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Investigating Phrase Usage Errors in the English Language Education Study Program: A Student-Centered Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The primary objectives of this study were (1) to identify the types of errors made by third-semester students in the use of noun phrases and (2) to determine the most frequently occurring error type. To achieve these objectives, a descriptive qualitative research design was employed. Data were collected using two types of assessments: multiple-choice questions and essay writing tasks. These instruments were designed to elicit various forms of noun phrase usage to allow for a comprehensive analysis of student performance. Based on the data analysis, four main types of grammatical errors were identified (1) omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. Among these, misformation errors were found to be the most prevalent. This suggests that while students may understand the general structure of noun phrases, they struggle with selecting the correct grammatical forms, such as appropriate determiners, pluralization, or adjective-noun order. The high frequency of misformation errors may stem from several interrelated factors, including interference from the students' first language, insufficient grammatical instruction, and limited exposure to authentic English usage

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INTRODUCTION

Effective communication in English, particularly in academic settings, requires not only a strong vocabulary but also a firm grasp of grammatical structures, including the use of phrases. A phrase is defined as a group of words that operates as a single grammatical unit

within a sentence but lacks both a subject and a predicate (Richards & Schmidt, 2013). Among various types of phrases, noun phrases play a particularly important role in academic writing, as they are frequently used to introduce and elaborate on key concepts.

Proficiency in constructing and appropriately using phrases—especially noun phrases—is fundamental to achieving grammatical accuracy in both spoken and written English. This competence requires not only the recognition of individual lexical items but also an understanding of the syntactic and semantic relationships among them to convey precise meaning (Thornbury, 1999). In higher education contexts, students are expected to demonstrate sufficient English language proficiency to effectively participate in academic tasks. However, many students continue to encounter difficulties in forming grammatically correct and semantically coherent noun phrases, which negatively impacts the clarity and quality of their academic writing. Identifying and analyzing these common errors is therefore essential to improving pedagogical strategies in English language instruction.

According to Norrish (1983), there are 3 types of errors namely carelessness, first language interference and translation.

a. Carelessness

Rather than a lack of linguistic expertise, carelessness is a sort of inaccuracy that is usually linked to a lack of effort or attention. It frequently occurs when students are not totally attentive and fail to apply rules they have already understood. Based on Pawlak, (2013) careless errors occur not because the learner does not know the correct form, but because of temporary lapses in concentration or effort. Some teachers acknowledge that such errors may be linked to a broader issue of low motivation, which can stem from the use of inappropriate learning materials, unengaging presentation methods, or a lack of contextual relevance in classroom content. For instance, a student might write “She go to school every day” instead of “She goes to school every day”—not because they are unaware of the rule, but because of inattention or a rushed effort. These mistakes emphasize the importance of fostering a motivating and stimulating learning environment to sustain students’ focus and reduce unintentional errors.

b. First Language Interference

First-language interference (also referred to as language transfer) occurs when a learner applies elements of their native language (L1) to their second language (L2), leading to errors. This phenomenon is a well-documented cause of errors in second language acquisition, as learners often rely on familiar linguistic structures, vocabulary, and rules from their native language when attempting to communicate in the target language. These errors can manifest at various levels, including phonology, syntax, morphology, and semantics.

c. Translation

Translation errors occur when learners use direct translation from their first language (L1) to their second language (L2). This leads to incorrect word choices, syntactic errors, and semantic misunderstandings, which can impede the clarity and accuracy of communication. These errors are particularly prevalent among learners who are heavily dependent on their native language to understand and produce sentences in the target language. While

translation can serve as a useful tool for bridging the gap between L1 and L2, it becomes problematic when overused or misapplied. Let's delve into the causes and consequences of translation errors, the types of errors involved, and how overreliance on translation can hinder language learning.

A frequently observed issue among learners is the inappropriate use of noun phrases within specific contexts, which often leads to ambiguity and diminished clarity in written communication. This problem is compounded by students' limited understanding of the structural components and grammatical functions of noun phrases, including the ability to differentiate between nouns, pronouns, and adjectives. As a result, students may construct sentences that are syntactically incorrect or semantically unclear, thereby undermining the overall coherence and effectiveness of their writing.

