



An Error Analysis of The Inflectional Markings in EFL Students' Academic Writing

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Abstract*

This study aims to identify specific problems and provide insight into learners' difficulties in the inflectional markings learning and academic writing. The method of this research is Dulay's Linguistics Category Taxonomy. The result of classification was calculated by the frequency of each error category: plural marks 13, present verb for third person singular 11, past verb 3, possessive noun 2, and past participle 1. Plural marks dominate the error of using the inflectional markings. The comparison and progressive marks are not found errors in EFL Students' Academic Writing.

1. Introduction

Writing is a key part of daily communication and an essential skill for learners. It helps us express ideas, thoughts, and feelings accurately in written form. Writing goes beyond simple communication; it creates permanent records, avoiding confusion and preserving information accurately. For students, writing is crucial for tasks like taking notes, which aids in understanding and remembering information. Writing also supports vocabulary development and reading skills. According to Richards & Schmidt (2013), writing is a productive skill in language learning and a popular mode of communication, especially for remote work. It allows people to express their thoughts creatively, communicate better, and build self-confidence. Learning to write well helps students organize their thoughts, use grammar and punctuation correctly, and convey emotions and ideas effectively.

Teaching writing to EFL students is important for developing their skills and preparing them for any writing type. Understanding inflectional markings, which involve changing word forms to convey grammatical information, is also crucial. These markings help make academic writing more precise. Morphology classes covered how words are formed and inflected, including processes like blending, acronyms, and derivation. At Tadulako University, the English study program included writing for personal, professional, and academic purposes. However, students often face challenges. According to Maharani, Hakiki, and Safitri (2023), common issues include organizing ideas, vocabulary, and grammar.

In addition, Nenotek, Tlonan, and Manubulu (2022) found that university students struggle with content and organization in academic writing, while referencing is also difficult.

Inflectional markings and grammatical rules in academic writing share similarities across languages due to their role in conveying precise, formal meaning (Adi, 2024). Inflection involves changes to a word's form, such as verb tense or noun plurality, which helps clarify time, quantity, or agreement. For instance, English verbs like "write" and "wrote" indicate different tenses, similar to inflections in many other languages. Grammatical rules, such as maintaining consistent sentence structure and tense, ensure clarity in academic texts. Passive voice is commonly used to shift focus from the actor to the action, a practice mirrored in languages like German or Spanish.

Additionally, hedging through modal verbs, such as "may" or "might," allows writers to present claims cautiously, a technique applied in various languages. Academic writing across cultures requires agreement between subjects and verbs, whether in English or other languages with rich inflection systems. Complex sentence structures, often featuring subordinate clauses, are crucial for expressing nuanced arguments. In languages that rely on case systems, inflectional markings indicate grammatical relationships just as word order does in English. Ultimately, inflection and grammar create formal, precise, and objective communication in academic contexts.

There was a phenomenon when most English Students could change the word category rather than differentiate when they should add the suffix -s, -ed, and -en to attach to the verb, and so on. Otherwise, this study investigated and compared the students' comprehension of the inflectional markings and found the challenges that the EFL Students faced. As we know, academic writing is a critical skill for students, and errors in inflectional markings can significantly affect the clarity and quality of writing. Maharani et al., (2023) stated that analyzing the specific aspect can fill a gap in the field of foreign language acquisition and provide fresh insight into how learners internalize complex grammatical rules. This research aimed to identify specific problems and provide insight into learners' difficulties which can inform targeted interventions or teaching strategies. Because of that, this research focused on identifying, classifying, and analyzing the specific errors that learners face challenging the most in language learning, not only assessing students' performance based on set criteria.

According to Basri, Bochari, and Hastini (2020), linguistics delves into how humans communicate, which is fundamental to human interaction. Linguistics research can address practical issues like improving language education, especially for foreign language learners. It also had applications in areas like speech therapy, helping individuals with language disorders. There was a variable in this research, with errors in inflectional markings being the primary variable of interest as the dependent variable, and there were various factors like proficiency level, first language, and language background serving as potential independent variables. However, this research focused on investigating the number of errors in inflectional markings and finding out the students' difficulties.

