

# MORPHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' WRITING

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## Abstract

Morphology is one of the important studies in linguistics that focuses on the words and the formation of the words from the smallest pieces. This study explored morphological issues in students' writings about their favorite person and best friend. Data were collected from students' writing products that belong to twenty-five elementary students in the fifth grade. The collected data were analyzed to examine the morphological errors encountered by the students in the rank of morphemes, words, phrases, and sentences. The types of errors include omission, overuse, misordering, misplacement, and misselection in the free morpheme (lexical and functional) and bound morpheme (inflection and derivation) elements. This research revealed that the participants contributed morphology errors in nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. Second, the most frequent type of morphological error contributed by the participants was misselection. The students have difficulties understanding the formation and function of words due to the interference of their first language, their low proficiency in English words and structure, and their low practice of writing in the target language. It is expected that the teachers use interesting techniques of teaching and learning English to assist the students' practices of the target language and also frequently make corrections and explanations of the students' writing for them to get a clear and specific understanding of the aspect of morphology.

**Keywords:** free morpheme, bound morpheme, morphology, morphological errors, writing

## Introduction

Being the most spoken language in the world, English as a lingua franca has been used in international communication by people from different countries (Eberhard, 2019). The globalization of English has increased the interest of individuals in learning it comprehensively. In Indonesia, English has been taught supplementary at the elementary level (Sepyanda, 2017).

There are four skills to be comprehensively learned in mastering English, which are listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Among those skills, writing is considered a productive skill that enables students to communicate their opinions in the form of papers. (Wardani, Hasan, & Waris, 2014) stated that writing is a skill to express ideas, feelings, and thoughts arranged in words, sentences, and paragraphs using the eyes, brain, and hand. Writing requires complex cognitive activities to express and arrange them into ideas

that can be understood by people (Nunan, 2003).

Many students experience difficulties in English writing as a result of the differences in the target and source languages (Dewaele and Furnham, 2000); therefore, they have some errors in writing. Errors might happen in the smallest part of the words called morphemes, and the study of these words is known as morphology, which is needed in identifying, describing, and analyzing the structures of words. Handoko (2019) explains that morphology studies the patterns of formation of words by the combination of sounds into minimally distinctive units of meaning called morphemes.

In morphology, there are two types of morphemes: free and bound morphemes. A free morpheme is a minimally meaningful shape of a linguistic unit that can stand by itself as a single word (Payne, 2011), for example, bag, table, write, depend, close, for, this, some, and quick. Those words can stand alone without

having an attachment like a prefix or suffix. While bound morpheme is a morpheme that cannot stand alone and must be attached to some other morpheme (Akmajian, 2010), examples are disagreement, information, buildings, eating, singing, and waiting.

Bound morphemes are divided into two categories: inflectional and derivational morphemes. Inflection refers to word formation that does not change category and does not create new lexemes but rather changes the form of lexemes; therefore, they fit into different grammatical contexts to indicate grammatical functions (Yule, 2010).

**Table 1. Types of Inflectional Morpheme**

English inflectional Morphen		Example	
Noun inflection	-s	Third-person singular person	John stay at home
	-s	Plural	John bought ten pencils
	-s	Possessive	John brought Smith's pencil
Verb inflection	-ed	Past tense	John performed well
	-ing	progressive	John is performing as magician
	-en	Participle	John has seen Smith at school
Adjective inflection	-er	Comperative	John is taller than Smith
	-est	Superlative	John is the tallest student in the class

Source: Fromkin, 2003

Meanwhile, (Lapham, 2023) said that derivational morphemes operate more directly on the meaning of words. The basic function of the derivational process is to enable the students to form a new lexeme (Booij, 2005). It is called a derived word that results from a derivational process, which might have a different grammatical class from the original word (class-changing) or stay in the same original class (class-maintaining).