Errors in the use of noun phrases can significantly hinder students' ability to write and communicate effectively in English. Octasary et al., (2024) implied that such errors are generally understood as deviations from standard language norms, often resulting from a lack of full comprehension of grammatical rules. In line with that, Swandana et al., (2020) these errors tend to recur due to the absence of corrective feedback or the learner's inability to internalize linguistic structures. The persistence of such errors highlights a disconnect between the grammatical knowledge delivered through formal instruction and its practical application in real-world communication.

Several theories can serve as recommendations for defining errors to recognize, classify, and examine linguistic errors. These include Surface Strategy Taxonomy. This taxonomy focuses mostly on understanding the cognitive processes that students use to learn a new language. Students could add extraneous morphemes or words, forget essential ones, or misform or rearrange things. Dulay et al., (1982) explain that error based on surface category is classified into four types, such as omission, addition, misformation, misordering. Those are:

a. Omission

The mistake of leaving off something that is necessary for an utterance to be considered grammatical is known as omission. When a crucial component of a noun phrase is left out, it can lead to ambiguity or misinterpretation. Determiners, adjectives, and modifiers that add more information about the noun in question are examples of elements that are typically left out. In the context of noun phrases, this type of error arises when essential components such as determiners (e.g., a, the), adjectives, or other modifiers are omitted. For example, saying "boy plays football" instead of "the boy plays football" omits the definite article, which may lead to confusion regarding the specificity of the noun. Such omissions can significantly impact meaning, causing ambiguity or misinterpretation, and often reflect the learner's developing grasp of syntactic and semantic roles within noun phrase construction.

b. Addition

This type of error occurs when the speaker or writer includes unnecessary words or phrases, resulting in redundancy or structural inappropriateness within the sentence. Such errors often reflect a lack of syntactic efficiency or a misunderstanding of the grammatical structure, leading to phrases that are overly verbose or semantically repetitive. In the context

of noun phrases, these errors typically involve the insertion of superfluous determiners, adjectives, or modifiers that violate the rules of noun phrase structure. For example, a learner might say “the a dog” or “many the books”, where the use of multiple determiners is incorrect and leads to redundancy or confusion. Addition errors may stem from overgeneralization of rules, transfer from the learner’s first language, or a lack of familiarity with the syntactic constraints governing noun phrase formation in English. Such mistakes hinder both fluency and clarity, highlighting the importance of mastering the structural sequence of elements within noun phrases.

c. **Misordering**

Errors of misordering are characterized by the incorrect placement of a morpheme or a group of morphemes within an utterance. In the context of noun phrase usage, this type of error occurs when the components of the noun phrase—such as determiners, adjectives, quantifiers, or nouns—are arranged in an inappropriate sequence. Such misordering can significantly alter the intended meaning or render the sentence grammatically incorrect or unclear. For example, a learner might say “red big car” instead of “big red car”, violating the conventional adjective order in English. These errors often reflect learners’ limited awareness of the syntactic rules that govern noun phrase structure in English.

d. **Misinformation**

Misinformation errors are characterized using incorrect word forms or the inappropriate selection of grammatical elements. In the context of noun phrase construction, misinformation occurs when the learner uses an incorrect form of a determiner, adjective, quantifier, or noun that does not align with standard grammatical rules. These errors indicate that the learner has understood the need for a particular structure but has failed to apply the correct form. According to Dulay et al., (1982) misinformation happens when “the learner supplies something, although it is incorrect”

It is critical to do research on students' errors in using phrases, particularly within the English Language Education Study Program at Khairun University, because recognizing these errors can help students develop language abilities. Analyzing frequent forms of errors can also help students establish better learning strategies. Furthermore, recognizing common sources of errors provides insight into areas that require additional practice, allowing students to improve their English skills. The findings of this study are likely to help lecturers and program managers develop successful teaching strategies.

By addressing error propagation and measuring these errors accurately, this study hopes to increase students' awareness of their errors and aid them in improving their use of noun phrases. This, in turn, helps students enhance their English language skills and prepare them for difficulties in an increasingly competitive world. Consequently, this study focuses on analyzing student errors in noun phrases among third-semester students in the English Language Education Study Program at Khairun University

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive qualitative research methodology was employed in this study. This approach was selected to examine and characterize the different kinds of mistakes and the most common mistakes made by third-semester students at Khairun University's English Language Education Study Program when utilizing noun phrases. A descriptive qualitative method works well for comprehending and analyzing occurrences in their natural setting, claims (Cresswell, 2017). Based on the information gathered from students' written projects, the researcher concentrated on identifying the different kinds of noun phrase errors and figuring out which faults were more common. Without comparing the results to those of other institutions, the qualitative analysis was carried out and the results were presented descriptively to show the trends and patterns in the mistakes made by the students.

