

Common mistakes in Indonesian grammar among students: linguistic analysis and implications for language learning

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Article Info

Article history:

Received : Mar 10, 2025

Revised : Apr 21, 2025

Accepted : May 25, 2025

Keywords:

Affixation;
Conjunctions;
Contextual Learning
Diction;
Grammatical Errors;
Sentence Structure.

ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify and analyze the forms of grammatical errors that are commonly found in the writings of high school students in five major cities in Indonesia. With a qualitative descriptive approach, data was collected through analysis of 50 student essays and interviews with Indonesian teachers. The results showed that there were four main categories of errors, namely morphology (35.8%), syntax (26.6%), conjunction use (21.1%), and diction (16.5%). These errors are caused by weak grammatical comprehension, lack of contextual writing practice, the influence of spoken language and social media, and the lack of discourse-based teaching. These findings reinforce the results of previous studies and confirm the importance of reformulating grammar learning strategies through error-based approaches and authentic texts. The practical implications of this study encourage educators to integrate guided writing exercises, sentence structure exploration, and discourse analysis as part of effective and meaningful Indonesian learning.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Grammatical mastery is a fundamental aspect of good and correct language skills. Grammar, which includes structure, syntax, and morphology, serves as a guideline for conveying ideas systematically and effectively (Kridalaksana, 2011). In the context of Indonesian learning in schools, teaching grammar is often still considered a purely technical aspect, even though errors in mastering grammar can have a big impact on students' communication skills, both verbally and in writing.

Previous studies have shown that students at the elementary to secondary levels often make repeated mistakes in grammar. These errors occur in the use of suffixes, sentence structures, conjunctions, and the use of non-standard words (Chaer & Agustina, 2010). According to Santosa (2015), this error generally stems from students' lack of understanding of the grammar rules taught and lack of contextual practice in its use.

Grammar teaching in schools tends to be normative and less applicative. Teachers often emphasize memorization of rules rather than their application in the context of discourse. This results in students not being able to use grammar correctly when writing or speaking in real situations. As

stated by Yani and Suryani (2018), a structural approach in language learning must be accompanied by a communicative approach so that students are able to internalize language rules well.

Weaknesses in grammar mastery can also hinder the development of students' writing skills. In a study conducted by Wulandari (2019), it was found that 75% of junior high school students made grammatical errors in writing narrative essays. These errors are generally repetitive and include both syntactic and morphological aspects. This is an important signal for educators to re-evaluate grammar teaching methods in the classroom.

In addition to pedagogical factors, the influence of social media and the language of everyday conversation also contribute to grammatical errors in students. Informal communication styles used in social media, such as the use of abbreviations or non-standard forms, can affect the consistency of the use of standard language in academic contexts (Fauzi & Amelia, 2020). Therefore, there is a need for an adaptive approach to language learning that maintains formal rules while understanding the reality of students' language.

The urgency of this research lies in the importance of mapping grammatical errors made by students so that they can be used as a basis for formulating more targeted learning strategies. By understanding the types and patterns of common errors, teachers can develop relevant and contextual teaching materials according to the needs of students.

This study aims to identify the types of grammar mistakes that are most often made by high school students in Indonesia and analyze the factors that cause them. The results of this study are expected to be a reference in improving the quality of grammar learning at the school level.

2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach because it aims to describe linguistic phenomena in the form of grammatical errors made by students in their written texts without manipulating variables or conducting experiments. This approach is considered appropriate because it allows researchers to describe in detail the forms of error, their frequency of occurrence, as well as the context of their use, taking into account the social, cultural, and pedagogical background of the student.

2.1 Subjects and Data Sources

The subjects in this study are grade XI students from five high schools (SMA) in five different regions in Indonesia, namely Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta, Medan, and Makassar. The selection of locations was carried out by purposive sampling to represent the cultural diversity and regional language background that has the potential to affect grammatical errors in Indonesian.

