participants were selected through the use of purposive sampling because at this level of education, it is assumed that the students would be experienced in speaking English but are still prone to making grammar mistakes. Purposive sampling helped the researcher to choose information-rich participants for the research instead of

selecting the participants randomly in an effort to get statistically representative samples. The rationale behind a sample size of six participants is not grounded in representativeness but in the need to conduct in-depth analysis at the clause level: in total, 115 clauses from the six audio tapes were manually transcribed and coded, which corresponds to the in-depth nature of SFL-based discourse analysis and not to the large N design.

2.3 Data Collection

In this study, the researcher was the main person who collects and analyses the data, while secondary tools are used to provide support so that the process is thorough and organized (Malterud et al., 2016). Originally, instructions were provided live via the Zoom platform while the participants checked in through their webcams to ensure no scripts were used. Participants then opened a voice recording application on a smartphone to get clear and isolated audio.

Data were collected in real and non-real time to ensure the veracity of what was being stated so that there would be no audio issues. The researcher initially gathered the students in a live Zoom meeting to introduce the assignment and provided them with the speaking topic, either *"Describe Someone or Something Meaningful to You"* or *"Describe A Personal Item/Place."* Students were given a full minute to write 2 or 3 key words; no one was allowed full scripts. Second, the students independently launched a voice recording application on their smartphones and muted the microphones in Zoom for avoiding background noise mixing while remaining visible through the webcam. Third, students made their recordings using their phones for about 4-5 minutes. Lastly, the students dispatched the audio files over a secured link via Google Drive. Before any data was gathered, all participants provided informed consent.

Transcriptions rules were defined by the researcher to indicate how the audio recording should be transcribed in writing, taking into consideration the rules for false starts, pauses, self-corrections, and repetitions in the speech. The audio recordings were transcribed manually, and the transcription maintained the natural disfluencies, while the participants remained anonymous through speaker identification codes.

2.4 Clause Segmentation

Segmentation of spoken discourse into clauses was done on the basis of the existence of Process (language element) alongside its Participants and Circumstances, as defined by Halliday & Matthiessen (2014). The following principles were considered in segmentation of spoken discourse:

- The self-repair was examined for its final form only and not for what preceded it since it was treated as a disfluency and left out of the transitivity coding process.
- A false start and/or abandoned utterance without the Process-Participant structure were not included in the transitivity and Meaning Resilience analysis but recorded in the Disfluency/Performance Error column.
- The repetitions were counted as one instance of clause, with the repetition marked as a performance feature rather than as a second clause.
- Elliptical clauses, such as clauses where there is coordination between two attributes having a common Process, were considered to be separate instances of clause if the participant had a unique attribute itself.

Of the 115 clauses which are divided into segments, three clauses were not included in the transitivity and Meaning Resilience coding since they were formulaic openings or closings that were outside the descriptive text and not due to their incompleteness. The 112 clauses, which comprise of 86 error clauses and 26 without errors, were included in transitivity coding.

2.5 Coding Procedure and Operationalization of Meaning Resilience

Coding sheets served as the main analytic tool in this study. They were designed for the classification of: (1) grammatical errors through on Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's (1982) error taxonomy that was used to determine the type of error being made such as omission, addition, misformation, and misordering; (2) ideational meaning through analysis of transitivity system processes participants and circumstances under Halliday & Matthiessen (2014) framework within discourse analysis; and (3) the degree of Meaning Resilience.

As there can be more than one grammatical error in one clause, error codes were recorded as individual error tokens. In the entire data set, 153 individual error tokens were found in 86 error clauses (1.8 errors in each error-containing clause on average); 26 clauses had no grammatical error and thus were error free. Calculation of Meaning Resilience is done on the basis of the 86 clauses with errors because the definition of the construct means the resilience of meaning to the interference of grammar. Calculation is done without taking into account the 26 correct clauses, which are discussed in the Results section for the purpose of description only.

The transitivity pattern analysis and the Meaning Resilience analysis that have been discussed in this paper were carried out based on the same group of 86 clause with errors. Thus, process-type distributions refer to the particular realization of the transitivity patterns within those clauses and cannot be considered to represent the descriptive discourse in general which was made up of 26 clauses without any errors.