Thirty students of third-semester from Khairun University class B English Language Education Study Program served as the research subjects. The study's tools included five essay questions, and fifteen multiple-choice questions intended to detect and examine students' misuse of noun phrases. The multiple-choice questions were carefully designed to target specific aspects of noun phrase usage, such as identifying noun phrases in context, distinguishing between simple and complex noun phrases, and recognizing their syntactic functions within sentences. These objective items allowed for efficient assessment of students' foundational knowledge and recognition skills related to noun phrase structures.

In contrast, the essay items demanded a higher level of cognitive engagement by requiring students to actively construct sentences that incorporated various types of noun phrases. This not only evaluated their ability to apply grammatical rules but also provided qualitative insights into their depth of understanding and practical usage of noun phrases in coherent written contexts. By employing both multiple-choice and essay formats, the study leveraged the strengths of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, ensuring a more holistic evaluation of students' grasp and application of noun phrase constructions in English. This comprehensive approach aligned closely with the research objectives, allowing for a nuanced analysis of both theoretical knowledge and practical competence.

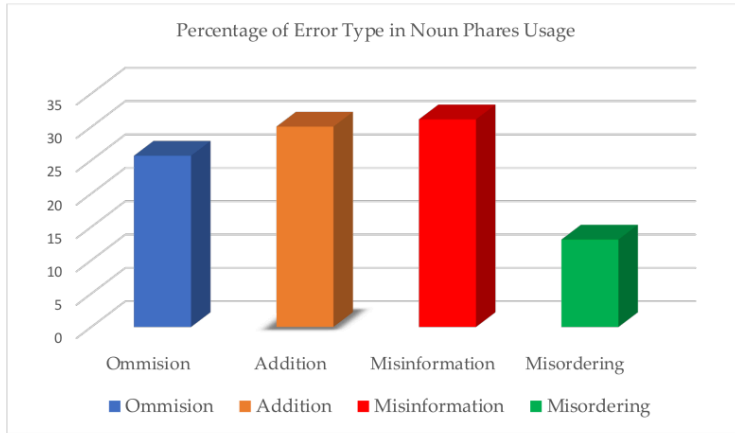
Data were collected using a worksheet consisting of 15 multiple-choice items and 5 essay items focused on noun phrases. Errors were identified and classified into omission, addition, misformation, and misordering based on (Dulay et al., 1982) theory of error classification. This process aimed to describe the errors comprehensively and highlight the most frequent error types to offer insights into students' difficulties in using noun phrases.

In addition to using essays and multiple-choice tests as instruments for data collection, the researcher also aimed to investigate the underlying causes of the errors made by the students. To achieve this, the researcher applied the framework proposed by Norrish (1983) who identified three main categories of error causes. These categories, as previously outlined, provide a comprehensive basis for analyzing the reasons behind students' language errors. By utilizing Norrish's theory, the researcher was able to systematically classify the

errors and gain deeper insights into the cognitive and linguistic challenges faced by the learners.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing and calculating the errors related to noun phrases in the students' answer sheets, the researcher compiled a list showing the percentage of each type of error. The findings from this analysis, which highlight the students' difficulties in using noun phrases correctly, are presented in the following picture:



Picture 1. Percentage of Error Type in Noun Phares Usage

The bar chart illustrates the distribution of four types of errors students made when constructing noun phrases. These types are omission, addition, misinformation, and misordering. By examining the chart, we can interpret not just the frequency of errors but also gain insight into the nature and severity of the students' difficulties.

A. Misinformation – The Most Frequent Error

Misinformation errors top the chart, indicating that many students struggle with selecting the correct grammatical forms in noun phrases. This could involve incorrect use of determiners, adjectives, or plural/singular forms—such as saying "a informations" instead of "information". The high frequency suggests that students may lack a clear understanding of the structural rules that govern noun phrase formation.