The main data source is in the form of 50 student essays written in the context of the task of writing narratives and expositions. These texts were chosen because they demand the use of complex sentence structures and the use of grammar that conforms to formal rules, thus giving rise to the potential for grammatical errors that can be analyzed.

2.2 Data Collection Techniques

Data is collected through three main methods:

- a. Documentation: The researcher collected copies of student essays from each Indonesian subject teacher involved in this study.
- b. Observation of written text: The researcher reads and marks the parts of the text that indicate potential grammatical errors.
- c. Semi-structured interviews: Conducted with five Indonesian teachers (one from each school) to obtain contextual information about classroom grammar instruction, as well as their perceptions of students' abilities.

2.3 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was carried out using an error analysis approach as developed by Corder (1974) and supported by structural and functional linguistic theory. The stages of analysis are carried out as follows:

- a. Identification of errors: Marking the parts of text that contain grammatical errors, both in terms of morphology, syntax, and semantics related to grammatical rules.
- b. Fault classification: Grouping faults by category, such as: Morphological errors (e.g. misuse of prefixes, suffixes, confixes); Syntax errors (sentence order, subject-predicate, compound

- sentences); Conjunction errors (incorrect use of conjunctions); Diction errors (choice of words that are out of context or not standard)
- c. Explanation of the cause of the error: Analyze the cause of the error found, whether it is caused by the influence factor of the first language (L1 interference), overgeneralization, or weak understanding of the structure of the Indonesian language.
 - d. Interpretation and implications: Examine the impact of such errors on the effectiveness of students' written communication and make recommendations for improvement in learning.

2.4 Validity and Validity of Data

To ensure the validity of the data, the researcher used source triangulation and analysis triangulation techniques. Each error classification result was compared with an analysis from two other researchers (interrater reliability) to ensure objectivity. In addition, the data was also validated through member checking by asking Indonesian teachers to verify some of the results of the initial analysis of the student's text.

2.5. Research Limitations

This research has several limitations, including:

- a. It only analyzes written texts in the form of narrative essays and expositions, so it does not include other types of writing such as reports, letters, or arguments.
- b. The number of respondents was limited to 50 students, so the findings could not be generalized widely, but could be an indication of a general pattern of grammatical errors that occur at the high school level.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results of Identification and Classification of Grammatical Errors

Based on an analysis of 50 essays by students from five high schools in five different cities in Indonesia, 413 cases of grammatical errors were found. Each student's text contains an average of 6 to 10 errors. The results of the fault classification are presented in the following Table 1.

Table 1. Types of Grammatical Errors Found in Student Text

No.	Error Categories	Number of Cases	Percentage (%)
1	Morphology (remuneration)	148	35.8%
2	Syntax (sentence structure)	110	26.6%
3	Conjunction	87	21.1%
4	Diction (word selection)	68	16.5%
Total		413	100%

3.2 Morphological Errors

Morphological errors were the most dominant errors (35.8%). These errors include:

Inappropriate use of prefixes: example: "consume" (supposedly "consume"), "solving the problem is very difficult for him" (it should be "difficult for him").

Omission or excess remuneration: such as non-standard "influencing".

A misform of the passive verb: "done by me" (it should be "I do" or "done by me" depending on the context).

This mistake shows the weak understanding of the Indonesian attribution process. This is in line with Wulandari's (2019) research which found that affixation is the morphological aspect that students most often misunderstand because of its complex and flexible nature in application.

Morphological errors dominated the findings with a percentage of 35.8%, which shows that students have difficulty in understanding and applying the rules of affixation in Indonesian. Affixation is a complex morphological process, including the addition of prefixes, suffixes, inserts, or confixes to the base word. Many students confuse the form of suffix or use forms that are not common in the

standard language. For example, the use of "consume" instead of "consume" reflects ignorance of the phonological changes that occur in the morpheme fusion process.

