



The Error Analysis of Grammar Found in Students' Writing on WhatsApp

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Abstract

Grammar is a necessary language component to improve the proficiency of learner's language. However, many secondary education learners still commit grammatical errors in typing their messages on WhatsApp. This research aims to describe types of grammatical errors found in students' writing on WhatsApp typed by 20 first-semester learners in an Indonesian university. The researchers used a descriptive case study to conduct the research. The research participants were 20 first-semester learners of a private university in Central Java, Indonesia. The researchers used a test to collect the data. They analyzed the tests results descriptively by using Keshavarz's theory. The analysis result shows that the percentage for each error type is 27.5% (omission), 10.6% (addition), 58.2% (substitution), and 3.7% (permutation). The research result indicates that the most dominant error is substitution (58.2%).

Keywords: Error Analysis, Grammar, Writing, Whatsapp

Introduction

Writing is the most complex language skill to master because it requires both linguistic competence and writing knowledge. Producing quality texts demand strong text knowledge, organizational skills, vocabulary, and grammar (Goshu & Gebremariam, 2024). Students also need the ability to generate and develop ideas systematically and to use critical thinking to support arguments with appropriate examples and vocabulary (Abrar et al., 2023; Jin et al., 2020). To have good writing skills, learners also need to master grammar.

Teaching writing is demanding since there are various factors such as organization, vocabulary, grammar, and suitable methods of assessing learners' progress. Particularly, the teaching of writing in English is a serious problem in teaching and learning in an EFL context. In L2 contexts, learners' competence is

commonly inadequate for developing learners' English writing skills (Amnuai, 2020).

Though the first-semester learners of an Indonesian college have learned English for some years, they still have difficulties typing messages on WhatsApp, especially applying grammatical rules correctly. Some of them omit the inflection *-s/-es* to show the plurality of a noun. When the tense is in the present simple, they also often do not put the inflection *-s/-es* to show the tense marker. In addition, learners omit the verb *is*, *am*, or *are* to construct a nominal sentence in the present simple. Furthermore, learners do not put the inflection *-ing* to show the gerund in the sentence. Besides, they also do not attach an auxiliary verb in a passive voice.

In some cases, students attach the preposition, which is unnecessary in a sentence. They also give an auxiliary verb *is* to the verbal affirmative sentence in the present simple. Sometimes students attach double auxiliaries such as: *is* and *can* in one sentence. Some of them also use the past simple instead of the present simple and use the past continuous tense instead of the present continuous tense. Some of them also still have difficulties constructing a noun phrase. They are still confused about determining the head and the modifier of the phrase. They also sometimes write the subject *I* in a small letter. Besides, they also cannot write interrogative sentences correctly. They still often put the subject in front of the auxiliary verb in arranging interrogative sentences. Besides, they still put the inflection *-s* to the main verb in constructing interrogative sentences. It means that learners commit errors. They do not know what errors they have made, and they cannot do self-correction.

Errors generally occur due to inadequate competence in learning English as the foreign language. They are commonly made by people who do not comprehend some institutionalized language system (Hutauruk et al., 2022). Errors can act as warning signals demonstrating the students' inadequate target language competence. Thus, to give constructive feedback to learners, educators should be fully aware of their learners' writing errors. In writing, students can easily commit errors since they apply only their individual language knowledge in writing a text without help (Amnuai, 2020).

Error analysis (EA) is defined as recognizing, categorizing, and interpreting inappropriate forms committed by language learners. EA informs lecturers, curriculum designers, and textbook writers about problem areas and differentiates between learners' competence and needs. The scope of error analysis is to determine how skillful someone masters the language, to show how someone studies the language, and to collect information on general obstacles in language learning (Barzani & Baiz, 2024). Some reasons learners commit errors in writing in a second language are carelessness, first language interference, and translation errors (including collocation errors) (Nurlaily, 2022).

Error analysis is beneficial for learning process (Devilito et al., 2025). It helps educators and course developers in identifying learners' errors, why they commit such errors, and how these errors could be eliminated. Understanding the causes

of errors enables educators to directly solve those trouble-spots in the language learning of learners by preparing appropriate teaching materials and effective techniques to remedy learners' errors (Amnuai, 2020).