In order to minimize subjectivity as seen in earlier versions of the code rubric, the three levels of Meaning Resilience were defined in relation to specific SFL element rather than listener perception:

Table 1. Criteria for Evaluating Meaning Resilience

Level	Criterion
High Resilience	The process and all Participant roles (such as Carrier-Attribute, Actor-Goal, Senser-Phenomenon) can be discerned straight from the clause without the need for reconstruction from any external context. Lexicogrammatical errors (like subject-verb agreement and article omissions) may exist but will not prevent understanding the basic structure of transitivity.
Medium Resilience	The Process and the Participant relation are clear, but there is at least one central Participant role that is not represented directly within the clause structure and can only be implied by reference to context.
Low Resilience	Neither the Process nor the necessary Participant Roles can be identified or recovered, even when taking into consideration the surrounding context, since they are irrecoverably constituted.

2.6 Inter-Rater Reliability and Coding Validation

In order to check the reliability of the coding process, the full coding form consisting of all 112 clauses that were codable, the grammatical error classifications, transitivity classifications, and Meaning Resilience ratings was checked by another coder: the thesis supervisor, a linguistics lecturer with a Systemic Functional Linguistics background. The supervisor was provided with the operationalized criteria shown in Table 1 and the transcripts for coding the data by the primary researcher on all three coding levels: (1) grammar error-type classification, (2) transitivity element classification, and (3) Meaning Resilience level classification.

Rather than a double-blind coding system, this study employed supervisory review and expert debriefing, a technique of validating qualitative data through informed critique from a knowledgeable expert on the researcher's analyses, undertaken to enhance the credibility of the interpretation process (Creswell, 2009). This technique was deemed to be appropriate because: (1) The database was small enough to allow a comprehensive clause-by-clause analysis without resorting to sampling; and (2) the applied criteria in Table 1, which are based on the SFL elements, have allowed less room for subjectivity compared to the more impressionistic rubric used in an earlier stage of this research.

Interpretive disagreements that emerged during the course of the current review were resolved through consultation between the primary researcher and the supervisor. In case where a total agreement could not be achieved, the decision of the supervisor was used in light of theoretical assumptions of the SFL approach, and the difference of opinion was documented. However, because the validity check process was performed through supervisory approval and discussion rather than an independent coding process involving two raters, no agreement coefficient measure (such as Cohen's Kappa or percentage agreement) could be meaningfully calculated, a limitation acknowledged in the Discussion section.

2.7 Ethical Consideration

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the collection of data. This research followed the general ethical research guidelines of Universitas Negeri Semarang with supervisory approval in order to protect the rights of the participants, their anonymity, and voluntariness.

3. Result

This aim of this research is to investigate the connection between grammatical errors and the representation of ideational meanings in the semi-spontaneous spoken descriptive texts produced by six third-semester EFL students. After the process of clause segmentation, there were 115 clauses that could be coded among the six audios; 3 clauses made up of formulas of greeting or closings were not included in transitivity and Meaning Resilience coding, resulting in 112 clauses that could be analyzed. Out of 112 clauses, 86 clauses had errors, while 26 clauses did not have errors. Since a clause can have more than one error in grammar, the types of errors were coded and counted as error tokens and not as a single error per clause; this will be consistent through the following discussions.

3.1 Types of Grammatical Errors in Spoken Descriptive Texts

Regarding the first research question, "What types of grammatical errors do EFL university students make in their spoken descriptive texts?", the following classification of grammar errors was made based on the taxonomy of surface structure provided by Dulay & Krashen (1982). Overall, 86 clauses containing mistakes were found, and in total, 153 separate error tokens were found ($M = 1.8$ tokens per error-containing clauses; range 1-5), due to the reality that a considerable number of error-containing clauses had more than one mistake at once. Table 2 illustrates this distribution.

