

EFL Learners' Part-of-Speech Errors in ESP Essay Writing: A Pedagogical Grammar Reflection

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates part-of-speech errors in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) essay writing among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, with a focus on identifying prevalent error types and deriving pedagogical implications for grammar instruction. Grounded in error analysis theory, the research addresses persistent grammatical challenges faced by EFL learners, particularly in academic writing contexts influenced by L1 interference from Bahasa Indonesia. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, analyzing 18 essays from fifth-semester intermediate ESP students in the Arabic Department at STAI Ali bin Abi Thalib Surabaya during the 2022/2023 academic year. Errors were classified using Dulay et al.'s (1982) surface strategy taxonomy (omission, addition, misformation, and misordering) and categorized by parts of speech (e.g., verbs, nouns). Findings reveal 134 total errors, with verbs dominating at 38.06% (n=51), followed by determiners (15.67%, n=21) and nouns (14.18%, n=19). Omission emerged as the most frequent error type (63.43%, n=85), primarily in verb inflections and articles, attributed to L1 transfer and incomplete grammatical rule acquisition. Misformation (19.40%, n=26) and addition (14.93%, n=20) were also common, while misordering was rare (2.24%, n=3). These patterns underscore the need for targeted pedagogical grammar interventions, such as mini-lessons and peer editing integrated into writing processes. The novelty lies in its context-specific application to ESP learners in an Islamic higher education setting, offering practical strategies like drilling exercises to mitigate verb-related errors and enhance writing proficiency. This contributes to applied linguistics by bridging error analysis with reflective grammar teaching in non-Western EFL environments.

Keywords: Error Analysis, Part of Speech; EFL Writing; ESP; Pedagogical Grammar

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INTRODUCTION

The English proficiency, encompassing speaking, listening, reading, and writing, forms the cornerstone of communicative competence, with these skills being interdependent and requiring concurrent development (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Kadiatmaja posits that English should be conceptualized as a foreign language rather than a second language, underscoring its distinct status in non-native contexts (Kadiatmaja, 2022). Furthermore, he argues that attaining proficient English skills necessitates a comprehensive grasp of grammatical structures, wherein the interplay between lexical resources and grammatical elements must align harmoniously with broader linguistic competencies and knowledge bases; this integrated approach, he suggests, fosters a more authentic and effective command of the language (Kadiatmaja, 2024). For EFL learners, particularly in ESP contexts, foundational grammatical knowledge—such as parts of speech (nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections)—is crucial for effective writing and speaking (Ferris, 2011). Kadiatmaja defines fundamental competence in terms of what EFL learners can achieve in reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, speaking, dictation, listening comprehension, writing comprehension, and the exercises associated with them (Kadiatmaja, 2018). However, grammatical errors persist as a major barrier, often stemming from L1 interference, incomplete rule internalization, and limited exposure to target language input (Bram, 1995; Tong & Shi, 2012). In ESP settings, where domain-specific discourse demands precision, these errors can impede academic success, as seen in proficiency tests like the TOEFL, which emphasize structure and written expression (Kadiatmaja, 2021b). This diagnostic orientation has since been extended into metacognitive scaffolding for EFL test preparation, reframing syntactic error analysis as a learning tool rather than merely a corrective one (Kadiatmaja, 2026).

The problem is acute for EFL learners whose L1, such as Bahasa Indonesia, lacks verb inflections for tense, leading to frequent errors in verb forms, articles, prepositions, subject-verb agreement, and sentence structure (Bram, 1995; Ferris, 2011). Comparable inflectional pressures are observable in Arabic-speaking learners, whose past-participle errors reveal how morphological mismatch between L1 and English compounds written inaccuracy (Kadiatmaja, 2024). Within the Indonesian context specifically, deviations in basic sentence patterns have been mapped as a systematic phenomenon rather than isolated slips, confirming that L1 structural transfer operates at the level of core clause architecture (Aditya et al., 2026). At the morphological level, affixation errors in everyday student conversation further demonstrate that Indonesian learners' difficulties are not confined to syntax but extend to word-formation processes (Al Ayyubi et al., 2026), while errors in basic word structure and formation point to a parallel gap in morphological awareness (Ma'ruf et al., 2026). Collectively, these findings justify adopting a part-of-speech lens, as lexical misclassifications (e.g., nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs) represent the surface realization of these deeper morphological and syntactic mismatches.