It was suggested to explore practical teaching strategies, understand the errors that make academic writing challenging, and incorporate self-evaluation techniques to improve learning. This study investigated English students' understanding of inflectional markings using, and Dulay Linguistics Category Taxonomy as the measurements for this research. In Addition, the inflectional markings are part of morphology in linguistics. According to Basri, et al (2020) mentioned inflection modifies a word to express grammatical categories like tense, mood, or number. For example, adding "-ing" to "run" forms "running," and adding "-er" to "big" forms "bigger." Inflection helps adapt words to different grammatical contexts without changing their core meaning.

2. Research Methods

The descriptive quantitative method was a research method that used statistical tables, graphs, and numerical measures to summarize and organize data. It could be used in surveys, polls, and experiments. There were three basic approaches for gathering data in descriptive research: observation, case study, and survey. The design of this research was a descriptive quantitative method because the data is presented in numerical data and descriptive form. It aimed to describe and calculate data related to errors in using

inflectional markings found by students in the writing process. According to Wilson & Creswell in Nuraini, (2018), quantitative research includes measurements and assumptions that the phenomenon under study could be measured. Descriptive research is a research method that aims to describe existing phenomena that occur in the present or the past. Furthermore, descriptive quantitative analysis in this research was to calculate the data, describe it with numbers, and conclude according to the actual situation.

This research was a descriptive quantitative approach used in social sciences and related fields to gain an in-depth understanding of human experiences, behavior, and social phenomena. The instruments or methods used in descriptive quantitative research typically focus on gathering rich, detailed, and nuanced data. This research used the EFL Proposal Background as the document sample. Analyzing existing documents, records, and artifacts can provide additional context and insights. This could include anything from personal journals and letters to organizational reports and social media posts. The data study of this research was in the form of inflectional markings errors, which focused on the use of inflectional morphemes: -s for plural nouns (e.g., cats), -s for third person singular present verbs (e.g., runs), -ed for past tense verbs (e.g., walked), -ing for present participle verbs (e.g., running), -en for past participle verbs (e.g., eaten), -er for comparative adjectives (e.g., faster), -est for superlative adjectives (e.g., fastest), and 's for possessive nouns (e.g., Thomas's papers).

Population was usually about the number of people living in a particular homeland. Population is the number of total subjects to be studied, which can be people, things, or an agency that has the same characteristics. In this research, the population was the EFL Students of the seventh semester who were preparing their proposal before getting revisions from their supervisors. The researcher chose the EFL Students of the seventh semester as a population because they are who have learned the inflectional markings in morphology and all writing classes. The EFL Students would practice writing their proposal, so the researcher could investigate the comprehension of the students about the use of inflectional morphemes in academic papers.

The researcher used purposive sampling as a technique for selecting a sample because the participants were selected based on specific characteristics or criteria relevant to the research. For example, choosing individuals who have particular expertise or experience. It was useful when targeting a specific population segment, but could introduce bias and may not be generalizable. The criteria of this research were the EFL Students of the seventh semester and/or had written the proposal background, which was the research samples. The purposive sampling was relevant for this study, which was descriptive quantitative (Arfi & Fudhla, 2021).

Documents Existing were used as the technique of collecting data for this research. The type of examining records which were artifacts. According to Mertosono & Erniwati (2023), artifacts were written or visual sources of data that contribute to our understanding of what is happening in classrooms and colleges. In this study, the test results of Academic writing or the students' background of their proposal were categorized as artifacts in examining records. To collect data, researchers would achieve the students' writing results from all students who had fulfilled the requirements above. The students' writing results would be analyzed in terms of inflectional marking errors to answer the research question. Using existing data collected for other purposes, this might include data from previous research studies or organizational records.

3. Discussions

Classification of Linguistics Category Taxonomy by Dulay

Based on the results of analyzing the EFL Students' Academic Writing, several errors of inflectional markings were found in the EFL Students' Proposal Papers. The following results will be presented in table form.

- A. The errors in Plural Marking just occurred in the EFL Students' Academic Writing. The total number of errors produced by EFL Students in their proposal background was 13 sentence errors from 26 samples.

