



Investigating Grammatical Errors in the Spoken English of Freshmen at Panjshir University's Faculty of Education

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Abstract

This study examined grammatical errors in the spoken English of first-year EFL students at the Faculty of Education, Panjshir University, Afghanistan. The purpose of the study was to identify the types and causes of grammatical errors in students' oral production. A qualitative descriptive research design was employed. Thirty undergraduate students enrolled in the Speaking I course (2024 cohort) were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through structured interviews and audio-recorded with participants' consent. The recordings were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's (1982) Surface Strategy Taxonomy, which categorizes errors into omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. To enhance credibility, follow-up interviews were conducted to explore the underlying causes of the identified errors. The findings revealed 443 grammatical errors. Omission errors were the most frequent (235 cases, 53%), followed by addition errors (78 cases, 17%), misformation errors (67 cases, 15.12%), and misordering errors (63 cases, 14.22%). The results suggest that insufficient grammatical competence, limited exposure to authentic English, interlingual interference from learners' first language, intralingual factors, and overgeneralization strategies contributed to students' errors. The study highlights the need for more focused grammar instruction within the communicative speaking course.

Keywords: causes of error, freshman Grammatical Error, speaking.

Introduction

English has emerged as a global lingua franca, extensively utilized in education, media, and international communication (Kuswoyo & Qodriani, 2021). In the field of English language learning, skills are commonly categorized into two major groups: receptive skills – namely listening and reading – and productive skills, which include speaking and

writing (Chania & Amri, 2019). Among these, speaking occupies a central position due to its fundamental role in facilitating communication, fostering social interaction, and supporting cognitive development. Through speaking, learners are able to articulate ideas, exchange information, and establish interpersonal relationships (Adib, 2010). Nevertheless, speaking is widely regarded as one of the most demanding language skills to master, as it simultaneously controls grammatical accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary range, and fluency (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). The role of grammar in language learning has long been significant (Renandya, 2002). Grammar determines how to form meaningful and correct sentences (Penny, 1996). It not only governs form but also affects meaning. Understanding grammatical structures such as tenses, plurals, and comparisons is essential for accurate communication. Nevertheless, many learners struggle with grammatical errors, often prioritizing ideas over accuracy (Mahdi, 2018).

Error analysis is a systematic study of learners' deviations from norms (Sari, 2018). According to Ellis (1997), errors reflect gaps in knowledge, while *mistakes* represent temporary lapses in performance. Corder (1981) emphasized that analyzing learners' errors helps teachers identify learning difficulties and evaluate progress.

Brown (1987) classified error sources into three categories: Interlingual transfer -influence of the mother tongue, Intralingual transfer - overgeneralization of language rules, and Context of learning errors caused by incorrect instruction or misunderstanding.

When errors become habitual, they may lead to fossilization - a persistent failure to achieve target-like accuracy. Empirical studies have identified various types of grammatical errors in students' speaking. For example, Susidamaiyanti (2021) examined grammatical errors among English department students at IAIN Takengon, identifying omission, overgeneralization, misformation, misordering, and addition as the main types, with omission being the most frequent.

Similarly, Sari (2018) analyzed grammatical errors among Indonesian university students and found that errors in number agreement were most common, while errors in comparative forms were least frequent. In addition to grammatical competence, several affective factors such as anxiety, low motivation, and lack of self-confidence negatively affect learners' speaking performance (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). The study revealed that students with high motivation and low anxiety perform better in oral communication. Therefore, teachers should create a supportive and encouraging classroom environment, build learners' self-confidence, and use engaging teaching strategies. Providing constructive feedback, sufficient speaking opportunities, and a non-threatening atmosphere helps students overcome their fear of making mistakes and improves their oral proficiency.

In this study, the researcher seeks to discover the grammatical problems and the causes behind these errors in the English language speaking class faced by freshman students at

Panjshir University Education Faculty, English Department, and tries to find appropriate solutions to these problems and challenges.

Material and Method

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive design supported by qualitative interviews. This investigation tracks the research objectives, identifies grammatical errors, focuses on the most common faults, and explains their causes.

Instrument of the study

The research used observation, a smart smartphone audio recorder, and interview guidelines. The study used data from freshmen during the final exam in the English department

of Panjshir Higher Education Institute. Twenty-five students participated in this study. However,

25 students were initially recorded; only 15 complete recordings were usable for analysis. They did not deliver a message of more than two or three sentences. The students were asked to talk about “the first day of the university”, which was recorded from the beginning by a smart smartphone audio recorder, and it finished after they had finished speaking. Students preferred to share their experiences.