Table 2. Distribution of Grammatical Errors Tokens

Error Type	Total Tokens	Percentage
Misformation	117	76.5%
Omission	25	16.3%
Misordering	6	3.9%
Addition	5	3.3%
Total	153	100%

Table 2 reveals that Misformation is the error that occurred most frequently, constituting 76.5% of all error tokens. Misformation in this study concerned errors such as incorrect verb inflection (e.g. *"it's have"* for *"it has"*) incorrect active/passive voice selection (e.g. *"I inspired him"* for *"he inspires me"*), adjective inflection (e.g. *"I will boring"* for *"I will be bored"*) and inaccurate lexical choice (e.g. *"felt with"* for *"filled with"*). Omission, comprising 16.3% of tokens, was mostly focused on the lack of mandatory elements like the relational process *"is"* (e.g. *"The beach very beautiful"*) or the third-person *"-s"*. However, misordering and addition occurred less frequently, representing 3.9% and 3.3%.

3.2 Transitivity Pattern in Error-Laden Clauses

Regarding the second research question on how ideational meaning is conveyed in error-containing clauses, the analysis was done by employing Halliday & Matthiessen's (2014) The Transitivity System, applied to all 86 error-containing clauses. One clause (*"And, you know, wonderful things"*) did not contain any realized Process and was thus not counted among the distribution of process-types provided below, even though it still appears in the Meaning Resilience analysis section because it qualifies as an example of Low Resilience.

Table 3. Distribution of Process Types in Error-Laden Clauses

Process Type	Total Occurrences	Percentage
Relational Process	44	51.8%
Material Process	23	27.1%
Mental Process	14	16.5%
Verbal Process	3	3.5%
Existential Process	1	1.2%
Behavioral Process	0	0%
Total	85	100%

It is important to note that this distribution reflects the patterns of transitivity used only in clauses containing errors, and not the entire spoken descriptive discourse of the participants, which also consisted of 26 clauses free from errors.

As table 3 shows, relational processes accounted for nearly half of the error-laden clauses (51.8%), followed by material processes (27.1%), and mental processes (16.5%). This distribution reflects the generic structure of descriptive text, which consists predominantly of relational process of attribution in assigning some quality to the carrier (e.g., *"My smartphone is very useful"*), and material process which describes acts and features (e.g., *"It has a smooth screen"*), and mental process to convey their affective attitude toward the described entity (e.g., *"I love him because..."*).

Despite the existence of some grammatical errors, students managed to identify Process-Participant structures successfully. For example, *"It's have a smooth screen"* (incorrect formation of the possessive auxiliary). However, the relational possessive structure was identified completely, where the Process (Relational, Possessive) is *"have"* rather than the correct one *"has"*; the Carrier/Possessor is *"It"* (smartphone); and the Attribute/Possessed is *"a smooth screen"*. In spite of the misformation of the auxiliary, all three obligatory components of the possessive relational structure could be easily extracted from the clause itself.

3.3 The Phenomenon of Meaning Resilience

In answer to the third research question of what degree grammatical errors hinder ideational meaning realization, each of the 86 error clauses was evaluated for its Meaning Resilience based on the defined criteria from Table 1. The results are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4. Distribution of Meaning Resilience Levels

Resilience Level	Total Clauses	Percentage
High Resilience	48	55.8%
Medium Resilience	36	41.9%
Low Resilience	2	2.3%
Total	86	100%

The findings in Table 4 indicate that 55.8% of the clauses that had errors had High Resilience, whereby both the Process and all obligatory Participants of the Process were readily discernible without the need for context reconstruction despite the existence of error in grammar. In addition, 41.9% of the clauses had Medium Resilience, where the Process as well as its core Participant were recognizable but at least one Participant was inferred from the context. The lower number, 2.3%, (2 clauses) showed Low Resilience, where the Process and/or the Participant could not be reliably reconstructed, even with the help of context.

The following four samples serve to demonstrate each of the classifications above:

Example 1: High Meaning Resilience (Omission and Misformation)

Utterance: "My smartphone is so white colour, eh no I think is a silver colour." (Speaker 2)

Error Analysis: Omission of the subject *"it"* in the second clause; misformation of *"is so white colour"* instead of *"is white"*.

Transitivity Analysis:

- Process: Relational (Attributive)
- Carrier: My smartphone
- Attributive: white/silver colour

Resilience Assessment: Even without the subject and with an unusual structure, both the Carrier and the Attribute can be easily recognized from the clause itself, without any contextual interpretation. Additionally, the self-correcting nature of the speaker (*"white"* to *"silver"*) provides a good indication that the speaker was paying attention to giving a precise description.

