



## Proform Dynamics in Constituency: Insights from EFL Student Sentences

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### Abstract\*

This research investigates the distribution and challenges of proform use among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners at Tadulako University, focusing on proform verb phrases (ProVP) and proform prepositional phrases (ProPP). Using a quantitative descriptive approach, data was gathered through tests and questionnaires from samples of 36 fifth-semester students. The analysis reveals that verb phrase proforms, especially those involving tense and aspect, are more challenging for EFL students compared to prepositional phrase proforms. Four factors influencing proform use were identified: first language interference, limited practice in real life, lack of motivation, and ineffective teaching methods. These findings highlight the need for enhanced syntactic training in EFL instruction to improve students' understanding and application of proforms, supporting more effective sentence construction and overall linguistic competence.

## 1. Introduction

In English, one of the skills people need to master is writing. In writing, syntax is how we construct words to form sentences. Syntax is the branch of linguistics that studies how words are put together to form sentences (Carnie, 2013; Tallerman, 2019). Understanding syntax offers significant benefits, one of which is improving their ability to construct sentences (Ismahani et al., 2024). One important concept in syntax is constituent, which refers to the parts of a sentence that can be considered separate units.

In syntax, to create a meaningful sentence, we need a phrase that is a collection of interrelated words that function as a unit. Constituents are basic elements in the sentence structure that form grammatical units (i.e., phrases) (Carnie, 2013; Roberts, 2016). Additionally, according to Sari, Bochari, & Usman (2024), a constituent, sometimes known as a phrase, is a group of related words used in a sentence. Understanding constituents could make it easier for us to construct good sentences. According to Ibad, Jamiludin and Bochari (2014), the constituent test can improve EFL students' writing ability when constructing sentences. There are several ways to identify the constituents known as constituent tests, and the proform test is one of them.

A proform test is used to determine if a group of words or phrases forms a constituent by replacing them with a proform. If the resulting sentence is grammatically correct after the proform process and keeps the same meaning as the sentence form before using proform, the group of words or phrases is considered a constituent (Carnie, 2013; Müller, 2023). Additionally, proform is a term used to stand in for or substitute other words, phrases, or sentences.

According to Purinanda (2020), HTML5-based games for tense learning have positive impacts on secondary school students. Additionally, Dewi, Putri, & Hermawan (2023) posited that wordy-wordy card games can facilitate vocabulary development across all educational levels, thereby enhancing comprehension of phrases. However, based on the researchers's experience, many EFL students cannot use proform because they do not know what phrases and tenses are used. They do not even know how to identify phrases (i.e., noun phrases, verb phrases, adjective phrases, prepositional phrases) so their inability to recognize the phrases, thus they do not know how to use proform correctly.

Several studies have been conducted on the proform test. However, no research study has focused on how the distribution and the factors influencing EFL students' proform distribution in sentences. In contrast, a study conducted by Demirci (2014), focused on proving that pronouns are not the only terms that can function as representative of an antecedent in sentences. A study also conducted about proform focused on examining the notion of pro-form in linguistics and how the forms are used in different contexts by Cornish & Salazar Orvig (2016), while Gaillat (2019), focused on understanding how English learners use the proforms "it," "this," and "that" in sentences. Based on those studies, there is an urgent need to conduct research that focuses on the distribution of proforms in sentences constructed by EFL students.

This study investigates the distribution of proforms in constituency within sentences constructed by EFL students. Using proforms in writing significantly enhances clarity and cohesion, reduces repetition, and makes texts more concise and readable. Mastering proforms helps students understand grammatical structures, boosting their overall writing skills and fluency, especially for EFL learners. The researchers explore this topic to identify is proform on verb phrase or proform on prepositional phrase challenging to use by EFL students in sentences, what proform on verb phrase or proform on prepositional phrase is the most challenging for EFL students to use in sentences, and what are the challenging factors faced by students when using proform in their sentence writing.

## **2. Research Methods**

This research was conducted at Tadulako University and used descriptive quantitative methods, relying on quantitative data and statistical analysis. Additionally, descriptive quantitative research design is a systematic approach that involves collecting and analyzing numerical data to describe characteristics, patterns, or relationships within a population or phenomenon (Barella et al., 2024; Indu & Vidhukumar, 2020; Martias, 2021).

Data collection was done by giving tests and questionnaires. Moreover, this research focuses on proform distribution by EFL students and analyzes the dominant factors that influence their ability to use proform. The data in this study were obtained from the 5th-semester students of the English education study program in Tadulako University consisting of 231 students from six parallel classes. Therefore, the researchers used the purposive sampling technique to determine the sample where the purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique used to select participants based on specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives (Andrade, 2021; Rahmawati,

2023). Thus, the researchers collected the 36 students' papers from class B as the samples for this research.