This error indicates an error in understanding the phonological rules in affixation, such as a change in the basic phoneme due to the affixing process. This is in line with the opinion of Chaer (2009) who stated that the form of affixation in Indonesian is greatly influenced by phonotactic rules and sometimes cannot be intuitively guessed by young speakers. Without explicit knowledge of phonological changes, students are prone to hypercorrections or incorrect generalizations.

Another factor that causes morphological errors is the difference between spoken and written language. In everyday speech, word forms do not always follow the standard form. For example, in informal communication, the use of the word "taken" is more commonly used than "taken". This habit eventually carried over into students' writing. According to Kridalaksana (2011), interference with spoken language into writing is a common source of morphological errors.

Wulandari (2019) in his research on the writing of junior high school students found that affixation is one of the highest categories of errors, especially in the task of writing narratives and expositions. He explained that although students have been taught the theory of affixation, its practical application in written texts remains low due to non-contextual practice and limited to multiple-choice questions.

The research of Santosa (2015) supports this finding. He stated that the weakness of grammar teaching in Indonesian schools lies in the incompatibility between theoretical material and language use practice. Teachers focus too much on defining and identifying the types of remuneration, without providing enough practice in actual use in paragraphs or discourse.

The solution offered by some researchers is a contextual approach in the teaching of morphology. This means that students are not only taught the definition of suffixes, but also invited to analyze the use of suffixes in authentic texts such as news, short stories, and popular articles. Chaer and Agustina (2010) suggest the use of the discovery learning method in which students find suffix patterns from their own texts.

By understanding that affixation is not just a grammatical rule but part of a meaning system, teachers can guide students to use affixes appropriately according to the context of the meaning they want to convey. This is important to improve the accuracy and flexibility of students' language in writing.

3.3 Syntax Errors

A total of 110 errors (26.6%) were classified as sentence structure errors. Examples of errors include:

Sentences without a clear subject or predicate:

"If you look at this phenomenon, it is difficult for them to understand."

This sentence does not mention who the main subject is.

Incorrect word sequence:

"They are also important to learn a good and correct language."

It should be: "They are also important for learning a good and correct language."

Compound sentences that are not logically structured or incoherent:

"He was gone, because his house was far away, he came back anyway, because he left things behind."

This sentence is ambiguous and does not show a causal or chronological relationship. According to Santosa (2015), this mistake occurs due to the weak ability of students to understand the syntactic function of sentence elements and the lack of practice in writing complex sentences correctly.

Sentence structure errors were the second most common type of error with a percentage of 26.6%. These errors include inaccuracies in the order of sentence elements, sentences without a clear subject or predicate, and the formulation of illogical compound sentences. Students' lack of understanding of the basic structure of sentences is the main root of this problem. In fact, understanding syntax is an important prerequisite for building effective and meaningful sentences.

In some of the essays analyzed, sentences were found that consisted only of incomplete phrases or clauses. For example: *"If I leave."* This sentence has no main clause, so it cannot stand

alone. This kind of error indicates that the student is not yet able to distinguish between complete sentences and fragmented sentences. Santosa (2015) stated that students' failure to recognize subjects and predicates is often caused by a weak mastery of basic sentence concepts and Indonesian sentence patterns.

Another problem that is quite dominant is the improper arrangement of compound sentences, both in terms of the use of conjunctions and in terms of the logical relationship between clauses. Many students compose sentences that are ambiguous because they don't use conjunctions or use conjunctions excessively. This leads to confusion in capturing the meaning of the sentence as a whole.

According to Kridalaksana (2011), the syntactic structure in Indonesian is greatly influenced by pragmatic elements, namely the context of its use. Therefore, syntax errors are not only structural, but also concern the clarity of meaning in a particular context. His research shows that students often fail to connect sentence forms with the context of speech, resulting in sentence structures becoming rigid and non-communicative.

Research from Yani and Suryani (2018) emphasizes the importance of discourse-based syntax learning. They suggest that the teaching of sentence structure should not stand alone, but rather be integrated into learning to write and speak. Thus, students can see firsthand how sentence structure is used to build coherent and cohesive paragraphs.