Example 2: Medium Meaning Resilience (Misformation – Active/Passive Confusion)

Utterance: "I inspired him because he is a good leader." (Speaker 1)

Error Analysis: Misformation concerning active and passive voice; the obvious intended meaning *"I am inspired by him"* or *"He inspires me"*.

Transitivity Analysis:

- a. Process: Mental (Affection) - inspired
- b. Senser/Actor: I
- c. Phenomenon/Goal: him

In linguistic terms, this clause means that the referent was inspired by the speaker, which is the opposite of the intended meaning. The opposite cannot be reconstructed from the clause alone.

Resilience Assessment: The actual relationship (the speaker's admiration of the referent) is recoverable only through contextual inference at the discourse level because the speaker always uses admiring discourse about the referent in other parts of the transcript ("*he is very quiet but his heart is still kind*"). Since it is only possible to determine the proper participant role from the context around the clause, not the transitivity structure of the clause itself, then this example must be labelled as Medium Resilience, not High. The key to understanding this concept, which distinguishes between what the learner realized linguistically and what the learner intends, lies at the very core of Meaning Resilience.

Example 3: Medium Meaning Resilience (Misordering and Misformation)

Utterance: "They are doing is job like make a song." (Speaker 1)

Error Analysis: Misordering and misformation; the intended meaning should be "*Their job is making songs*".

Transitivity Analysis:

- a. Process: Material
- b. Actor: they
- c. Goal: a song

Resilience Assessment: Even though the sentence structure is disjointed and probably due to constraints in real-time, it is still possible to recognize the Material Process and the Actor of the clause. No considerable amount of interpretation is required to ascertain the Goal ("*a song*" as the product of "*their job*"), which is in accordance with Medium Resilience.

Example 4: Low Meaning Resilience (Omission)

Utterance: "Make, make my dream." (Speaker 4)

Error Analysis: Incomplete clause; missing the Actor and completing the predicate.

Transitivity Analysis:

- a. Process: Material – make (a Process is realized in this clause)
- b. Actor: unrealized
- c. Goal: my dream (semantically irregular collocation, because "*dream*" does not usually represent a Material Goal)

Resilience Assessment: While Process is indeed instantiated ("make"), the clause is categorized as Low Resilience not on the grounds that it does not have a Process component, but rather due to the absence of an Actor and semantic anomaly of Process-Goal relation. As there is no Actor and an atypical combination of Process and Goal components, the hearer cannot determine who is doing what from this clause alone.

3.4 Relationship Between Error Type and Meaning Resilience

In order to explore the connection between the type of grammatical error and the recoverability of the ideational meaning, Table 5 presents a cross tabulation of the type of error and Meaning Resilience. Since one clause may contain multiple types of errors, the total in Table 5 is higher than the number of error-containing clauses (86).

Table 5. Meaning Resilience by Grammatical Error Type

Error Type	High	Medium	Low	Total
Misformation	39	34	0	73
Omission	10	11	2	23
Misordering	4	2	0	6
Addition	4	1	0	5

As can be seen from Table 5, one of the things that stands out is a notable asymmetry: both instances of Low Resilience involved omission errors, while misformation, although being the most common error type, never coincided with an ideational recoverability. The reason for this can be found in the fact that omission is more threatening to ideational recoverability as it completely deletes an obligatory element of the clause.

3.5 Relationship Between Process Type and Meaning Resilience

Table 6 presents the cross-tabulation of the main process types of the error clause and their meaning Resilience.

Table 6. Meaning Resilience by Primary Process Type

Process Type	High	Medium	Low	Total
Relational	24	20	0	44
Material	18	4	1	23
Mental	5	9	0	14
Verbal	0	3	0	3
Existential	1	0	0	1

The relational processes, which constituted the most common form of processes in database, did not exhibit any association with Low Resilience, probably because of their relatively high resilience against grammatical interference, mainly due to the fact that they usually needed only the Carrier and the Attribute to be identified, while the Process could be deduced by ellipsis (as in *"He [is] very kind."*).