Errors can be categorized based on the process. According to Keshavarz (2012), there are some types of errors: omission, addition, substitution, and permutation. Below is a detailed explanation of each error type.

1. Omission

The omission is the deletion of some crucial items within a sentence (Keshavarz, 2012; Kusumawardhani, 2017). For example, **I am do my homework now* instead of *I am doing my homework now*. In this example, there is no inflection *-ing* to the main verb *do* to show that the tense is in the present continuous tense.

2. Addition

The addition is the presence of a particular element that is not needed within a sentence or an utterance (Keshavarz, 2012; Rusyaiddi, 2018). For example, **They are always get up at 5 a.m.* instead of *They always get up at 5 a.m.* In this example, the auxiliary verb *are* is not needed because there is the primary verb *get*, and the sentence is in the present simple.

3. Substitution

The substitution uses the incorrect form of a word in a sentence or an utterance (Keshavarz, 2012). For example, **I am not afraid from dogs* instead of *I am not afraid of dogs*. In this example, there is the improper use of a preposition. The preposition *from* cannot be placed after the adjective *afraid*. The collocation of *afraid* is *of*.

4. Permutation

The permutation is the incorrect placement of a morpheme or word in a sentence or an utterance (Keshavarz, 2012). **He sings always in the bedroom* instead of *He always sings in the bedroom*. In this sentence, the adverb of frequency *always* should be placed before the main verb *sings*.

WhatsApp is a smartphone application that enables users to communicate with other people without charge (Ariyanti et al., 2020). It is a well-known application that allows students to communicate efficiently (Mahmud, 2020). It enables people to deliver some features such as: texts, pictures, audios, and videos (Hashemifardnia et al., 2018). Viewed from the pedagogical approach, WhatsApp enables teachers to check students' mistakes in EFL learning, so it has educational benefits (Al-Ahdal & Hussein, 2020). Besides, WhatsApp can improve students' English proficiency because students can develop their lexical items and learn from their friends' mistakes (Maulina et al., 2019).

Based on the researchers' observation in the English education department of a private university in Central Java, many first-semester learners still commit errors in typing their messages on WhatsApp. Here, the errors in their WhatsApp messages will influence the meaning to the receiver of the message. The ability to write messages clearly with high accuracy is important for the effective

communication. In this case, learners should be able to type their messages by applying grammatical rules appropriately.

The researchers took five previous studies about error analysis in different cases. The first previous study is about grammatical and mechanic errors in students' write-ups in the tenth-grade students of a senior high school. The mechanic errors were punctuation and indentation, while the grammatical errors were in the correct use of verb groups, prepositions, and subject-verb agreement. The researcher suggests that the teacher give more lessons and exercises related to students' errors to minimize their errors in writing (Calanoga, 2019).

The second previous study is about the errors in writing recount text. The findings indicated that learners' errors are 13 omission (6.5%), 12 addition (6%), 158 misformation (79%), and 17 misordering (8.5%). The most dominant error is misformation. The percentage is 79% (Hutauruk et al., 2022).

The third previous study is about errors in L2 learners' sentences writing. The study showed that the common errors are the incorrect use of punctuation (mechanical category), the inappropriate use of verb tense (grammatical category), and use of sentence fragments (structural category). The researcher suggests that teachers should enhance learners' competence in constructing sentences (Catabay, 2019).

The fourth previous study is about errors in writing a summary. In mechanical elements, the learners committed errors in capitalization, spelling, and punctuation. The most dominant error in grammatical features is in the use of articles. Meanwhile, punctuation had the highest percentage of mechanical errors (30% of the errors), which is the most prevalent in the learners' writing. These findings demonstrated that the learners need to pay more attention to grammar and mechanics in their writing (Nurlaily, 2022).

The fifth previous study is about errors in learners' comments in online classroom. The most common error was omission (120 errors/52.18%), misformation (70 errors/30.43%), addition (30 errors/13.14%), and misordering (10 errors/4.38%). It can be inferred that learners encountered difficulties understanding grammar rules during the writing process (Fawaid et al., 2022).

This research is different from previous researches. In this research, the researchers investigate the error analysis of grammar found in students' messages on WhatsApp because there are many errors in their messages. Here, the researchers analyze all grammatical errors found in students' online chatting to detect students' overall grammar competence. Types of errors are analyzed based on Keshavarz's theory (2012). The analysis is based on the classification of the process.