Literature highlights learner-centered approaches, such as using authentic writing for grammar instruction, to accelerate acquisition (Calkins, 1980; DiStefano & Killion, 1984; Harris, 1962, as cited in Hanganu, 2015). Teachers can integrate mini-lessons on issues like misplaced modifiers and peer editing to make grammar relevant ((Ali et al., 2023). As in IELTS speaking, Kadiatmaja states that for candidates to excel in their assessments, they must exhibit excellent speaking proficiency across four essential domains: fluency and coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy, and pronunciation (Kadiatmaja, 2025). Writing drills are particularly effective for proficiency, reinforcing inversion and linguistic accuracy (Kadiatmaja, 2021a), and drilling has likewise proven effective for teaching the past

participle as a discrete grammatical target (Kadiatmaja, 2022). Yet, challenges like word choice and redundancy persist (Chen, 2002), necessitating error analysis to uncover patterns. This need is especially pressing in academic writing, where punctuation misuse has been documented as a recurrent source of imprecision in student manuscripts (Ibrohim & Kadiatmaja, 2026), and where the authority of abbreviations and acronyms is frequently misapplied in social-media commentary that increasingly feeds into academic discourse (Zaard & Kaditmaja, 2026). Errors in the use of standard academic language varieties further indicate that register control remains fragile among student writers (Qurbani et al., 2026), while shifts in orthographic norms—particularly the use of italics and capitals in digital media—show that even surface conventions are unstable (Assa'dy & Ihsan, 2026). At the level of academic discourse quality, bibliographic practice has been shown to shape the credibility of scholarly writing, linking referencing accuracy to overall discourse competence (Athaillah et al., 2026), and the use of scientific language in student articles within Arabic departments reveals persistent register-related deviations (patra & Kadiatmaja, 2026).

Previous studies, such as on Malaysian learners' syntax errors (Saadiyah & Subramaniam, 2009) on subject-verb agreement interventions, underscore error analysis's role in tailoring pedagogy. Ruziah (2006) and Corpuz (2011) advocate explicit correction and feedback for preposition and writing errors (Ruziah, 2006; Corpuz, 2011). However, these often overlook ESP in non-English dominant regions, particularly Islamic institutions where Arabic-English bilingualism adds complexity. To date, no study has systematically mapped part-of-speech errors in ESP essays written by Indonesian EFL learners within an Arabic–English bilingual Islamic institution, leaving the interaction between L1 transfer and Arabic grammatical metalanguage unexamined. This bilingual complexity is itself a productive site of investigation: Arabic syntactic structures such as na't patterns in Surah Al-Waqi'ah have been classified and analyzed, showing how Arabic modification systems differ structurally from English (Shofiah et al., 2026), and the i'rab of fi'il mudari' has been examined semantically in Surah An-Nazi'at, revealing functional roles that have no direct English analogue (Saleh et al., 2026). Semantic analysis of idafah in Surah Az-Zumar 1–20 and its interpretive implications further illustrates the depth of Arabic grammatical semantics (Farrada'biya et al., 2026), while a linguistic-semantic analysis of the phrase Laa Ilaha Illallah in Kitab At-Tawhid demonstrates how theological phrasing carries grammatical implications for Arabic language education (Muhammad Nafis et al., 2025). Cross-linguistic pragmatic work on istifham taqriri in Juz 'Amma translations adds a pragmatic dimension, showing how rhetorical question force is rendered differently across languages (Pertiwi et al., 2026). Error analysis of isim isyarah in maharah kitabah has identified causal factors and grammatical patterns underlying demonstrative errors (“ERROR ANALYSIS OF ISIM ISYARAH IN MAHARAH KITABAH: INVESTIGATING CAUSAL FACTORS AND GRAMMATICAL PATTERNS,” 2026), and studies of compound versus single sentences in Malin Kundang folklore document how sentence-type control develops in narrative writing (Zahran et al., 2026). Analyses of predicate function variation in single Indonesian sentences within student academic texts further show that predicate realization is a locus of error (Ubaidillah et al., 2026), while morphological analysis of affixation in everyday student conversation confirms the pervasiveness of word-formation errors (Al Ayyubi et al., 2026). Together, these Arabic and Indonesian strands establish that learners in Islamic institutions operate under dual grammatical pressure—Arabic inflectional and nominal-sentence systems on one side, Indonesian analytic structures on the other—which heightens the likelihood of part-of-speech errors in English ESP writing. This dual pressure is itself rooted in local wisdom of a grammatical kind: the pesantren tradition of nahwu–sharaf instruction equips learners with

explicit Arabic grammatical metalanguage—case marking, inflectional categories, and word-class distinctions—yet that very metalanguage can either scaffold or interfere with English part-of-speech accuracy, since Arabic and English classify words along partly incompatible grammatical lines. This grammatical local wisdom therefore constitutes the local epistemic context of the study, in which learners reason about English parts of speech through categories inherited from Arabic grammar. Methodologically, the study is therefore interdisciplinary by design, drawing on applied linguistics, morphosyntax, pragmatics, and academic-literacy research to interpret part-of-speech errors as more than surface slips.