**Table 2. Types of Derivational Morpheme**

Pre-Class	Lexeme	→	Derived word	Post-Class
Noun	boy	→	boysh	Adjective (CC)
Verb	Sing	→	singer	Noun (CC)
Adjective	exact	→	exaclly	Adverb (CC)

Noun	moral	→	moralize	Verb (CC)
Adjective	free	→	freedom	Noun (CC)
Verb	read	→	readable	Adjective (CC)
Noun	friend	→	friendship	Noun (CM)
Verb	do	→	undo	Verb (CM)
Adjective	legal	→	ilegal	Adjective (CM)

Source: Fromkin, 2003

Students must build adequate morphological awareness to reduce and limit the occurrence of morphological errors in their spoken and written English (Akande, 2003). Students who understand how words are formed using roots and affixes tend to have larger vocabularies and better reading comprehension (Lapham, 2023). Therefore, many language teachers need to find the concept of morphological analysis useful in assisting pupils to improve their language skills. Morphological analysis refers to the analysis of a word based on the meaningful parts contained within it (Lapham, 2023).

Linguistic error is an unintentional deviation made by the students. It reflects the stages of language learning competence and knowledge, and it cannot be self-corrected (James, 2013). Thus, this error can be observed, analyzed, and classified to reveal something about a system that is operating within the students, and this led to a surge of study called error analysis (Brown, 2007). Teachers and observers are the ones who recognize the errors made by the students. Error analysis is the process of determining the incidence, nature, causes, and consequences of unsuccessful language learning that focuses on the creative ability of the learners to construct words in the target language (James, 2013).

A previous study conducted by Kusumawardhani (2018) showed morphological errors in derivational morphemes found in the English narrative composition of the eleventh-grade students of SMA Negeri 8 Perumnas II Tangerang. The result of her study was that noun derivation was the most common error found, and it was caused by the student's inability to master the target language and fall into the interference of

the mother tongue. Another study by Pranata (2022) identified morphological errors in the narrative writing of the tenth-grade students of SMK Ma'arif NU Gending. The study concluded that the most frequent category of morphological errors contributed by participants was verb misselection. It indicated that participants faced difficulties with specific characteristics of the English words, significantly different from the first language.

The difference in this study was that the participants were fifth-grade students in elementary school, and it focused on the morphological errors in free morphemes (lexical and functional) and bound morphemes (inflectional and derivational).

### Methodology

The study was an error analysis research of morphology made by the students in the fifth grade at Jakarta International School. Twenty-five students participated in the test. Al-Khreshah (2016) mentioned that there are several stages in an error analysis study, which are: (1) collection of a sample of learner language; (2) identification of errors; (3) description of errors; and (4) explanation of errors. In this study, there were some stages

employed. The first was collecting the data by asking the students to write about their hobbies and favorite person as the theme included in the national curriculum. The second step was analyzing the data by classifying the types of errors that appeared in the texts into several categories and identifying the source or cause of the errors. The researchers classified the errors with the use of free and bound morphemes (inflectional and derivational) in Morphological Taxonomy (Fromkin, 2003). Then, the causes were analyzed using Brown (2007). The last stage was presenting the result through words and tables.

### Findings and Discussion

After collecting and reading the data from the students, the researcher analyzed, underlined, and identified the students' sentences that contained some morphological errors. The analysis consists of identifying the free and bound morphemes. The free morpheme includes lexical and functional morphemes, while the bound morpheme includes inflectional and derivational morphemes. The table below shows the identification and classification of the free morpheme errors made by the students:

**Table 3. Identification and Classification of the Free Morpheme Error**

Types of Free Morpheme Errors	Identified Sentences	Correction
<b>Lexical Morpheme</b>		
a. Noun	1. She getting to know a <i>lizard</i> can make poison to cure the flu.	<i>lizard</i> <i>fashion</i>
Overused (addition)	2. My mother and I have the same dream of becoming <i>fashion</i> designers.	<i>life</i> <i>past</i>
Misordering	3. I want my <i>live</i> good than ever.	<i>the first child</i>
Misselection	4. In the <i>pass</i> my mom was easy angry to me and my brother.	<i>coffee</i>
Omission	5. My father is <i>the first children</i> in the family.	
	6. My mother likes drinking <i>cofee</i> .	
b. Verb	1. After eating, I <i>photo</i> with my mother.	
Omission	2. <i>Ashley so kind and funny</i> .	<i>take photos</i>
Misselection	3. I <i>back</i> to the hotel.	<i>Ashley is ...</i> <i>go back</i>
	4. You get to <i>chang</i> someone vision.	<i>change</i>
	5. I <i>play</i> bicycle around the hotel.	<i>ride a bicycle</i>
c. Adjective	1. She is in the <i>frist</i> year of junior high school.	<i>first year</i>
Misordering	2. We have a lot of <i>comon</i> things to do.	<i>common things</i>
Omission		
<b>Functional Morpheme</b>		
a. Preposition	1. I go <i>with my car</i> .	<i>in my car</i>
Misselection	2. I played football <i>in</i> Wednesday and Friday.	<i>on Wednesday and</i> <i>Friday</i>
Omission	3. <i>In November 25, 2023</i> , my father will having birthday.	<i>on November 25,</i> <i>2023</i>
	4. I see her <i>a calming and patient person</i> .	<i>as a calming and</i> <i>patient person</i>
	5. I have already gone fishing <i>three times</i> .	

b. Article	1. I <i>get shower</i> for go to mosque.	<i>for three times</i> <i>get a shower</i>
Omission	2. I <i>play bicycle</i> around the hotel.	<i>ride a bicycle</i>
Overused (Addition)	3. I am glad to have <i>a friends</i> like them.	<i>(no article)friends</i>
c. Pronoun	1. My mother goes to <i>she</i> work place everyday.	<i>her work place</i>
Misselection	2. They work so hard so that <i>me</i> and my siblings could have a nice home.	<i>.... my siblings and I</i> <i>them</i>
	3. I am so happy to meet <i>they are</i> .	<i>them</i>
	4. If I see <i>they</i> , I want to pinch <i>they faces</i> .	<i>their faces</i>

From the table above, the students made mistakes in both lexical (13 sentences) and functional morphemes (12 sentences).

In lexical morphemes, they overuse the alphabet for a word they use (one sentence) as in the sentence *She getting to know a lizzard can make poison to cure the flu*. (The word *lizzard* should be written *lizard*. The additional letter “z” will make different meaning for the word. The errors also happened in the misordering of the letters of words (2 sentences) that can direct into the misinterpretation of the whole sentence, as in the sentence : *My mother and I have the same dream of becoming fahsion designer* (the word *fahsion* should be written *fashion*), or in the sentence: *She is in the frist year of junior high school*(the word *frist* should be *first*). The majority of errors are found in the misselection of words (4 sentences), such as in the sentence: *I want my live good than ever* (the word *live* (verb - *hidup*) is a verb, and it is not appropriate to be used after possessive pronoun *my* that needs a noun *life* (noun - *kehidupan*). While the sentence *In the pass my mom was easy angry to me and my brother*, the word *pass* (*lewat*) is not suitable for the sentence that needs the word *past* (*lampau*). The omission errors found in two sentences, they are *My mother likes drinking coffee* (*cofee – coffee*) and *We have a lot of common things to do* (*common – common*). This omission of a letter in a word might happen because the students have difficulties understanding the spelling of the words and get influence from their mother

tongue.

In functional morphemes, errors are mostly found in the misselection of pronouns (4 sentences) and prepositions (3 sentences). The examples of misselection are the use of the subject, object and possessive pronouns; the sentence *My mother goes to she workplace everyday* shows the wrong use of the subject pronoun (*she*) that should be the object pronoun (*her*) followed by a noun (*her work place*); the sentence *They work so hard so that me and my siblings could have a nice home* reflect the error in the use of object pronoun (*me*) to subject pronoun (*I*). For the misselection of prepositions, the students tend to choose preposition “in” for all purposes, rather than using “on” to express a day of the year, as in the sentence *I played football in Wednesday and Friday* (*in – on*). Another errors are found in the omission of the prepositions (2 sentences) and articles (2 sentences), they are *I have already gone fishing three times*. In this present perfect sentence, there is an omission of preposition to express the duration of time (*for three times*), and the sentence *I get shower for go to mosque*, there should be an article “a” before the word *shower* (*get a shower*). There is also overuse of article (1 sentence) in the sentence *I am glad to have a friends like them*, the usage of the article “a” is not necessary due to the plurality of the word *friends*.