No.	Incorrect Sentences	Correct Sentences	Category of Errors
1.	Podcasts are the subscribed audio files in the format of MP3 that are distributed over the internet. They can be played on any digital device, such as laptops, tablets, and smartphone so that users can listen to them whenever and wherever they want (Gonulal, 2022).	Podcasts are subscribed audio files in the format of MP3 that are distributed over the internet. They can be played on any digital device, such as laptops, tablets, and smartphones so that users can listen to them whenever and wherever they want (Gonulal, 2022).	Incorrect Article, Plural Marks
2.	According to Sadullaevna and Safarovna (2020), “Speaking is not only having amount of vocabularies and knowing the grammatical structures but also mastering all elements of speaking above.”	According to Sadullaevna and Safarovna (2020), “Speaking is not only having the amount of vocabulary and knowing the grammatical structures but also mastering all elements of speaking above.”	Plurality
3.	Most of the student added that they had problem memorizing English vocabulary because of difficult pronunciation.	Most of the students added that they had problems memorizing English vocabulary because of difficult pronunciation.	Plurality
4.	Some problem in vocabulary teaching can be seen in practice in the fiels .	Some problems in vocabulary teaching can be seen in practice in the fields .	Plurality and Spelling
5.	Among the various types of educational games in the learning process, crossword puzzle have received special attention for their potential in improving students’ vocabulary acquisition in a fun and interactive way.	Among the various types of educational games in the learning process, crossword puzzles have received special attention for their potential to improve students’ vocabulary acquisition in a fun and interactive way.	Plurality

6.	Crossword puzzle , as a learning tool, offer a range of potential benefits.	Crossword puzzles , as a learning tool, offer a range of potential benefits.	Plurality
7.	However, although there is evidence that crossword puzzle can increase motivation and vocabulary comprehension, there is still little research exploring the specific effectiveness of this method in the context of English education in Indonesia, especially at the high school level.	However, although there is evidence that crossword puzzles can increase motivation and vocabulary comprehension, there is still little research exploring the specific effectiveness of this method in the context of English education in Indonesia, especially at the high school level.	Plurality
8.	Futher research is needed to find out how crossword puzzle can be adapted and effectively applied in a classroom environment.	Further research is needed to find out how crossword puzzles can be adapted and effectively applied in a classroom environment.	Spelling and Plurality
9.	Writing is one of the important English skills that has process of using symbols, typically in the form of letters and words, to communicate thought, ideas, emotions, and information.	Writing is one of the important English skills that has the process of using symbols, typically in the form of letters and words, to communicate thoughts, ideas, emotions, and information.	Article, and Plurality
10.	In writing skill , there are some type of the text taught to the tenth-grade students such as narrative text, descriptive text, recount text, anecdote text, procedure text, etc.	In writing skills , there are some types of text taught to tenth-grade students such as narrative text, descriptive text, recount text, anecdote text, procedure text, etc.	Plurality
11.	Also, teacher asks students to make procedure text with their word after seeing the tutorial video.	Also, the teacher asks students to make procedure text with their words after seeing the tutorial video.	Article and Plurality

12.	The students are supposed to be active in procedure text learning. Therefore, by using tutorial video , the students' problem can be overcome during teaching-learning.	The students are supposed to be active in procedure text learning. Therefore, by using tutorial videos , the students' problems can be overcome during teaching-learning.	Plurality
13.	The findings of this study are also expected to contribute positively to the development of teaching methods and provide meaningful information for teaching English subject , especially speaking skills by teachers at Madrasah Aliyah Nurul Muttahida Pinotu.	The findings of this study are also expected to contribute positively to the development of teaching methods and provide meaningful information for teaching English subjects , especially speaking skills by teachers at Madrasah Aliyah Nurul Muttahida Pinotu.	Spelling, Plurality Punctuation

- B. The errors in verb form as past verbs just occurred in the EFL Students' Academic Writing. The total number of errors produced by EFL Students in their proposal background was 3 sentence errors from 26 samples.