- a. Student AY:
 - Incorrect : "I need some advices from you".
 - Correct : "I need some advice from you"
- b. Student DC:
 - Incorrect : "The children is playing in the yard."
 - Correct : "The children are playing in the yard."

c. Student RU:

Incorrect : *"He bought an beautiful white shirt."*

Correct : *"He bought a beautiful white shirt."*

B. Addition – Also Highly Prevalent

Addition errors come second, showing that students frequently include extra or unnecessary elements in noun phrases. This may reflect confusion about article usage (e.g., *"the a car"*) or redundancy in modifiers. These errors imply that while students attempt to construct complex noun phrases, they often overcompensate or misapply grammatical rules.

a. Student UL:

Incorrect : *"The very beautiful garden is full of colorful flowers."*

Correct : *"The beautiful garden is full of colorful flowers."*

b. Student NF:

Incorrect : *"The latest and updated version of the software includes new features."*

Correct : *"The latest version of the software includes new features."*

C. Omission – A Significant Issue

Omission errors rank third, which means students often leave out essential components of a noun phrase. For example, they might omit an article (*"I saw cat"*) instead of *"I saw a cat"*) or a noun entirely. This type of error could reflect a lack of attention to detail or an incomplete grasp of phrase structure

a. Student NS:

Incorrect : *"She bought beautiful red dress."*

Correct : *"She bought a beautiful red dress."*

b. Student DC:

Incorrect : *"Group of talented musicians performed at the concert."*

Correct : *"A group of talented musicians performed at the concert."*

D. Misordering – Least Common but Still Notable

Although misordering is the least frequent, its presence is still noteworthy. It suggests that some students have difficulty arranging words in the correct syntactic order within a noun phrase—for instance, saying *"a red big balloon"* instead of *"a big red balloon"*. This indicates issues with word order conventions in English, especially regarding adjectives and determiners.

a. Student FA:

Incorrect : *"He has an amazing car red."*

Correct : *"He has an amazing red car."*

b. Student AY:

Incorrect : *"A book interesting."*

Correct : *"An interesting book."*

The present study aimed to analyze students' errors in constructing noun phrases and to determine the most dominant error type based on the Surface Strategy Taxonomy, which includes four categories: misformation, addition, omission, and misordering (Dulay et al, 1982). Data were collected through a descriptive text-writing task, along with multiple-choice and essay tests. The analysis revealed that misformation was the most prevalent error type, accounting for 31.14% of the total errors. This was followed by addition errors (30.05%), omission errors (25.68%), and misordering errors (13.11%). In total, 183 errors were identified in the written responses of third-semester students enrolled in the English Language Education Study Program at Khairun University. These findings highlight the specific areas of syntactic difficulty faced by learners, particularly in the accurate formation and structure of noun phrases.

The reasons for these errors can be attributed to three main factors based on the students' result. The first, carelessness, which happens when students are hurried, distracted, or do not provide enough attention to linguistic precision, is a common cause of mistakes. This results in difficult language, syntactic errors, and missing details. For instance, adding superfluous words might make sentences seem repetitious and unclear. These mistakes frequently occur when students fail to proofread their work, missing small but important elements in their writing or speech.

Next, mistakes might also be caused by the first language (L1) of the students interfering. Incorrect sentences may arise when students inadvertently apply grammatical structures or norms from their home language to English (L2). For example, students may use awkward or incorrect English sentence patterns or statements that are natural in their native tongue. This kind of interference is frequent, particularly when students don't have enough exposure to or practice with the target language.

The last one is translation. Many students rely on precise translations of their ideas from their native tongue into English. Unnatural expressions or grammatical errors are frequently the result of this process. Because idioms, terminology, or sentence patterns in the original language may not have exact English equivalents, literal translation may produce sentences that seem awkward or unclear. Students run the danger of making mistakes and losing fluency if they don't grasp the subtleties of English.

CONCLUSION

According to the study, third-semester English Language Education Study Program students at Khairun University committed a number of noun phrase usage mistakes. This is clear from the test results, which show that students made 183 mistakes in total, divided into four categories: 57 misformation errors (31.14%), 55 addition errors (30.05%), 47 omission errors (25.68%), and 24 misordering errors (13.11%). The most common kind of error that was found among these was misformation.

The findings suggest that while students are able to construct noun phrases, they face significant challenges in applying grammatical rules accurately, particularly in the use of correct forms and in avoiding redundant or incorrectly ordered elements. These errors indicate not only gaps in linguistic competence but also the influence of performance factors such as carelessness and first language interference.

By addressing these pedagogical needs, educators can better support students in developing greater grammatical competence and syntactic accuracy, particularly in their written English. Future research could expand on this study by exploring error patterns across different linguistic structures or proficiency levels, offering a broader understanding of learner difficulties in EFL contexts.

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