This study fills this gap by analyzing part-of-speech errors in ESP essays from Indonesian EFL learners, hypothesizing verb errors as dominant due to L1 transfer. It differs by focusing on pedagogical reflections for grammar instruction, using surface strategy taxonomy (Dulay et al., 1982) to propose strategies like targeted drills, enhancing external validity through a context-specific sample. Its novelty lies in triangulating part-of-speech error patterns with the under-researched bilingual Arabic–Indonesian ESP context of Islamic institutions, an intersection that prior error-analysis studies—whether Malaysian, Filipino, or Indonesian—have not addressed within a single surface-strategy framework. Methodologically, the novelty does not lie in the taxonomy itself—which is well established—but in its application to a bilingual Arabic–Indonesian ESP corpus, combined with a pedagogical-reflection layer that translates error frequencies into drill priorities. Practically, the findings are expected to inform ESP syllabus designers and writing instructors in Islamic higher-education settings about which part-of-speech targets warrant prioritized drills, while theoretically contributing to the L1-transfer literature on Indonesian EFL writing. The study is expected to tell a new story: that part-of-speech errors in this context are not random but patterned by the collision of an analytic L1 (Indonesian), an inflection-rich religious L2 (Arabic), and an inflection-dependent target language (English), with verb-related errors likely serving as the visible tip of a deeper morphosyntactic transfer. This story reframes error analysis from a corrective enterprise into a diagnostic and pedagogical one, offering a context-sensitive account that complements—rather than replicates—existing Malaysian, Filipino, and Indonesian studies. The research questions are: (1) What types of part-of-speech errors are most prevalent in EFL learners' ESP essay writing? (2) What pedagogical implications do these errors hold for grammar instruction?

METHODS OF RESEARCH

This descriptive qualitative study employs error analysis to examine part-of-speech errors in EFL learners' ESP essay writing, drawing on Corder's (1967) framework for investigating interlanguage deviations. The design aligns with Gay et al. (2009), who describe descriptive research as data collection to depict the current status of phenomena, here grammatical errors in academic writing. Gall et al. (2007) further support its suitability for precise categorization of educational issues like learner errors.

Participants comprised 18 fifth-semester intermediate ESP students from the Arabic Department at STAI Ali bin Abi Thalib Surabaya, Indonesia, during the 2022/2023 academic year. This group was selected for their enthusiasm in early-stage writing and accessibility for error correction, reflecting typical EFL challenges in an Islamic higher education context where Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic influence English production. The setting was an essay writing class focused on ESP topics, ensuring relevance to academic discourse.

Data sources were 18 randomly selected essays (approximately 300-500 words each) on uniform topics, serving as written tasks to elicit natural errors. As qualitative document analysis (Burns, 1999), instruments included: (1) the researcher as human instrument for data gathering and interpretation (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982); (2) essay documents for primary data; and (3) checklists to mark error presence, frequency, and types (Hopkins, 1976). Supporting tables quantified errors by part of speech and surface strategy taxonomy.

Data collection involved: (1) preparing instruments and explaining procedures; (2) administering the writing task with allocated time; and (3) collecting and anonymizing essays. Analysis followed (Dulay et al., 1982) surface strategy taxonomy, classifying errors into omission (missing elements), addition (extraneous items: double marking, regularization, simple addition), misformation (wrong forms: regularization, archi-forms, alternating forms), and misordering (incorrect placement). Steps included: (a) transcribing and noting errors per sentence; (b) identifying and classifying frequent errors; (c) correcting based on standard grammar (Azar, 1992); (d) tabulating frequencies with percentage formula $P = (F/N) \times 100$, where F is error frequency and N total errors; and (e) interpreting patterns. Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation with theory (Corder, 1967); (James, 1998) and iterative review across five stages: problem identification, method design, data collection, analysis, and reporting. Ethical considerations included informed consent and anonymity.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Result

Analysis of the 18 essays yielded 134 part-of-speech errors, distributed across categories as shown in Table 1. Verbs were the most error-prone (51 errors, 38.06%), reflecting challenges in tense and agreement, followed by determiners (21, 15.67%), nouns (19, 14.18%), prepositions (14, 10.45%), pronouns (11, 8.21%), adjectives (10, 7.46%), conjunctions (5, 3.73%), and adverbials (3, 2.24%). This aligns with the hypothesis of verb dominance due to L1 non-inflection.