No.	Incorrect Sentences	Correct Sentences	Category of Errors
1.	According to Nety, Asti Wahyuni, and Nurhaeni (2020), their found out that the student felt anxious and afraid of the idea of making mistakes as they are worried that their friends will laugh at them and receive negative evaluations from their peers if they make mistake in speaking English.	According to Nety, Asti Wahyuni, and Nurhaeni (2020), found that the students felt anxious and afraid of the idea of making mistakes as they were worried that their friends would laugh at them and receive negative evaluations from their peers if they made mistakes in speaking English.	Incorrect Pronoun, preposition, and plurality. Incorrect verb form (Past verb)
2.	In addition, Nety, Asti Wahyuni, and Nurhaeni (2020), state the student explained that lack of vocabulary is the biggest obstacle in class, then they decided to be quiet.	In addition, Nety, Asti Wahyuni, and Nurhaeni (2020) stated the students explained that lack of vocabulary is the biggest obstacle in class, then they decided to be quiet.	Incorrect verb form (Past Verb), and plurality
3.	However, the researcher has chosen to focus on procedure text because the	However, the researcher has chosen to focus on procedure text	Verb form (Past Verb)

text always uses in daily life for because the **text is always used** students. in daily life for students.

- C. The errors in verb form as past participle verbs just occurred in the EFL Students' Academic Writing. The total number of errors produced by EFL Students in their proposal background was 1 sentence error from 26 samples.

No.	Incorrect Sentences	Correct Sentences	Category of Errors
1.	In this study, various medias have been reflect to improve students' writing skills such as using pictures, demonstration , and tutorial video .	In this study, various media have been used to improve students' writing skills, such as pictures, demonstrations , and tutorial videos .	Plurality, Verb form (Past Participle)

- D. The errors in verb form as the present verb for third person singular subject just occurred in the EFL Students' Academic Writing. The total number of errors produced by EFL Students in their proposal background was 11 sentence errors from 26 samples.

No.	Incorrect Sentences	Correct Sentences	Category of Errors
1.	This enables them to explore new subjects, gain a deeper understanding of intricate ideas, and better prepares them for the future.	This enables them to explore new subjects, gain a deeper understanding of intricate ideas, and better prepare them for the future.	Subject-Verb Agreement (present verb)
2.	Furthermore, a study by Octaberlina (2023) found that the use of YouTube videos, digital posters, digital comics, and Grammarly tools supports teaching and learning activities and improve the students' language skills as well.	Furthermore, a study by Octaberlina (2023) found that using YouTube videos, digital posters, digital comics, and Grammarly tools supports teaching and learning activities and improves the students' language skills.	Subject-Verb Agreement (present verb)
3.	Students' motivation to learn English is often low, which makes them inactive when the teacher ask question in English.	Students' motivation to learn English is often low, which makes them inactive when the teacher asks questions in English.	Verb form (Present Verb) and plurality

4. By understanding the effectiveness of crossword **puzzle** in vocabulary learning, it is hoped that this research can **be provide** valuable insights for educators and curriculum developers in designing more effective and engaging vocabulary learning strategies.
- By understanding the effectiveness of crossword **puzzles** in vocabulary learning, it is hoped that this research can **provide** valuable insights for educators and curriculum developers in designing more effective and engaging vocabulary learning strategies.
- Plurality and Verb form (Present Verb)
5. In the context of education this ability it's not only talk about grammar, vocabulary, and **pronouncing** word correctly but it also about how **student's** can express their ideas and feelings, interact with others such as their friends, and communicate effectively in various situations.
- In the context of education, this ability not only **talks** about grammar, vocabulary, and **pronouncing words** correctly but also about how **students** can express their ideas and feelings, interact with others such as their friends, and communicate effectively in various situations.
- Subject-verb agreement (Present Verb), Spelling, Plurality
6. So that's why **student's** don't get many opportunities to improve their speaking skills and **feels unconfidence** when they speak in front of class.
- So that's why **students** don't get many opportunities to improve their speaking skills and **feel unconfident** when they speak in front of the class.
- Derivational form, Verb form (Present Verb)
7. The teacher asks students to write procedure text with their own **word**, but they write unstructured way and **using** unrelated words.
- The teacher asks students to write procedure text with their own **words**, but they write unstructured way and **use** unrelated words.
- Plurality and Verb form (Present Verb)