Based on the study's background that the researchers have stated before, the researchers formulate the research problem as follows:

1. What types of grammatical errors are found in students' messages on WhatsApp?

In line with the research problems, the objective of the study is:

1. to analyze types of grammatical errors found in students' messages on WhatsApp, and

Methods

In this research, the researchers used a descriptive case study. It aims to give detailed information on a specific phenomenon to attain a deep understanding (Heigham & Croker, 2009). The researchers presented detailed information about types of grammatical errors found in learners' messages on WhatsApp. The research participants were 20 first-semester learners of the English Education Department of a private university in Central Java, Indonesia. The researchers took class 1A as the sample. The data sources of this research were documents. The documents were in the form of transcripts of messages on WhatsApp. The analysis unit was the sentences found in learners' messages on WhatsApp.

The researchers used a test to gather the data. A test is a method of measuring a person's ability or knowledge in a given domain (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019). In this study, the researchers collected the data by providing a test to 20 first-semester learners in the English education department of a private university in Indonesia. The test is writing messages on WhatsApp based on the topic they have chosen.

In administrating a test, the researchers did some steps as follows:

1. Asking for permission from the first-semester learners to take the data,
2. Showing the topics of messages,
3. Asking learners to write messages on WhatsApp based on the topic they have chosen,
4. Asking learners to send the messages on WhatsApp,
5. Asking learners to transcribe their messages in Microsoft Word, and
6. Asking learners to submit their works in the google drive link.

After the data are collected, the researchers analyzed them by using some steps as follows:

1. Reading the results of learners' messages on WhatsApp,
2. Highlighting and categorizing grammatical errors found in learners' messages,
3. Explaining the types of grammatical errors,
4. Gathering and counting the result and put it into the table, and
5. Calculating the percentage of each error

The researchers calculated the percentage of each error made by the first-semester learners using the formula as follows:

$$P = f/n \times 100\%$$

Note:

P = percentage of the number of error

f = frequency of each type of error

n = number of error

6. Interpreting and explaining the result
7. Concluding the result

Result

In this section, the researchers present the result of the analysis of types of grammatical errors found in learners' messages written by 20 first-semester learners of a private university in Indonesia. The analysis of types of errors is based on Keshavarz's theory. There are omission, addition, substitution, and permutation. Below is the table of recapitulation of types of grammatical errors found in online chatting.

Table of Recapitulation of Types of Grammatical Errors
 Found in Students' Messages on WhatsApp Written by University Learners

No.	Types of Errors	Total	Percentage (%)
1.	Omission	52	27.5
2.	Addition	20	10.6
3.	Substitution	110	58.2
4.	Permutation	7	3.7
	Total	189	100

The table shows that the first-semester learners of a private university in Central Java, Indonesia still committed grammatical errors in writing their messages on WhatsApp. The total number of errors is 189. The total number for each error type is 52 (omission), 20 (addition), 110 (substitution), and 7 (permutation). The analysis result shows that the percentage for each error type is 27.5% (omission), 10.6% (addition), 58.2% (substitution), and 3.7% (permutation). It can be concluded that the most dominant error found in learners' messages on WhatsApp is substitution. The percentage of error is 58.2%.

Discussion

Types of Grammatical Errors Found in Students' Messages on WhatsApp Written by University Students

This section deals with discussing findings of types of grammatical errors found in students' messages on WhatsApp, which are written by the first-semester university students Indonesia. According to Keshavarz (2012), there are four types of errors: omission, addition, substitution, and permutation.

1. Omission

Here are examples of omission errors.

- a. The omission of an auxiliary *have* in an affirmative sentence.

Robi: "Have you heard that?"

Yunus: "Yes, I ^ heard". (S1)

Yunus' sentence is not correct. It is an omission of an auxiliary *have* in the present perfect tense. Robi asks Yunus with the auxiliary *have* in the sentence above, so Yunus has to answer with an auxiliary *have*. Because the

subject is *I*, the appropriate auxiliary verb is *have*. Therefore, the sentence should be “*Yes, I have heard.*”

- b. The omission of a verb *be* in an affirmative sentence.