All recorded voices for further analysis, identifying each sentence with grammatical errors. After analyzing the data, the students support the data to answer the research question of this study. The types of error were analyzed using (Dulay & Krashen, 1982) theory; the surface

Strategy taxonomy consists of four types: omission, addition, Misformation, and Misordering.

In this section, the questions will find the answers. The types of grammatical errors made by freshman students and the causes of errors. The types using Dulay’s surface strategy taxonomy consist of four: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering errors.

Types of Grammatical Errors Made by Freshman Students

In this study, 25 students were initially recorded; only 15 complete recordings were usable for analysis. Each student spoke for approximately three to five minutes, producing between 320 and 650 words. According to Dulay’s theory, grammatical errors fall into four types: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. The analysis revealed that omission errors were the most frequent, totaling 235 instances, followed by 78 addition errors, 67 misformation errors, and 63 misordering errors. The findings also indicated that the types and frequencies of errors varied among individual students. Errors made by freshman Students

Based on the explanation above, it showed the kinds of errors in each type of grammatical error. The following table shows the classification of grammatical errors made by students.

Table 4. Frequency of Errors

No	Omission	Addition	Misformation	Mis-ordering	Total
1	18	5	4	7	34
2	18	6	3	4	31
3	17	4	4	6	31
4	16	3	5	3	27
5	14	3	4	2	23
6	13	5	4	4	26
7	13	6	4	3	26
8	14	4	6	2	26
9	15	7	6	4	32
10	15	7	9	4	35
11	13	2	2	3	20
12	16	5	3	5	29
13	18	7	3	5	33
14	18	6	4	6	34
15	17	6	4	7	34
	235 = 53%	78=17%	67=15,12%	63=14.22%	443=100%

The data presented in the table indicate four categories of grammatical errors: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. Among these, omission errors were the most frequent, with 235 instances, followed by 78 addition errors, 67 misformation errors, and 63 misordering errors. A detailed explanation of each error type is below.

a. Omission

Omission errors occur when a required linguistic element is absent from a sentence or utterance. In other words, an omission represents the absence of a grammatical or structural form that should be present in the sentence. Learners typically commit omission errors by leaving out essential components such as articles, verbs, auxiliary verbs, prepositions, punctuation marks, possessive forms, objects, or subjects. In the present study, omission errors were the most frequent type, accounting for 235 instances (53% of the total errors); students' significant error was in speaking.

Table 4. types of omission

No	Linguistic Error	Grammatical Error	Correct sentences
1	Missing subject	I saw he was happy	I saw him, and he was happy
2	Missing verb	The lecture awful	The lecture was awful
3	Missing adverb	I went yesterday	I went there yesterday
4	Missing be	I completely happy	I was completely happy
5	Missing article	Ideas are always with us	The idea is always with us
6	Missing "s"	It makes us proud.	It makes us proud
7	Missing "s" plural	We saw many students	We saw many students
8	Missing preposition	I have many books home	I have many books at home

Table 4.2 revealed that there are 8 subtypes of omission in freshman speech.

Addition

An item that does not necessarily appear in a sentence indicates this error. This error consists of 78 or 17%. Here are examples

Table 4. types of addition

No	Linguistic error	Grammatical Error	Correction sentences
1	Addition of be	We are be able to write for others.	We can write for others.
2	Addition of an adverb	I wrote a letter during the night yesterday	I wrote a letter last night
3	Double verb	He does not study at Panjshir	He does not study at Panjshir

According to Table 4.3, three categories of addition errors were identified in the students' speech: the addition of *be* verbs, the addition of main verbs, and the use of double verbs

c. Misformation

This category, known as misformation errors, refers to the incorrect use of linguistic forms, particularly when regular markers are used in place of irregular ones. In other words, learners apply an incorrect form where a correct irregular form is required. The analysis revealed 67 instances of misformation errors, accounting for 15.12% of the total errors. Examples below.

Table 4. types of misformation errors

No	Linguistic Description	Grammatical Error	Correction sentences
1	Wrong structure of V2	I start school in Panjshir	I started school in Panjshir
2	Wrong in choosing article	I was born at the village	I was born in the village
3	Subject verb agreement	My father work in the farm.	My father works on the farm
4	Word choice must be a noun	As you know that language is a tool to speak.	As you know that language is a tool of speaking
5	Word choice	I will chose studying at library	I prefer studying at the library
6	After the Model must follow V1	We can learning language	We can learn a language.
7	Wrong in passive	The type of article that often makes students in correct.	The types of articles that are often made incorrectly by students

Table 4.4 shows that the freshman students produced seven subtypes of misformation errors. These include errors in verb form, subject-verb agreement, word choice, and the use of active and passive voice.

d. Misordering

This category of error is characterized by the incorrect placement of morphemes or groups of morphemes within a sentence or utterance. Misordering errors occur when words or grammatical elements are arranged in sequence, resulting in ungrammatical or unclear expressions. In this study, misordering errors accounted for 63 instances, representing 14.22% of the total: Examples of such errors are below.