- | | | | |
|-----|--|---|--|
| 8. | It may be happened because the main problem is the lack of understanding which teacher sometimes ask to do the task without explanation the material lack of vocahnlary which students cannot write down with the various and right word ,lack of references, and the students do not have critical and creative thinking. | It may happen because the main problem is the lack of understanding which the teacher sometimes asks to do the task without explanation the material lack of vocabulary which students cannot write down the various and right words , the lack of references, and the students do not have critical and creative thinking. | Subject-verb agreement (Present Verb), Verb form (Present Verb), Spelling, Plurality |
| 9. | The students be able to improve their skills in writing procedure text. | The students can improve their skills in writing procedure text. | Verb Form (Present Verb), Spelling |
| 10. | It could be a expertise that creates normally in most people from earliest stages but can be ceaselessly refined and progressed all through life. | It could be an expertise that is created normally in most people from the earliest stages but can be ceaselessly refined and progressed all through life. | Article and Verb form (Present Verb) |
| 11. | When students engage in negative inside discourse, such as "I'm not great at open talking" or "I continuously mess up when I conversation in class," they may encounter expanded uneasiness and decreased certainty. | When students engage in negative inside discourse, such as "I'm not great at open talking" or "I continuously mess up when I talk in class," they may encounter expanded uneasiness and decreased certainty. | Verb form (Present Verb) |

E. The errors in Possessive Nouns just occurred in the EFL Students' Academic Writing. The total number of errors produced by EFL Students in their proposal background was 2 from 26 samples.

No.	Incorrect Sentences	Correct Sentences	Category of Errors
1.	This problem can be identified from their low participation in speaking class, for example: many student's seem to be passive and do not want to speak.	This problem can be identified from their low participation in speaking class, for example: many students seem to be passive and do not want to speak.	Possessive Noun

2. In traditional teaching methods, like lectures and memorization commonly do not provide enough time for **student's** to actively speak and participate. In traditional teaching methods, like lectures and memorization commonly do not provide enough time for **students** to actively speak and participate. Possessive Noun

- F. The errors in verb form as progressive or continuous verbs just occurred in the EFL Students' Academic Writing. The total number of errors produced by EFL Students in their proposal background was 0 sentence errors from 26 samples.
- G. The errors in Adjectives as the comparative degrees just occurred in the EFL Students' Academic Writing. The total number of errors produced by EFL Students in their proposal background was 0 sentence errors from 26 samples.
- H. The errors in Adjectives as the superlative degrees just occurred in the EFL Students' Academic Writing. The total number of errors produced by EFL Students in their proposal background was 0 from 26 samples.

The Inflectional Markings were an important element of writing theory in improving the EFL Students' Academic Writing. The presence of inflectional markings could help students deliver the main point of their writing clearly and correctly. Additionally, the inflectional markings also affected the sentence or contents of academic writing or any kind of paper. However, EFL Students' who are learning English as a second language in their daily life, cannot lose from the errors or mistakes while they practice to be mastered. The researcher aimed to investigate students' errors in the inflectional markings used in their proposal background as the samples of this research. This research was conducted to answer two questions that have been determined in the research question or problem statement. Based on Dulay Category Taxonomy in Fanani & Fathoni (2021), those errors were put into one of three categories: Plural Marks, Verb Marks, Adjectives Marks, and Possessive Marks.

Table. 1 Distribution of Students' Errors in The Inflectional Markings Categories

Calculation of Errors in Inflectional Markings			
Category of Errors	Total Sentences of Each Category	Total Errors of Each Category	%
Present Verb	70	11	16
Past Verb	71	3	4.2
Past Participle Verb	66	1	1.5
Progressive Verb	47	0	0
Possessive Noun	46	2	4.3
Plural Marks	151	13	8.6

Comparative Degree	25	0	0
Superlative Degree	4	0	0

According to the data presented in the table that was located above, it was discovered that the students produced 13 Plural Marks errors, 11 Present verbs of 3rd person singular errors, 3 Past Verbs, 2 Possessive Nouns, and 1 Past Participle Verb. The biggest number of students' errors is in Plural Marks. It was possible to conclude that the number of errors in plural marking was the most, while the number of errors due to Past Participle verbs was the lowest of the students' errors.

English is not our first language, and many students do not want to learn it because they did not speak or write English when they were kids (Kartini, 2022). Therefore, their English skill did not improve. Second, there are many grammar types and rules. They might become tricky because it has many substances such as tenses, articles, pronouns, and nouns. Several Indonesian English learners still do not have high skills in English because of the complexity of the English grammar, which does not develop students' interest in learning English. Indonesians never think about time signal rules when they speak Indonesian because Indonesians do not have specific rules for tenses. However, in English, people should think about time signals to refer to a particular time. These matters cause Indonesian learners to develop their ability in English, especially in the mastery of tenses.