Aura: “Smoking ^ very harmful to other people.” (S2)

Aura’s sentence is inappropriate. It is an omission of a verb *be* in the affirmative sentence. In the sentence above, the subject is *smoking*, and it is singular. Because the kind of affirmative sentence is a nominal sentence, the appropriate verb *be* is *is*. Therefore, the correct sentence is, “*Smoking is very harmful to other people.*”

- c. The omission of an inflection –s to the verb in the present simple.

Aurora : “Besides, cigarette *cause* cancer, respiratory problems, and cause people die.” (S3)

Aurora’s sentence is not correct. It is an omission because there is no inflection –s attached to the verb *cause* in an independent clause. The subject in the sentence above is *cigarette*, and it is singular. Thus, the verb must be in the singular form, and the correct verb is *causes*. Therefore, the correct sentence is “*Besides, cigarette causes cancer, respiratory problems, and death.*”

2. Addition

- a. Addition of the auxiliary verb *am* to the verbal sentence of the present simple.

Fida : “I’m agree.” (S4)

Fida’s sentence is not correct. It is an addition of the auxiliary verb *am* to the verbal sentence of the present simple. Here, the verb *agree* indicates that the sentence is the verbal sentence, and it is in the present simple. Thus, the sentence does not need the auxiliary verb *am*. In the sentence above, the subject is *I*, so the correct verb is *agree*. Hence, the correct sentence is, “*I agree.*”

- b. Addition of the inflection –s to the main verb in the interrogative sentence
Asti : “What does it means?” (S5)

Asti’s sentence is not appropriate. There is an addition of the inflection –s to the main verb in the interrogative sentence. The main verb *mean* should be in the infinitive form in the sentence above because it is an interrogative sentence in the present simple. Thus, an inflection –s in the primary verb *means* must be omitted. Therefore, the sentence should be, “*What does it mean?*”

3. Substitution

- a. Substitution of double auxiliaries instead of a single auxiliary

Yanuar : “When *is* the deep learning will be *hold*?” (S6)

The sentence is not appropriate. There is a substitution of double auxiliaries instead of a single auxiliary. The sentence uses the future simple tense, however, there are two auxiliary verbs: *is* and *will*. The future simple tense always uses the auxiliary verb *will*, so the auxiliary verb *is* is not necessary. Then, in constructing an interrogative sentence in the future

simple tense, the auxiliary verb *will* must be placed after the question word *When*. Then, for the main verb *hold*, it is also not appropriate because the sentence is passive, so the appropriate one is *held*. Therefore, the correct sentence is, "*When will the deep learning be held?*"

- b. Substitution of the present simple instead of the present perfect tense

Amalia : "My lecturer *is* never *apply* the problem-based learning." (S7)

The sentence is not correct because it belongs to the substitution of the present simple instead of the present perfect tense. The adverb of frequency *never* indicates that the tense is the present perfect tense. However, it uses the present simple. The student did not attach the inflection *-ed* to the main verb *apply*, and she did not use the auxiliary verb in the form of *have*. Here, the sentence should use the past verb in the third form. The main verb *apply* must be changed into *applied*. The subject of the sentence is *My lecturer*, so the correct auxiliary verb is *has*. Therefore, the correct sentence is, "*My lecturer has never applied the problem-based learning.*"

- c. Substitution of the auxiliary *was* instead of *am*

Salma : "What are you reading?"

Aulia : "I *was* reading a grammar book." (S8)

The sentence typed by Aulia is incorrect. The type of error in the sentence belongs to a substitution. An aspectual auxiliary *was* is used for an affirmative sentence in the present continuous tense in the sentence above. In the sentence above, Salma asks, "What are you reading?" Aulia answers, "I was reading a grammar book." In this case, Fina should answer Salma's question in the present continuous tense, so the correct auxiliary verb is *am*. Therefore, the sentence should be "*I am reading a grammar book.*"

4. Permutation

- a. Permutation of a subject and an auxiliary verb

1) Fita : "By the way, when *the video will* be submitted?" (S9)

