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Analyzing morphosyntactic errors of verbs in English written compositions by Vietnamese undergraduates

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Abstract

This error analysis aimed to investigate Vietnamese university students' written grammatical accuracy in EFL writing, given the crucial role of verbs and their intricate morphosyntactic features (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). However, systematic investigation into morphosyntactic verb errors and their causes remains limited. To address this gap, the study aimed to: (a) identify the types and frequency of morphosyntactic verb errors made by elementary-level EFL undergraduates, and (b) examine their causative factors. The researchers conducted an error analysis of 224 compositions written by EFL undergraduates at a university in Vietnam. The findings showed that misformation errors were the most prevalent, followed by omission and addition, while misordering was least common. Most errors stemmed from intralingual factors, with false concept hypothesis as the primary source, though interlingual transfer also exerted a notable influence. The findings partially align with previous research, likely due to differences in study scope, writing genres, and participant characteristics. The insights suggest that teachers should implement targeted, rule-based activities (e.g., tense drills, verb correction tasks, and coded feedback) to improve learners' control of morphosyntactic verbs. They also highlight the need for more robust research designs to better capture learner performance and contextual influences on error production.

Keywords: Error analysis, morphosyntactic verb, written compositions, EFL undergraduates

Introduction

Writing in a second language is cognitively demanding because it requires the integration of multiple linguistic components (Kara, 2024). Among these, grammar often emerges as a major challenge for EFL students, particularly beginners who struggle to apply grammatical rules

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accurately (Brown, 2014; Ellis, 1994). This difficulty is frequently reflected in their written compositions, which tend to exhibit numerous grammatical errors, most notably in verb usage (Fitria, 2022; Toba, Noor, & Sanu, 2019).

Verbs are central to communication, functioning as the linguistic core that allows speakers to express actions and states of being (Pinker, 2015). In English, they serve as the main predicate, carrying crucial information about tense, aspect, and action, thereby playing a vital role in constructing meaning and grammatical accuracy (Larsen-Freeman & Celce-Murcia, 2015). Given their importance, errors in verb use can substantially hinder the clarity and correctness of students' writing.

Previous studies have consistently shown that EFL undergraduates commit various types of verb-related errors (e.g., Hamed, 2018; Nuruzzaman et al., 2018). In the Vietnamese context, researchers (e.g., H. Nguyen, 2020; N. Nguyen, 2020) report incorrect verb tense usage and subject–verb disagreement have been identified as particularly common. N. Nguyen (2020) further attributes these errors to students' limited proficiency in using inflectional morphemes. These findings suggest that verb errors remain a persistent issue in EFL writing and are closely related to the morphosyntactic aspects of verbs.

In light of error analysis studies, the classification of errors is often based on two major dimensions: grammatical categories and surface strategy taxonomy. Research focusing on grammatical categories, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs (Ramadhan et al., 2018; Ulhaq et al., 2022; Zainuddin, 2016), has identified verb errors as among the most problematic for EFL students. However, there remains a lack of systematic investigation into morphosyntactic verb errors analyzed through the Surface Strategy Taxonomy proposed by Dulay et al. (1982).

To address the research problems, this study aimed to (1) examine morphosyntactic errors of English verbs in compositions by Vietnamese EFL undergraduates and (2) analyze the causative factors of verb-related errors in student writing. Understanding these causative factors is essential in error analysis, as it can help teachers identify learners' underlying knowledge gaps and misconceptions, diagnose specific weaknesses, and provide targeted feedback and instructional interventions to enhance proficiency (Ellis, 2009).

To fulfill these aims, two research questions were formulated:

(1) What types of morphosyntactic errors of verbs do EFL undergraduates commit in English written compositions?
(2) What causative factors related to linguistic interference between the first and the second language result in these morphosyntactic errors of verbs in English written compositions by EFL undergraduates?