In data analysis, the collected data were analyzed. For the test, first, the researchers separated the correct answers from the incorrect ones. Second, the researchers listed the wrong answers based on the category of proform using an Excel worksheet. Third, the researchers analyzed the frequency of incorrect responses for each proform category by identifying the specific types of proforms that consistently received incorrect answers. After identifying the proform category with frequent errors, the researcher examined which specific proforms students consistently struggled with within that category.

After that, the researchers analyzed the questionnaire. The researchers inserted answers of the questionnaires into the SPSS program and then sorted the results of SPSS based on the theory of factors that influenced students' difficulty. Furthermore, suppose there is any variable that has a slight gap between agree and disagree. In that case, the researchers will determine the validity of the variable by recognizing it as valid if there is a slight gap of more than 10% since small gaps like 5-8% are often viewed as statistically insignificant in smaller samples (Samohyl, 2020). Ultimately, the researchers listed all the factors to see which variables became dominant.

### 3. Findings & Discussions

The data findings are based on the results of data analysis. The data analysis consists of two parts, the test and the questionnaire

#### The Analysis of the Data Collected from the Test

To find out what type of proform—verb phrase proforms or prepositional phrase proforms—is more challenging for EFL students to use and identifying the specific proforms that students find difficult within the selected category, the researchers take the data of the incorrect answers from the test where 'most challenging' refers to the proform type where students made the most errors or incorrect answers, indicating difficulty in usage.

Table 1. Frequency of the Incorrect Answers for Each Type of Proform

	ProVP	ProPP
Incorrect	92	24

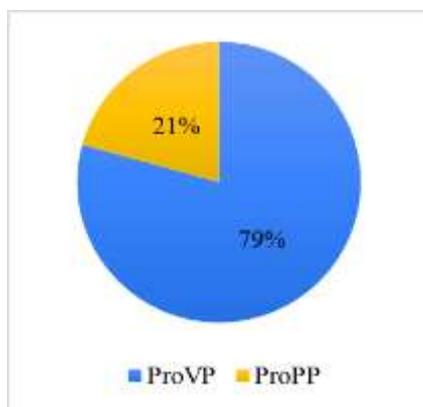


Figure 1. Percentage of Frequency of the Incorrect Answers for Each Type of Proform

As illustrated in Table 1 and Figure 1, most EFL students find the proform on verb phrases more challenging. Compared to the proform on prepositional phrases, which yielded 24 incorrect answers or 21% in percentage, the proform on verb phrases resulted in a significantly higher number of errors, with 92 or 79% of answers being incorrect. As a result, the researchers concluded that the proform on verb phrases is the most challenging for EFL students. Additionally, the researchers also concluded that EFL students are still unable to identify the tense just by looking at the verb since they do not know whether the verbs function as the tense or the aspect of the sentence. This result is also supported by Lee (2011), that verbs in sentences can serve as either tense or aspect markers. Therefore, EFL students need to carefully identify which verb serves as the tense and choose the correct proform verb, ensuring that the tense is consistent with the first clause. Additionally, to determine what proform is the most challenging for EFL students in verb phrase proforms, the table below shows the frequency of incorrect answers for each number related to verb phrase proforms.

Table 2. Frequency of the Incorrect Answers for Each Number in ProVP

No	Frequency	Percentage
1	1	3%
2	7	19%
3	7	19%
4	19	53%
5	16	44%
6	10	28%
7	8	22%
8	3	8%
9	6	17%
10	15	42%

The data in Table 2 illustrates the frequency of incorrect answers for each number from 1 to 10 in the ProVP test. Therefore, based on Table 2, question number 1 only has 1 incorrect answer recorded (3%), indicating that students found this question relatively easy. The first clause was in the simple past tense which is the verb “wrote”, and the majority of students successfully identified the correct proform

Question number 2 based on Table 2 had 7 incorrect answers or 19% of the percentage, showing a moderate level of difficulty. The first clause was in the present continuous tense including two verbs: “is” (as the tense) and “reading” (as the aspect), suggesting that some students struggled to correctly recognize the correct proform for the structure of the sentence.

Similarly, question number 3 based on Table 2 also had seven errors (19%). The first clause was in the past perfect tense including two verbs: “had” and “completed”, highlighting a comparable challenge to number 2 in identifying the correct proform.

Question number 4 based on Table 2 had the highest number of errors, with 19 incorrect responses (53%) where the first clause was in the past continuous tense, involving two verbs: "were" and "cooking". The student's high error rate suggests difficulty in distinguishing these roles and selecting the correct proform.