This sentence is not appropriate. It belongs to a permutation because there is the inappropriate order of a subject and an auxiliary verb. In an interrogative sentence, the auxiliary verb must be placed after the question word, and the subject must be placed after the auxiliary verb. Thus, in this sentence, the auxiliary verb *will* must be placed after the question word *When*. Then, the subject *the video* must be placed after the auxiliary verb *will*. Therefore, the correct sentence is, "*When will the video be submitted?*"

2) Nindi : "Why *the mid-term test is* postponed?" (S10)

Nindi's sentence is not correct. It belongs to a permutation because the subject and the auxiliary verb are inverted. In an interrogative sentence, the auxiliary verb must be placed after the question word, and the subject must be placed after the auxiliary verb. Thus, in this sentence, the auxiliary verb *is* must be placed after the question word

Why. Then, the subject *homeschooling* must be placed after the auxiliary verb *will*. Therefore, the correct sentence is, "*Why is the mid-term test postponed*"

3) Zheny : "What *students should* do?" (S11)

Zheny's sentence is not appropriate. It belongs to a permutation because the subject and the auxiliary verb are inverted. In an interrogative sentence, the auxiliary verb must be placed after the question word, and the subject must be placed after the auxiliary verb. Thus, in this sentence, the auxiliary verb *should* must be placed after the question word *What*. Then, the subject *students* must be placed after the auxiliary verb *should*. Therefore, the correct sentence is, "*What should students do?*"

b. Permutation of a noun (gerund) and a noun

Hanum: "As we know, the internet is beneficial to facilitated the work, or when we got the assignment, we can find the *materials learning*." (S11)

The sentence above is not correct. It belongs to a permutation because there is a wrong order of noun (gerund) and noun. The word *learning* as a gerund should be placed before the noun *materials*. Therefore, the correct sentence is, "*As we know, the internet is beneficial to facilitate the work, and when we get the assignment, we can find the learning materials.*"

c. Permutation of an adjective and a noun

1) Adi: "What's the *matter wrong*?" (S28)

The sentence above is not appropriate. It belongs to a permutation because the adjective and the noun are inverted. In the sentence above, the adjective is *wrong*, and it should be placed before the noun *matter*. Therefore, the correct sentence is, "*What's the wrong matter?*"

2) Tiara: Where is the *library famous*?

The sentence above is not correct. It belongs to a permutation because the adjective and the noun are inverted. In the sentence above, the adjective is *famous*, and it should be placed before the noun *library*. Therefore, the correct sentence is, "*Where is the famous library?*"

3) Wahida: Who is the *student smartest*?

The sentence above is not appropriate. It belongs to a permutation because there is an inappropriate order of adjective and noun. In the sentence above, the adjective is *smartest*, and it should be placed before the noun *student*. Therefore, the correct sentence is "*Who is the smartest student?*"

Conclusion

Lecturers need to conduct the error analysis to investigate learners' errors in a second or foreign language learning. Research results showed that the total grammatical errors found in students' messages on WhatsApp are 189. The total number of errors for each error type is 52 (omission), 20 (addition), 110

(substitution), and 7 (permutation). The result of the analysis shows that the percentage for each error type is 27.5% (omission), 10.6% (addition), 58.2% (substitution), and 3.7% (permutation). Based on the research result, the most dominant error is substitution (58.2%).

Error analysis gives some positive implications in English language teaching. With error analysis, the lecturer can determine TL's remedial measures, restructure TL learning items in classrooms and textbooks, know learning strategies used by L1 and L2 learners, identify types of students' errors, give feedback to students' errors, and help the lecturer to select appropriate learning method and media to improve the quality of learning. Error analysis gives much information about students' competence in second language learning so that the English lecturer can determine the effective teaching method based on students' weaknesses.

Lecturers need to apply various teaching strategies to minimize the errors (Nithyanantham & Paulmony, 2019). The lecturer can set the learning goals based on students' errors, especially for their dominant error. Here, the researchers found that students still commit errors in constructing interrogative sentences. They do not apply subject-verb inversion in making interrogative sentences. Thus, the lecturer can give some enrichment on how to write interrogative sentences correctly. Referring to the findings, students are also still confused about writing sentences in the future simple, the present simple, and the passive voice, so the lecturer can give more explanation about how to write sentences in the future simple, the present simple, and the passive voice correctly. When students have adequate grammar knowledge, they can improve their English proficiency.

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