Table 1. The Number and Percentage of Error

Part of Speech Error	Number	Percentage (%)
Verb	51	38,06%
Noun	19	14,18%
Pronoun	11	8,21%
Adjective	10	7,46%
Determiners	21	15,67%
Adverbials	3	2,24%
Prepositions	14	10,45%
Conjunctions	5	3,73%
Total	134	100%

The Number and Percentage of Part of Speech Error

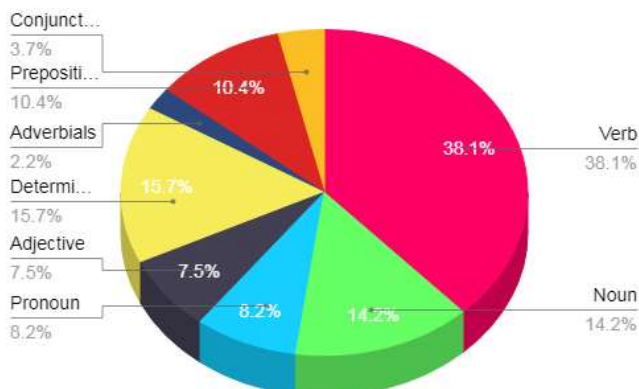


Figure 2. *The Number and Percentage of Part of Speech Error*

Using surface strategy taxonomy (Table 2), omission dominated (85 errors, 63.43%), often in grammatical morphemes like articles and verb inflections. Misformation followed (26, 19.40%), primarily alternating forms (24). Addition totaled 20 (14.93%), with simple addition (14) and double marking (6); no regularizations occurred. Misordering was minimal (3, 2.24%).

Table 2. The Frequency and Percentage of Error in Surface Strategy of Taxonomy

No.	Types of Errors in Surface Strategy Taxonomy		Number of Each Errors	Frequency of Errors	Percentage (%) of Errors
1.	Omission		85	85	63,43%
2.	Addition	Regularizations	0	20	14,93%
		Double marking	6		
		Simple Addition	14		
3.	Misformation	Regularizations	0	26	19,40%
		Archi-form	2		
		Alternating form	24		
4.	Misordering		3	3	2,24%
Total			134	134	100%

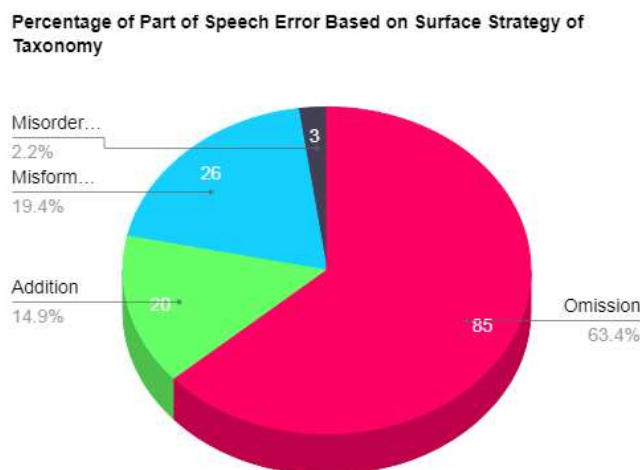


Figure 2. *The Distribution of Learners' Part of Speech Error on Surface Strategy Taxonomy*

Detailed per-learner data (Table 3) showed variability, with Learner 18 committing the most omissions (12). Examples include: omission in verb agreement (Reported speech is speech which tell you what someone said → tells); addition in modals (I'm gonna watching the movie → watch); misinformation in pronouns (And he has two types → it has); and misordering in adverbs (Attributive adjective is adjective generally that comes before verb → generally comes before).