3.6 Participants-Level Distribution

As a result of the limited sample size, individual speaker variability was analyzed as well in order to understand whether any individual speaker affected the resilience statistics more than others. Table 7 illustrates the Distribution of Meaning Resilience by speaker.

Table 7. Meaning Resilience Distribution by Participants

Speaker	N	High	Medium	Low
Speaker 1	17	58.8%	41.2%	0%
Speaker 2	26	88.5%	11.5%	0%
Speaker 3	15	73.3%	26.7%	0%
Speaker 4	23	43.5%	47.8%	8.7%
Speaker 5	12	58.3%	41.7%	0%
Speaker 6	19	63.2%	36.8%	0%

In term of participant-based results, it becomes evident that meaning resilience was not consistently distributed among the speakers. Specifically, while high levels of Resilience were shown by five out of the six participants within the range from 58 to 89%, there was one speaker (namely Speaker 4) who made up two cases of Low Resilience found in the dataset and who demonstrated lower levels of High Resilience (43.5%). It means that

participant-based resilience statistics may serve as good general representation of the dataset, but they cannot be considered consistent among all participants.

4. Discussion

This research is aimed at investigating the connection between grammatical errors and the representation of ideational meanings in the semi-spontaneous spoken descriptive texts in six EFL learners. The results show that there are three major tendencies: firstly, misformation is the most common category of error (76.5% of error tokens); secondly, relational processes are the most common process type in error-containing clauses (51.8%); and thirdly, the great majority of error-containing clauses were found to belong to the High and Medium categories of Meaning Resilience (55.8% and 41.9%, correspondingly), while 2.3% had Low Resilience. These patterns will be explored further in the paragraphs to follow from a theoretical perspective based on the information provided by the data, rather than from a causal perspective, the nature of the qualitative and small-scale research design prevents this study from making any casual inferences about EFL speech production.

4.1 Misformation and the Demands of Semi-Spontaneous Speech

The occurrence of misformation errors is consistent with the Monitor Model of Krashen's (1982), which assumes that spontaneous speech production does not allow enough time to monitor one's grammar in a conscious way. The fact might be linked to the processing efforts in semi-spontaneous speech, when participants had almost no time for preparation (2-3 keywords, one minute). This explanation may be purely speculative, since the current study did not employ any independent measurement of cognitive load (such as response time, subjective evaluation, or dual-task approach), but it provides a reasonable explanation that can account for the mistakes made.

This particular error pattern characterized by verb forms (e.g., *"it's have"*), active passive construction (e.g., *"I inspired him"*), and lexico-semantic mistakes (e.g., *"felt with"* instead of *"filled with"*) is generally in agreement with the pattern that were found in previous Error analysis studies (Alraimi & Abdalla 2019; Patarapongsanti et al. 2022; Sudarmono 2025). The present findings cannot be interpreted as refutation of the above-mentioned Error Analysis studies; they should rather be seen as an addition to them because while the previous research was concerned mainly with the frequency and surface features of the errors, the current study focuses on their meaning. In Error Analysis as a theory, linguistic errors are identified, but the theory is not meant to assume that every error causes communicative failure, and the current findings could be seen as expanding rather than contradicting this theory.

4.2 Relational-Process Dominance and the Descriptive Genre

The prevalence of relational processes (51.8%) in error-containing clauses is indicative of the structural pattern of the descriptive texts, which is known to employ relational processes to attribute and identify. This research result aligns with the findings by Septianti & Kurniawan (2023), Hamidah & Retnowati (2026), Fiscarina & Fauzati (2024), Wibowo et al. (2024) concerning the language properties specific to the descriptive genre. It would not be prudent, though, to make a comparative assessment of the results with those obtained in the studies mentioned above because they were performed on written texts, not spoken.

However, this distribution of process types fits in well patterns seen in descriptive texts, where learners use relational processes for attribution, material processes for action or qualities, and mental processes for attitude, regardless of whether grammatical expression is accurate or not, a more conservative description than saying that learners have "internalized the semantic specifications" of the genre. On the contrary, the above

result further expands the scope of SFL-based research on spoken discourse carried out by Bashir et al. (2026), Gea et al. (2026), Jing (2019), Stevani et al. (2023), and Xiang (2022), which largely focuses on expert speech; this work is the first attempt at extending the framework of transitivity to error-filled EFL speech.