For question number 5, there were 16 errors (44%) based on Table 2, indicating significant difficulty. The first clause was in the present perfect tense including verbs: “has” and “finished”, which may have posed challenges in recognizing the proper tense and aspect consistency for the proform.

Question number 6 based on Table 2 had ten incorrect answers (28%), reflecting a moderate level of difficulty. The first clause was in the simple present tense “drinks”, showing that some students faced challenges in identifying the correct proform.

For question number 7, there were eight errors (22%) based on Table 2. The first clause was in the present perfect tense involving two verbs: “has” and “written”, with students demonstrating moderate difficulty in recognizing the appropriate proform.

Question number 8 based on Table 2 had only three incorrect responses (8%), making it one of the easiest questions. The first clause was in the simple past tense with the word “visited” as the verb, and most students correctly identified the proform.

For question number 9 based on Table 2, six errors (17%) were recorded. The first clause was in the past perfect tense involving verbs: “had” and “booked”, showing that while some students struggled, the overall difficulty level was moderate.

Lastly, question number 10 recorded 15 incorrect answers (42%) based on Table 2. The first clause was in the simple present tense, with a relatively higher error rate, suggesting that students found it challenging to determine the correct proform for this tense.

The high frequency of errors in number 4 based on Table 2 suggests that students struggled to recognize the correct proform due to their limited understanding of tenses and aspects. The first clause of the sentence in number 4 is in the past continuous tense, which involves two verbs: one serving as the tense marker (“were”) and the other as the aspect marker (“cooking,” the main verb in its present participle form) (Kakzhanova, 2019; Mithun, 2019). Many EFL students had difficulty identifying which verb functions as the tense marker and determining the correct proform to maintain tense consistency with the first clause. This leads to the conclusion that the most challenging proform in ProVP for EFL students is “were.”

### **The Analysis of the Data Collected from the Questionnaire**

The researchers used the questionnaire to answer the research question about the dominant factors that influence their ability to use proforms in their sentences. Thus, the researchers present a table of the variables that are the dominant factors influencing students in their use of proforms below:

Table 3. The Frequency of Students' Answers Based on the Variables

No	Variables	SA	A	D	SD
1	First language interference	13	78	48	5
		9%	54%	33%	4%
2	Developing Bad Learning Habits	8	83	81	8
		4%	47%	45%	4%
3	Limited Practice in Real-life Situation	18	159	211	44
		10%	49%	37%	4%
4	Limited vocabulary knowledge	44	162	167	23
		11%	41%	42%	6%
5	Lack of motivation	24	195	109	32
		7%	54%	30%	9%
6	Ineffectiveness of the teaching methods used	8	35	25	4
		11%	49%	34%	6%
7	There are no friends to do peer assessment	30	255	214	41
		6%	47%	39%	8%

As a result, the researchers carefully analyzed the students' responses to each indicator for every variable. The researchers examined the answers of students who selected 'agree' or 'disagree' to the provided statements. After identifying eight potential factors that might influence the students' ability to use proforms, it became clear that only four are dominant. The four factors that influence students' use of proforms are first language interference (variable 1), limited practice in real-life situations (variable 3), lack of motivation (variable 5), and ineffective teaching methods (variable 6).

#### 4. Novelties

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on identifying proform distribution, particularly concerning proform verb phrases and proform prepositional phrases. This study aims to determine which specific proforms are most challenging for EFL students, especially within the more difficult types of proforms, and the factors that influence their ability to use them effectively. The findings indicate that EFL students struggle with proform verb phrases, particularly with the proform "were" when the first clause is in the past continuous tense. These findings also highlight the students' lack of mastery over tense usage.

#### 5. Conclusion

After conducting this research, the researchers discovered that proform on verb phrases is more challenging to use by EFL students in sentences, with 92 incorrect answers. Based on these findings, the researchers concluded that EFL students still struggle to use proform verb phrases correctly. It is evident that many students select the wrong proform when addressing verb phrases. Furthermore, the researchers found the most challenging proform verb phrase for EFL students to use in their sentences is the proform verb "were". This was highlighted by 19 incorrect answers in question number four of the ProVP test, where the first clause is in the past continuous tense, indicating that many EFL students still lack mastery of verb tenses. Lastly, the researchers discovered the challenging factors faced by students when using proform in their sentences are divided into internal and external factors. Based on the questionnaires, the researchers identified

four main factors that influence students' mastery of tenses and phrases, affecting their ability to use proforms effectively. These factors are 1) first language interference, 2) limited practice in real-life situations, 3) lack of motivation, and 4) the ineffectiveness of teaching methods.

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