Table 5. types of misordering

No	The grammatical errors	Corrected sentences
1	The first reason is that I study at library I will be easy to get focused	The first reason I prefer to study at the library is that I can focus learn anything very well.
2	I can easily understand the material. And the result when getting examination I can pass it	I can understand the lecture easily and absolutely. I will get a good score.
	He is proud because chief of his father	He is proud that his father is the chief.

Table 4. showed that the latest problem of the freshman class was in word ordering.

The Cause of the Errors

The interviews were conducted to identify the causes of grammatical errors made by each participant. During the interviews, students reflect on the reasons behind those errors.

The results revealed that most learners lacked awareness of the grammatical rules of the target language, particularly regarding verb forms. Errors involving verbs occurred far more frequently than other categories, indicating that limited knowledge of English verb structures was a dominant cause. Many students were unfamiliar with the appropriate use of verb forms—specifically Verb 1 and Verb 2—when constructing sentences, especially in the past tense. This was evident from the frequent omission of past tense markers such as *-ed* or the incorrect use of irregular verb forms, as well as the neglect of temporal signals like *yesterday*, *just now*, and *an hour ago*. According to Dulay (1982), the omission of past tense markers represents a type of intralingual error.

Misordering errors among the freshmen's speech samples. Some sentences from their first language reflect interference from L1 grammatical structures. As noted by Simbolon (2015), mistakes such as incorrect word choice, literal translation, and misordering indicate that learners do not yet know the grammatical rules required to construct accurate English sentences. The direct transfer of Persian syntactic patterns into English was particularly evident, suggesting that interlingual factors cause these errors.

Learners acknowledged that they did not fully understand English grammar rules in class. They reported difficulty recalling appropriate structures and vocabulary when speaking in real-life contexts. This hesitation stemmed from limited opportunities to practice English outside the classroom, where natural speaking contexts are scarce. Moreover, the frequent use of L1-based communication strategies—such as literal translation and code switching—was another major cause of errors. Consequently, omission, misformation, misordering, and addition errors frequently appeared in the students' spoken language.

Discussion

The findings of the present paper are consistent with previous research, particularly Sari (2018) and Susidamaiyanti (2021). Based on Heidi Dulay's (1982) Surface Strategy Taxonomy, the current study identified four types of grammatical errors: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. A total of 443 errors were found in the freshmen's speech, with omission errors being the most dominant (235 errors, 53%). This indicates that more than half of the total grammatical problems resulted from the absence of required linguistic elements.

Similarly, Susidamaiyanti (2021), in her study of English department students, also reported omission as the most frequent error type. Her findings suggest that learners commonly omit essential grammatical components such as auxiliary verbs, articles, and plural markers. This parallel result strengthens the argument that omission errors are a persistent issue among EFL learners, particularly in spoken production.

However, the findings slightly differ from Sari (2018), who found that errors in number agreement were the most frequent. While omission was also present in her study, the primary difficulty centered on subject-verb agreement and plural forms. In contrast, the present study reveals that omission errors encompass a wider range of missing grammatical elements, especially tense markers and auxiliary verbs.

Overall, the similarity between the present findings and those of Susidamaiyanti (2021) confirms that omission errors tend to dominate EFL learners' spoken performance. The slight variation with Sari's (2018) results is attributed to differences in research context, learner proficiency levels, and data type (spoken vs. written production). These comparisons demonstrate that grammatical inaccuracies among EFL learners remain strongly connected to incomplete mastery of fundamental grammatical structures.

Conclusion

Based on the discussions presented in the preceding sections, this study tries to analyze grammatical errors in students' spoken English during speaking sessions. The outcomes of Dulay's (1982) Surface Strategy Taxonomy categorize errors into four types: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. The study identified and classified the sort of error made by the students, determined their frequency and percentage distribution, and explored the underlying causes of the most frequent error types. The analysis of the speech data revealed 443 grammatical errors. Among these, omission errors were the most frequent, accounting for approximately 53% of all errors. Addition errors comprised about 17%, misformation errors represented 15.12%, and misordering errors accounted for 14.22%. These findings indicate that omission errors were the dominant type, reflecting students' limited mastery of grammatical structures in spoken English.

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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