Furthermore, the result of the analysis of bound morpheme errors (inflectional morpheme) made by the students shown in the following table :

**Table 4. Identification and Classification of the Inflectional Morpheme Error**

Types of Inflectional Morpheme Errors	Identified Sentences	Correction
<b>Noun Inflection</b>	1. Ashley adores <i>animal</i> .	<i>animals</i>
a. Plural	2. Ashley has a lot of pet.	<i>pets</i>
Redundancy	3. Sena and I showed <i>some action figure</i> to our friends.	<i>some action figures</i>

Misselection	4. <i>My hero is</i> my mom and dad. 5. I have <i>two brother's</i> and a sister.	<i>my heroes are</i> <i>two brothers</i>
b. Possessive		
Omission ('s)	1. I go to <i>my parent room</i> . 2. I like <i>my mother cooking</i> . 3. . You get to chang <i>someone vision</i> .	<i>my parents' room</i> <i>my mother's cooking</i> . <i>someone's vision</i> .
<b>Verb Inflection</b>		
a. Third Person		
Singular (suffix –s)	1. Ashley always <i>give</i> a food to all animals 2. My father <i>like</i> to drink matcha 3. She <i>getting</i> to know a lizzard can make poison cure the flu. 4. My dad <i>don't like</i> sweet food.	<i>gives</i> <i>likes</i> <i>gets</i> <i>doesn't like</i>
Omission	5. My mother always <i>sharing</i> food with me.	<i>shares</i>
Misplacement	6. She <i>is always buy</i> something I want or need. 7. She usually <i>teaching</i> me.	<i>always buys</i> <i>usually teaches</i>
b. Past Tense		
Omission –d/-ed (or irregular form of past verb)	1. The first thing I want to do was make friends and interact with them. 2. Once upon a time in the forest <i>life</i> a little girl. 3. Last week we <i>go</i> to Puri Indah Mall.	<i>wanted</i> <i>lived</i> <i>went</i> <i>realized</i>
Overused (addition)	4. As I grew up, I <i>realize</i> that I was a naughty boy. 5. She <i>was take care</i> of me. 6. I <i>have says</i> to them <i>don't angry</i> with other people.	<i>took</i> <i>I said to them not to be angry</i> <i>with other people</i>
c. Progressive		
Omission (–ing form)	1. The first thing I want to do was <i>make</i> friends and <i>interact</i> with them. 2. I go to hotel for <i>rest</i> . 3. I get shower for <i>go</i> to mosque. 4. My mother likes <i>draiver</i> her car to her office.	<i>making</i> <i>interacting</i> <i>having a rest</i> <i>going</i> <i>driving</i>
d. Past Participle		
Misselection	1. I <i>have meet</i> new friends 2. I <i>waiting</i> the plane for two hours.	<i>have met</i> <i>have waited</i>
e. Modal		
Misselection	1. I <i>will worked</i> at a popular hospital in America. 2. In November 25, 2023, my father <i>will having</i> birthday. 3. Why <i>I can having</i> virtual friends?	<i>will work</i> <i>will have</i> <i>can I have</i> <i>...to be better than ever</i> .
<b>Adjective Inflection</b>		
a. Comparative		
Misselection		
b. Superlative		
Misselection	1. She is <i>good mom</i> in the world. 2. I am <i>the younger people</i> in the group.	<i>the best mom in the world</i> . <i>the youngest person in the group</i>

The table above shown there are 34 morphological errors in inflectional morphemes.