4.3 Meaning Resilience: Patterns and Boundaries

The major result of this research is that 55.8% of clauses containing errors were characterized as High Resilience while 2.3% as Low Resilience. It means that many grammatical errors in this corpus do not influence recovery of ideational meaning. The statement that grammatical accuracy does not matter as far as communicative competence is concerned, is a much broader statement than that one made by the current research which speaks only about recovery of the ideational meaning.

The general trend is largely in agreement with the findings of previous studies in the field of Error Analysis (Alraimi & Abdalla, 2019; Patarapongsanti et al., 2022; Sudarmono, 2025) which show that grammatical mistakes do not always affect semantic outcome while impacting the form of the language. While most of studies mentioned above deal with written language, where there is time for planning and revision, the present study, which focuses on semi-spontaneous speech, implies that grammatical disturbance during production is not always ideational failure: learners often managed to create Processes-Participants patterns despite grammatical problems.

The cross-tabulation presented in Table 5 provides an interesting exception to the general trend: not all grammatical mistakes had equal effects on communication. In both examples of low resilience, omission mistakes occurred, while misinformation, the most common error type, was not related to the inability to reconstruct the ideational content. This difference can be regarded as significant from the point of view of the distinction between errors, which are formally erroneous but still allow recovering the meaning (in other words, they preserve some clause elements, although they are distorted), and errors that are likely to disrupt the meaning completely (they remove obligatory elements and, thus, do not provide any clues for reconstruction).

Table 6 also shows that relational processes, the most frequent process type in the dataset, were never linked to Low Resilience, possibly due to the fact that the relational two-party construction (Carrier-Attribute), despite possible distortion of the relational Process in terms of grammar, is always recoverable.

It should also be highlighted that this observed resilience did not vary equally among the speaker (Table 7): the same individual was responsible for all occurrences of Low Resilience and also had a significantly lower percentage of High Resilience clauses (43.5%), compared to the other five speakers (58-89%). This suggests that while this general resilience profile could serve as a characteristic of the dataset as a whole, it does not mean that EFL speech always displays such resilience patterns; different individual characteristics might play a role here.

4.4 Re-Examining Specific Cases

There are two clause-level examples that require further theoretical discussion considering the framework of the present study.

In the case of *"It's have a smooth screen,"* the analysis of the relational possessive construction was still possible, taking into account that there was only wrong choice of the auxiliary verb: the Process (Relational, Possessive) was *"have,"* not *"has"*; the Carrier/Possessor was *"It"*; and the Attribute/Possessed was *"a smooth screen."* Thus, this is consistent with Thompson's (2014) description of grammar errors as *"mis-selection"* rather than a failure to construct meaning.

Conversely, “I inspired him” (should be: “he inspires me,” “I am inspired by him”), calls for a more careful analysis compared to the other versions of this study. When viewed in its linguistic form, this sentence puts the speaker in the position of *Sensor/Actor* and the referent in the position of *Phenomenon/Goal*, precisely the opposite of the intended roles. This kind of inversion cannot be recovered on the basis of the clause alone; it can only be understood in relation to the co-text within which the speaker shows consistent admiration for the referent. This clause is therefore taken in this study to be an example of *Medium* rather than *High Resilience*: its ideational configuration is recoverable, but only contextually, not through the clause’s own transitivity structure. Ideational metafunction is analyzed in this study using the *Transitivity System*. The interpersonal meaning of this clause is not determined in this study since no *Mood* or *Appraisal* analysis has been done.

4.5 Theoretical Status of Meaning Resilience

Taking into account the small number of subjects involved (six participants), one genre of oral speech only, and the fact that the categorization was done by one research team, with supervisory approval rather than independent blind coding, *Meaning Resilience* can be described as a heuristic framework rather than a theoretically established framework. This description does not lessen the value of the concept; on the contrary, it provides a means of discriminating between grammatical accuracy and ideational recovery using *SFL* criteria (see Table 1).