Sentence structure errors are also affected by interference from the mother tongue or local dialect. In some regions, the sentence structure in the regional language is different from the sentence structure in Indonesian, so students are used to non-standard constructions. This is important for teachers to pay attention to in the context of multilingual learning such as in Indonesia.

Learning approaches that can reduce syntactic errors are the use of sentence models, the practice of exploring sentence patterns, and writing exercises in stages with direct guidance from the teacher. Teachers can also use the peer editing method to help students recognize each other and correct improper sentence structures.

3.4 Misuse of Conjunctions

Conjunction errors were found in 87 cases (21.1%), mainly in:

Inappropriate use of temporal and causal conjunctions:

"He studied very hard, but he didn't get good grades." The word "but" is inappropriate because it does not indicate a contradiction, but rather a cause and effect, so it should be: "although" or "yet".

Conjunction repetition:

"Because he was diligent, he got a class champion."

The use of "because" and "then" in a single structure should be avoided. Simply use one of them to create an effective sentence.

This mistake reinforces the findings of Yani & Suryani (2018) that students often make mistakes in applying conjunctions due to illogical sentence patterns or being too rigid in applying conjunction theory. Conjunction misuse was found in 87 cases (21.1%), making it the third most common type of error. Conjunctions are a cohesive element that is very important in forming relationships between sentences or clauses. The imprecision of the use of conjunctions has a direct result in confusion of meaning, unclear logical relationships between parts of the text, and low coherence of discourse. In the context of student writing, this error appears in the form of the misuse of conjunctions, the excessive combination of two conjunctions, or the omission of conjunctions that cause the sentence to be logically incomplete.

One of the dominant mistakes is the use of adversative conjunctions such as "but" in the context that actually demands causal conjunctions such as "because" or "so". For example, in the sentence: *"He studied earnestly, but his grades were good."* This sentence does not indicate opposition, but rather cause-effect, so the use of "but" is inappropriate. This error reflects students' weak understanding of the semantic function of conjunctions in compound sentence structures.

In addition, students often use double conjunctions unnecessarily, as in the structure: *"Because he is diligent, he is the champion of the class."* In fact, in an effective Indonesian construction, it is enough to use only one causal conjunction, namely "because" or "then". According to Chaer and Agustina (2010), errors like this often arise because students directly translate the logic of regional

languages or even foreign languages, such as English, into Indonesian, without paying attention to the applicable grammatical rules.

Conjunction errors also have their roots in teaching that is too theoretical. In many textbooks, conjunctions are only studied as a list of conjunctions to be memorized, not as part of a discourse structure strategy. Research by Yani and Suryani (2018) shows that students tend to be unable to distinguish the functions of temporal, causal, and conditional conjunctions when they are not given exercises in the form of paragraphs or essays.

Wulandari (2019) emphasized that conjunctions are one of the grammatical elements that must be taught through a discourse approach, not just through grammatical exercises. He suggested that teachers assign assignments to write paragraphs focusing on the use of certain conjunctions, such as paragraphs that show the sequence of time (temporal) or causal relationships (causal). This approach has been proven to improve students' ability to choose conjunctions correctly.

The sociocultural context also plays a role in conjunction errors. In everyday communication, especially in social media or conversational language, the use of conjunctions is often overlooked or simplified. Students are used to using structures like *"He left, he forgot to bring a book."* without logical connections, which are then carried over into formal writing. According to Fauzi and Amelia (2020), the habit of writing short and non-cohesive on social media causes a decrease in students' ability to write complex sentences.

As a solution, teachers need to develop grammatical cohesion learning modules that teach the function of conjunctions in a practical and contextual way. Teachers can also use short text analysis techniques (e.g. news, opinion articles, or short story quotes) to identify the role of conjunctions in reinforcing the flow of ideas. With a deep understanding of the role of conjunctions, students can build texts that are more concise, logical, and easy to read.