The first error is in noun inflection. It shows redundancy (4 sentences) in the use of plural form (-s/-es/-ies) as in the sentence *Ashley adores animal* or *Ashley has a lot of pet*. The words *animal* and *pet* should use the suffix –s to express plurality of the noun, and the students omit using it because they have not completely understood the grammar rules. Then, it also reflects misselection (4 sentences). One misselection is the use of the additional suffix –s (1 sentence). The students are often confused about using the apostrophe ('s) instead of the suffix -s for plural nouns, as in the sentence *I have two brother's and a sister* (*brother's* – showing possessiveness, it should be *two brothers* – showing plurality).

The second is verb inflection, which consists of 22 errors, and the omission error is in the first place (11 sentences). In English grammar, the third-person singular verb suffix –s/-es/-ies is conventionally added to the base form of verbs in the present tense when following the singular subject in the third person, for example: *Ashley always give a food to all animals* (the word *give* changed into *gives* due to the use of the subject *Ashley/She*) or *My father like to drink matcha* (the word *like* changed into *likes* because of the subject *my father/he*). The students also tend to omit the use of the suffix –d/-ed/ied (regular past verb and also irregular past verb), as in the sentence: *Last week we go to Puri Indah Mall* (the word *last week* showed the past time, so the verb *go* should use past irregular verb *went*), or *As I grew up, I realize that I was a naughty boy* (the verb *grew* and *was* showed past event, so the

verb *realize* should also be in the past form *realized* by adding suffix -d). Another omission is in the use of the progressive -ing, for example: *My mother likes draiver her car to her office* (the verb *like* should be followed by the progressive -ing that reflects noun form *driving her car- favorite activity*), or *I go to hotel for rest* (the phrase *for rest* should be changed into *for having a rest* because the preposition *for* need -ing form to express a noun).

Another verb inflection error is misplacement (5 sentences) due to the use of the subject pronoun. The examples are *My dad don't like sweet food* (The subject is the third person singular *my dad/he* that should use negative singular verb *doesn't like*, or *My mother always sharing food with me* (the subject *my mother/she* is the third person singular, so the present verb should use singular verb *shares* by adding suffix -s). There are 5 sentences in the misselection errors, past participle (2 sentences) and modal (3 sentences). Some examples are *I have meet new friends* and *I waiting the plane for two hours*. Both sentences should use past participle form, they are *have meet - have met* and *waiting - have waited* (to express actions that started in the past but continue to the present), and *I will worked at a popular hospital in America* or *In November 25, 2023, my father will having*

*birthday*. Those sentences use modal auxiliaries *will* that should be followed by the base verb (*I will work...* and *My father will have...*), instead past verb *worked* or progressive verb *having*.

The third is adjective inflection that consists of adjective comparison and superlative, and there are 3 misselection mistakes. One is comparison which is *I want my live good than ever* (the word *good* should be changed into *better*, so the correct sentence is *I want my life to be better than ever*), and the others are superlative (*She is good mom in the world* and *I am the younger people in the group*). Superlative is an adjective or adverb that expresses the thing or person being described has qualities that exceed all the others, so the form should be *She is the best mom in the world* or *I am the youngest person in the group*) While they also have omission problems in using apostrophe ('s) to show possessiveness in the sentence (3 sentences), for example: *I like my mother cooking* or *I go to my parent room*. The possessive noun case is used for showing possession with the addition -'s or sometimes just the apostrophe ('), for example: *my mother's cooking* or *my parents' room*.

Moreover, the result of analysis of bound morpheme errors (derivational morpheme) made by the students shown in the following table :

**Table 5. Identification and Classification of the Derivational Morpheme Error**

Types of Derivational Morpheme Errors	Identified Sentences	Correction
Noun – Noun	1. They always take us on a <i>vacaytion</i> . 2. She became a face <i>sourgery</i> .	<i>vacation</i> <i>surgeon</i>
Verb – Adjective	1. My mother is a really <i>supports</i> person.	<i>supportive</i>
Adjective – Adverb	1. He plays attractive as a striker. 2. She used to work with my dad, and that <i>acctually</i> how they met. 3. In the pass my mom was <i>easy</i> angry to me and my brother. 4. The reason that I chose my mother as a topic was our <i>recently</i> closeness.	<i>attractively</i> <i>actually</i> <i>easily</i> <i>recent</i>

Table 5 shows the errors in derivational morphology which consist of derivational in nouns (2 sentences), adjectives (1 sentence), and adverbs (4 sentences).