The second related weakness is the problem of coding reliability. As mentioned in Section 2.6, this research coding validation took place through supervisory checking and expert debriefing, instead of independent blind double-coding by two raters. Although the former permitted an exhaustive clause-by-clause analysis, which was necessary due to the size of the data set, the calculation of a formal measure of inter-rater agreement, such as kappa or percentage agreement coefficient, did not prove possible, as these coefficients are applicable only when the codings are made independently.

Further research on validating *Meaning Resilience* as a more robust construct should include: (1) larger samples including more speakers; (2) other genres of speech apart from descriptions; (3) independent raters blind-coding to determine the inter-rater reliability of the measurements; (4) judgement of the listeners’ comprehension to determine if the analysis-derived meaning resilience level matches that of the listeners; and (5) comparison with well-established comprehensibility or intelligibility tests.

4.6 Pedagogical Implications

In this particular corpus, the results indicating that many of the grammatical errors were not barriers to meaning restoration indicate a pedagogical implication, which could be to the effect that evaluation of oral proficiency based only on grammatical correctness can overlook the proven ability of the learner to create meaning. The results imply that there is need to pursue assessment procedures that weight equally the factors of grammatical correctness and meaning creation, and not as interchangeable factors, although this is an area for consideration, and not recommendation, as this particular research did not involve testing of correction practices.

An even more targeted implication for teaching derives from the findings regarding the asymmetric error-type risk of ideational breakdown noted in Section 4.3. In light of the present findings that is, where omission errors pose a higher risk of ideational breakdown than do misformation errors, it could be reasonable to give precedence to the former rather than the latter in both instruction and evaluation. Thus understood, the contribution of *Meaning Resilience* is certainly not that “errors do not matter,” but that some errors may matter more than others, a finding based on one dataset of only 86 error-containing clauses.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the connection between grammatical errors and the representation of the ideational meaning in semi-spontaneous descriptive texts of six EFL third-semester students employing the framework of error taxonomy by Dulay & Krashen (1982) and the Transitivity System by Halliday & Matthiessen in (2014). For the dataset with of 86 clauses containing errors, there seem to be three major trends.

Firstly, it can be argued that misformation is a leading error type for these six individuals (accounting for 76.5% of error tokens), far more common than omission, misordering, or addition. Secondly, relational processes were determined to dominate in the analyzed error-filled clauses (at 51.8%), as expected on generic grounds for the genre of description. Thirdly, the analysis indicates that many, but certainly not all, of the grammatical mistakes made by these six people did not affect the recovery of the basic ideational structure: High Resilience accounted for 55.8%, Medium Resilience for 41.9%, and Low Resilience for 2.3% of the analyzed error-filled clauses.

One particular pattern which comes out of this data set is that various types of errors seemed to carry varying levels of risk to the recovery of meaning: in this set of six participants' data, omission errors were the only type of error found in association with Low Resilience cases, while misformation, although frequent, carried no such associations for breakdowns in the recovery of meaning. The idea that there may be a distinction between formally incorrect but resilient-to-meaning errors versus disruptive-to-meaning errors seems to suggest itself through this limited set of Low Resilience cases.

Meaning Resilience, as a construct devised for and used in this study, needs to be seen in the context of a provisional analytical construct as opposed to a theoretical one. The construct was developed, operationalized and applied by a single research team, coded across all analyzable clauses using supervised coding, and tested on the descriptive speech of six learners in a spoken genre. Within this boundaries, the construct appears to offer a means of differentiating grammatical accuracy from ideational recovery, but its validity beyond this specific dataset, sample, and genre remains to be established.

Pedagogically, the patterns found in this dataset indicate that any method of assessing language proficiency that focuses exclusively on grammar might underestimate the ability to make meaning in cases like these six participants. This is presented not as evidence-based solution but as an avenue worth exploring because corrective methods and their impact on learners were not tested here.

Future research on this provisional construct should use more extensive and varied sampling, more varieties of spoken discourse, formal inter-rater reliability through blind double coding, listener comprehension assessments, and a direct comparison to other comprehension scales. It is only in this way that the results of patterns found among these six individuals can be evaluated as having broader generalizability for EFL spoken production.

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