Table 3. *The Number and Percentage of detail Part of Speech's classification Error in Surface Strategy Taxonomy and Each Categories*

Data	Initial	Classification of Error in Parts of Speech							
		O	A			Mf		Mo	
			A-Reg	D	S	Mf-Reg	Arc-F	Alt-F	
L1	HR	5	0	0	2	0	1	1	0
L2	ARH	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
L3	MHA	2	0	2	1	0	0	1	0
L4	AN	3	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
L5	AS	9	0	1	0	0	0	2	0
L6	WD	6	0	0	2	0	0	3	0
L7	LH	6	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
L8	MN	3	0	1	0	0	1	1	0
L9	MSA	7	0	0	1	0	0	3	0
L10	MRA	7	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
L11	MYM	3	0	0	4	0	0	3	0
L12	AF	3	0	0	3	0	0	0	0
L13	RMB	2	0	0	0	0	0	4	0

L14	MZM	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
L15	ACK	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
L16	DK	5	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
L17	MRM	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
L18	MNM	12	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Sub-Total		85	0	6	14	0	2	24	3
			20			26			
Percentage =		63,43%	14,93%			19,40%			2,24%
100%									
TOTAL					134				

No.	Description	
1	L	Learner
2	O	Omission
3	A	Addition
4	A-Reg	Regularizations
5	D	Double marking
6	S	Simple Addition
7	Mf	Misformation
8	M-Reg	Regularizations
9	Arc-F	Archi-form
10	Alt-F	Alternating form
11	Mo	Misordering

B. Discussion

The prevalence of verb errors (38.06%) supports the hypothesis, linked to Bahasa Indonesia's lack of tense inflections, causing omissions like tell instead of tells (subject-verb agreement) or describe instead of is described (passive voice; (Kadiatmaja, 2022)). This echoes (Bram, 1995) and (Ferris, 2011) on EFL challenges with verb forms and agreement, exacerbated in ESP where precise tense signaling is vital for academic coherence. Determiners (15.67%) and prepositions (10.45%) reflect syntactic integration issues, common in L2 acquisition due to L1 transfer (Chen, 2002).

Omission's dominance (63.43%) aligns with Dulay (Dulay et al., 1982), where learners omit function words (e.g., articles, inflections) more than content words, indicating incomplete interlanguage competence (Corder, 1967). For instance, This sentence also describe by every subject omits is, rendering passive voice incomplete. Misformation (19.40%), especially alternating forms (e.g., Tommy is extremely smart study → smart student), suggests overgeneralization of forms, as in archi-forms where one pronoun represents multiple (e.g., he for inanimate it; Dulay et al., 1982). Addition errors, like double marking (didn't went), stem from L1 habits, while rare misordering (2.24%) indicates better word order intuition, possibly from exposure as accomplished by (Erdogan, 2005).

Comparatively, Darus and Subramaniam found similar syntax/morphology issues in Malaysian essays (Saadiyah & Subramaniam, 2009), but this study uniquely highlights ESP in Arabic-influenced EFL, where bilingualism may amplify errors (Kadiatmaja, 2021a). Unlike Wee et al. (2009)'s EAP focus on agreement, findings emphasize verb omissions, supporting Chin (2000)'s integration of error-based mini-lessons. Pedagogically, these imply reflective grammar teaching: drills for verbs (Kadiatmaja,

2022), peer editing for omissions (Ferris, 2011), and awareness-raising for misformations (Corpuz, 2011). Novelty emerges in proposing context-specific strategies for Islamic institutions, enhancing writing via L1 contrasts and feedback loops (Ruziah, 2006); (Myles, 2002). Limitations include the small sample; future quantitative validation could strengthen generalizability. Overall, results affirm error analysis as a tool for interlanguage insights (Richards et al., 1992), informing targeted interventions to boost ESP proficiency.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that EFL learners in ESP contexts commit 134 part-of-speech errors across 18 essays, with verbs most affected (38.06%) due to L1 interference from Bahasa Indonesia's non-inflected system, confirming the hypothesis. Omission errors prevail (63.43%), particularly in grammatical morphemes, followed by misformation (19.40%) and addition (14.93%), while misordering is negligible (2.24%). These patterns highlight gaps in rule application, underscoring the need for pedagogical grammar that integrates error analysis into writing instruction.

Pedagogically, implications include: (1) targeted mini-lessons and drills on verb inflections to address omissions; (2) peer editing for misformations and additions; and (3) L1 contrastive activities to mitigate transfer effects. For teachers, findings provide diagnostic feedback to prioritize high-frequency errors, enhancing productive skills. Learners benefit from self-awareness, fostering independent correction. Future research could extend to longitudinal interventions or comparative L1 analyses, enriching EFL pedagogy in diverse contexts. Ultimately, this reflection on errors promotes a learner-centered approach, bridging theory and practice for improved ESP writing competence.

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