Literature Review

Error Analysis

In error analysis (EA), both Corder (1974) and Gass, Behney, and Plonky (2013) propose systematic sequential procedures for conducting error analysis. Corder (1974, 1981) introduces five steps to error analysis, including selection, identification, classification, explanation and evaluation. In Corder's view, EA is a means of tracing students' interlanguage development, emphasizing flexibility in sampling and qualitative interpretation. While this exploratory stance offers the foundational framework with developmental insight, it can lack procedural rigor. Gass et al. (2013) reconceptualize EA as a systematic, empirically grounded process integrating both qualitative and quantitative dimensions. Gass et al. (2013) propose a six-stage model, including data collection, error identification, classification, quantification,

source analysis, and remediation. Their framework requires controlled sampling, verification of linguistic accuracy, and norm-referenced quantification, thus enhancing reliability and replicability. Importantly, such rigor influences not only how data are collected but also how error patterns are interpreted—allowing researchers to move beyond illustrative examples toward statistically supported generalizations.

Studies that have relied on Corder's (1974) procedure have often only included selected excerpts to exemplify error types, thereby limiting their ability to capture error prevalence. This limitation is evident in Gayo and Widodo (2018) and Purinanda and Sutrisno (2022), whose analyses underrepresent recurrent errors. In contrast, studies adopting Gass et al.'s procedure (e.g., Kampookaew, 2020; Promsupa et al., 2017) demonstrate clearer frequency reporting and stronger pedagogical implications. Overall, while Corder's model foregrounds developmental insight, Gass et al.'s (2013) procedure provides methodological precision that substantiates data interpretation, making it more suitable for morphosyntactic analysis requiring frequency normalization and cross-text comparability.

Verbs from Morphosyntactic Perspectives

The analysis of morphosyntactic verbs in English centers on how morphological inflections operate within syntactic structures to realize grammatical meaning. As Crystal (2008) explains, morphosyntax refers to grammatical categories whose interpretation depends on both morphology and syntax. Accordingly, morphosyntactic verbs are lexical items whose forms vary to encode syntactic features such as tense, aspect, and subject–verb agreement. The interdependence of these dimensions is illustrated by Examples 2.1 and 2.2. In Example 2.1, the verb *works* occurs with a singular subject and the simple present tense, combining the free morpheme *work* with the inflectional suffix *–s* to signal agreement and tense. In Example 2.2, the verb *take* changes to *took* to mark past tense, demonstrating how verb morphology interacts with syntactic time reference.

(2.1) My mother works for an international company.
(2.2) I took my puppy to the park last night.

Expanding this view, Payne and Payne (1997) identify two verb properties: distributional, referring to their syntactic functions as predicates and phrase heads, and structural, concerning internal inflectional mechanisms. Biber et al. (1999) further classify verbs into lexical, primary, and modal categories, noting that only lexical verbs exhibit full inflectional paradigms. Additionally, several scholars (Campos & Bui, 2018; Nguyen, 2004) emphasize that inflectional affixes serve grammatical functions essential for agreement, whereas derivational affixes alter lexical category or meaning.

In light of verb form taxonomy, this study focuses on single-word lexical verb inflections, both regular and irregular, to ensure analytic precision in identifying morphosyntactic verb errors. Morphosyntactic verbs encompass regular and irregular lexical verb inflections, the three primary verbs (be, have, and do), and nine central modal and semi-modal verbs. This classification forms the theoretical foundation for analyzing types of morphosyntactic errors.

Surface Strategy Taxonomy of Morphosyntactic Errors

The Surface Strategy Taxonomy proposed by Dulay et al. (1982) classifies learner errors into four types: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering, based on how linguistic forms deviate from target language norms. Omission refers to the absence of required elements, while addition involves the presence of unnecessary forms. Misformation occurs when incorrect forms

are used, and misordering refers to the incorrect arrangement of linguistic elements within a sentence. This taxonomy provides a systematic framework for identifying and categorizing morphosyntactic errors and has been widely used in second language research to describe patterns of learner errors.

Causative Factors of Errors

Causes of errors in second language acquisition, as identified by James (2013) and Brown (2014), include interlingual interference, intralingual interference, context of learning, and communication strategies. Interlingual interference, or negative transfer, involves the influence of the learner's first language on the learning of a second language (James, 2013). Brown (2014) found that students rely on their native language when faced with an unfamiliar language system.