According to Dulay's Taxonomy Error, four types of errors were identified: linguistics categories, surface strategies, comparative analysis, and communicative strategies. However, this research only analyzed the student error using the linguistics category and focused on morphology, especially in the inflectional markings. Based on the data collected, student errors in Plural Marks are higher than in other error categories. The findings in Table 1 indicated that when using inflectional markings in their background papers, the students predominantly utilized the plural noun category, specifically analyzing the use of "-S" or "-ES" to explain plurality.

The results presented in Table 1 showed that when analyzing inflectional markings in the EFL Students' Academic Writing, one specific category stood out: the plural noun category. The students predominantly employed the addition of '-S' or '-ES' to nouns to indicate plurality. In other words, they used these suffixes to make nouns refer to more than one object or entity. This was the most common type of inflectional marking utilized by the EFL Students. On the other hand, the students' usage of other categories of inflectional markings, such as verb tense or possessive forms, was minimal or uncommon in their written works.

On the other hand, the students rarely employed other categories of inflectional markings. The results of this study are also reflected in previous research, which is similar to Jelimun et al., (2024) research. Jelimun also chose inflectional markings as her study. Additionally, this study analyzes the paper on EFL students. Additionally, there are comparative and superlative degrees that are not found in the works of EFL Students. It happened and influenced their language proficiency, first language, and language background. Furthermore, the students made the error in the wrong position.

Based on the research findings, it happened because the research samples are native Indonesians. As explained above, in Indonesia affixation did not affect the meaning of the words. The EFL Students can add the affixes in the first or the last word. However, that was different from the derivational process, which was changing the word form. Because, the inflectional morphemes did not change the category of words, but only made the content of sentences clear. Additionally, the inflectional morphemes were supposed to show the specific time, objects, or subjects, comparison, possession, and plurality.

The EFL Students assumed that the attachment of inflectional markings in English can be placed anywhere and does not affect the meaning. Inflectional morpheme attachment in English was unpredictable because the attachment of affixes can be in the first or last word. The affixes attachment in English had rules that must be understood. Putting the inflectional morphemes in the correct position could achieve effective communication, language proficiency, and cognitive development. Misunderstanding or not using these elements can significantly impair comprehension, fluency, and grammatical correctness. For example, the word "book" was originally a noun in a single form, but when

it became plural, it would be “books”. The attachment of the suffix -S in the noun, made the content of sentences clear that the sentence means plurality. As the same as comparison, possession, objects and subjects, and time. It could be concluded that the EFL Students should pay attention when attaching to the word and put the affixes correctly.

5. Novelities

This research focus on the detailed examination of inflectional markings in the EFL Students' Academic Writing, which is an underexplored area in linguistic and pedagogical research. While previous studies have often generalized grammatical errors in EFL writing, this research narrows its scope to analyze specific patterns of misused or omission of inflectional markings, such as tenses, aspects, plurality, and subject-verb agreement. This approach provides a deeper understanding of the systemic linguistics challenges faced by EFL Students, particularly in academic settings where precision in grammar significantly impacts the quality of written communication. Furthermore, the study highlights the implications of these errors for teaching practices, offering data-driven recommendations to improve writing instruction and error correction strategies in EFL classrooms.

6. Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion, plural marks were the most misused in Academic Writing of EFL Students. Plural markings were the addition of the suffix -S or -ES that can attach to the noun to explain plurality. English used specific plural markers like -s or -es, which must be added to nouns to show plurality, making it a more inflectional language. English relies heavily on these plural forms for clarity, while Indonesian speakers can often infer plurality from context, making explicit plural markers less important. Historically, English evolved from languages that emphasized grammatical rules and inflections, while Indonesian, influenced by Austronesian languages, developed simpler grammatical structures.

Bahasa Indonesia's analytic nature means word order and context are more important than changing word forms. Cultural factors also play a role, as Indonesian language usage tends to prioritize efficiency and clarity through context rather than strict grammatical rules. In contrast, English used inflections to ensure precision and prevent ambiguity. Overall, the two languages reflected different approaches to communicating the concept of plurality.

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