Two sentences have errors in derivational nouns, which are . *They always take us on a vacation*, and *She became a face*

*surgery*. The word *vacaytion* and *sourgery* are wrong because they are overused (having addition of the alphabet “y” in the word *vacaytion* – it should be corrected into *vacation*, and addition of the alphabet “o” in the word *sourgery* and the wrong formation of nouns for the person who experts in surgery. It should be

surgeon), so the corrected sentences are *They always take us on a vacation*, and *She became a face surgeon*.

There is a sentence that has error in derivational adjective, it is *My mother is a really supports person*. The word *supports* is a verb, and it can not modify a noun (*person*), so it should be changed into an adjective (*supportive*) that can modify a noun (*My mother is a supportive person*).

The last is an error in the derivational adverb. There are 4 errors, which are :

1. *He plays attractive as a striker*. (The sentence is wrong because the word *attractive* is an adjective, while after the verb *plays*, it needs a noun or an adverb, and in this sentence, it needs an adverb *attractively* (modify the verb), so the sentence should be *He plays attractively as a striker*).

2. *She used to work with my dad, which is actually how they met*. (The sentence is wrong because the word is an adverb, but it has the wrong spelling – the overuse of the alphabet “c” and the omission of the alphabet “l”, the adverb should be *actually*, so the sentence should be *She used to work with my dad, and that actually how they met*).

3. *In the pass my mom was easily angry to me and my brother*. (The sentence is incorrect because the word *easy* is an adjective, while after an auxiliary verb *was* and before an adjective *angry*, it needs an adverb *easily*, so the sentence should be *In the past my mom was easily angry to me and my brother*).

4. *The reason that I chose my mother as a topic was our recent closeness*. (The sentence is incorrect because the word *recent* is an adverb, while after a possessive pronoun *our* and before a noun *closeness*, it needs an adjective *recent*, so the sentence should be *The reason that I chose my mother as a topic was our recent closeness*).

From the findings and explanation above, it can be said that the most frequent category of the morphological errors found in the students’ writing in the fifth grade of elementary school was misselection and misordering/misplacement. Misselection

indicates the students have difficulties understanding the specific identification of English words due to the differences of their mother language structures. The incorrect placement of the language elements in the construction of the sentences can lead to misordering errors that will cause incomplete sentences. The second category was omission. The absence of the language elements causes the omission errors. The students did not comprehend the use of suffixes –s, -ed, -ing, and others that can influence the word’s meaning and function. This error can lead to ambiguity of meaning in a sentence level that interferes with the meaning in the semantic level. The third category was overuse (addition) and redundancy of alphabets, verbs, or others that came from the misconception of the spelling and structure of the words, and also the interference of the first language sound. These addition errors are caused by the overuse of language elements that are not needed in the sentence.

### Conclusion

The study of error analysis has played a significant in English Foreign Language Learning and Teaching. Many researchers have conducted studies in this area to explore and find a solution to help students comprehend the formation of English words and sentences. This study revealed that the participants contributed morphological errors both in free (lexical and function) and bound (inflectional and derivational) morphemes, and the most frequent errors were misselection, misordering or misplacement, omission, overuse, and redundancy. Those errors are produced by the students due to their low proficiency of the target language, their unfamiliar knowledge of morphology, the interference of their mother tongue, and their low level of English writing practice. If the students have understood the concept of morphology, they will not produce those morphological mistakes. For this reason, before giving writing tasks to the students, the teachers of English are expected to use interesting techniques of teaching and learning English for the improve of students’ practices

of the target language, and also frequently make corrections and explanations of the students' writing for them to get clear and specific understanding of the words and sentences they use in their writing (Nurhikmah, 2023). This can be the next study to measure the student's understanding of the morphological elements and the results of their writings.

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