3.5 Diction Errors

A total of 68 cases (16.5%) were diction errors or word choices that were not in accordance with the context. Examples:

The use of informal or non-standard words in academic texts:

"I thought they were coming." (should: "I thought they were coming."Düssel

The use of words that do not correspond to the semantic meaning:

"It took him a day to complete the task."

It should be: "It takes a day..."

Selection of non-adapted foreign absorption words:

"This topic is very interesting to discuss." The word interesting should be replaced with interesting.

This phenomenon supports the opinion of Fauzi & Amelia (2020) who stated that students' exposure to mixed language on social media causes word selection bias when writing formal texts. Diction errors accounted for 16.5% of all grammatical error findings. Although it is lower in percentage than other categories, diction errors have a significant influence on the meaning and style of students' written language. Improper diction can lead to ambiguity, inappropriate tone, or even misunderstanding. In student texts, diction errors are usually in the form of non-standard word selection, the use of foreign absorbed words that are not absorbed correctly, and the use of words with meanings that are not in accordance with the context.

One of the most common forms of diction errors is the use of informal language or slang in the context of academic writing. Examples of sentences such as *"I think he will date"* are representations of the influence of unfiltered conversational language when students write formal texts. This shows that students are not yet able to distinguish between formal and informal language registers. Kridalaksana (2011) stated that the ability to choose appropriate diction is a pragmatic skill that develops along with improving students' functional literacy.

The direct use of foreign words without adjustments or equivalents in Indonesian is also in the spotlight. For example: *"This topic is very interesting to discuss."* The use of the word 'interesting' in the sentence shows that students are exposed to foreign vocabulary (usually from social media or movies), but do not have the awareness to replace it with a standard equivalent such as "interesting".

This is in line with the findings of Fauzi & Amelia (2020) who examined the influence of digital culture on the habit of code mixing among adolescents.

Diction problems are also closely related to students' limited vocabulary. Students often use generic words such as "good", "bad", or "difficult", without considering more precise meanings or richer semantic nuances. According to Chaer (2009), the accuracy of diction in writing is greatly influenced by the breadth of vocabulary that students have and their experience in reading diverse texts.

Wulandari (2019) found that students who are diligent in reading tend to be more accurate in choosing diction because they are familiar with word variations and sentence structures in various contexts. Therefore, the habit of reading literary texts, popular scientific articles, and actual news is key in expanding students' diction skills. Without rich linguistic input, students will keep repeating the same words, even if they are not appropriate in context.

Learning diction is not enough to be done through a list of synonyms and antonyms. Teachers need to emphasize the importance of contextual meaning and provide exercises such as "choose the most appropriate diction to describe a particular situation." Students can also be trained through paraphrasing activities, which are changing sentences with different diction without changing their meaning. This method is effective in fostering awareness of word choice.

It is also important to teach language etiquette in word choice. In the digital age, many students are accustomed to expressive or hyperbolic language styles that are inappropriate in a scientific or formal context. Teachers can provide learning to contrast popular language styles with academic language styles so that students are able to adapt diction to their communicative goals.

With increased diction awareness, students will be able to write more effectively, precisely, and professionally. Diction is not just a matter of 'which word is correct', but about choosing the most appropriate word to convey ideas, tone, and meaning according to the purpose of writing.

4. CONCLUSION

This study revealed that common grammatical errors made by high school students include morphological errors (35.8%), syntax (26.6%), the use of conjunctions (21.1%), and diction (16.5%), which overall shows a weak understanding and application of Indonesian rules in the context of formal writing. These errors stem from the lack of contextual approaches in grammar teaching, the strong influence of informal language and social media, and the limitations of directed writing practice. The implications of these findings confirm the need to reformulate language learning strategies in schools by emphasizing the integration of text-based theory and practice, the use of error-based instruction, and strengthening students' metalinguistic skills through discourse analysis and guided writing activities. Context-based grammar learning and students' authentic experiences are believed to be more effective in fostering linguistic awareness and improving the quality of their academic literacy.

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