Intralingual factors stem from limited exposure to the target language, leading to overgeneralization errors and other difficulties in mastering fundamental rules (Brown, 2014). The context of learning, including classroom environments and materials, can also contribute to errors due to misleading explanations and faulty presentations (Brown, 2014). Additionally, students employ communication strategies such as using pre-made phrases or switching languages to effectively communicate (James, 2013), which seems to emanate from learner behavior during interaction. Because the factors related to context and communication strategies could be unpredictable due to possible variations in specific learning environments and spontaneous human behavior, our study was grounded in linguistic patterns and, hence, focused on the source of the linguistic interference between the first and the second language, including the interlingual and intralingual factors.

Related Studies and Research Gaps

A substantial body of research has documented morphosyntactic errors in English writing among non-English majors, consistently identifying verb-related errors—particularly tense misuse and subject–verb disagreement—as highly prevalent (Dizon & Gatchalian, 2025; Hamed, 2018; Nuruzzaman et al., 2018; Singh et al., 2017). These errors are often attributed to learners' difficulty in selecting appropriate verb forms and maintaining agreement. However, many studies have primarily focused on describing error types rather than examining the underlying morphosyntactic mechanisms, limiting deeper insights into learners' developmental challenges.

Research classifying errors by parts of speech similarly reports high frequencies of tense and agreement errors (Hariri, 2012; Zainuddin, 2016; Issa et al., 2025), typically linked to omitted inflections or weak control of verb forms. In addition, much of this research has focused on descriptive or argumentative writing (e.g., Gayo & Widodo, 2018; Ulhaq et al., 2022), while narrative writing, which requires more complex tense control and sequencing, remains underexplored.

Several studies employing the Surface Strategy Taxonomy have identified diverse error types, including omission, addition, and misformation (Gayo & Widodo, 2018; Padilla & Padilla, 2021; Purinanda & Sutrisno, 2022). However, research has paid limited attention to Vietnamese students, and few studies have systematically examined how L1 transfer from Vietnamese influences morphosyntactic verb errors. Furthermore, although intralingual factors such as overgeneralization and false concept hypothesized are frequently cited (Hariri, 2012; Ramadhan et al., 2018), these explanations are often based on broad assumptions rather than detailed analysis. Finally, methodological gaps also persist, including small sample sizes, lack of interrater reliability, and insufficient normalization of error frequency. These issues reduce the reliability and

generalizability of findings. Given these gaps, the present study investigates morphosyntactic verb errors in Vietnamese EFL students' narrative writing to provide a more systematic and context-specific analysis.

Methodology

Research Design

In this study, we conducted an error analysis to examine morphosyntactic verb errors in students' writing performance. We qualitatively categorized verb-related error types and the possible underlying causative factors of the detected errors. In order to describe patterns in the distribution of errors, we employed quantitative measures, such as frequencies, percentages, and normalized counts.

Participants and Sampling

224 Vietnamese EFL freshmen in their second semester provided a corpus of 224 paragraphs (see a sample paragraph in Appendix A). The participants were at the A2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, a level at which verb-related errors are commonly observed (H. Nguyen, 2020). Convenience sampling was employed, whereby participants were selected based on accessibility (Creswell & Creswell, 2022).

Instrument

The writing prompts were designed to assess the students' performance in a writing course. The grammatical learning outcomes of the writing course were aligned with the core textbook by Hughes et al. (2017), covering regular and irregular past tense forms, distinctions between present simple and present continuous, basic subject–verb agreement, and the use of time expressions in narrative contexts. The students were required to write an approximately 150-word paragraph within 30 minutes to demonstrate their ability to recount a past experience.

Data Analysis

To address RQ1 related to the occurrences of morphosyntactic verb error types, we performed Gass et al.'s (2013) error analysis procedures, including error detection, classification, and quantification. First, all verb instances in the student texts were evaluated against relevant grammatical descriptions presented in course materials and widely used reference grammars (e.g., Larsen-Freeman & Celce-Murcia, 2015; Leech, 2006). The errors were identified in relation to generally accepted conventions of standard English usage rather than instructional coverage. As illustrated in Example 3.1, we judged the correctness of a verb use in the sentence from the expected passive voice structure because the action was done ("repaired") to the subject ("his car"). In this case, the verb phrase is expected to include a form of the *be* verb and a past participle form of the main verb (Larsen-Freeman & Celce-Murcia, 2015).

Example 3.1: His car was **repair* (repaired) yesterday.

In the second step, we qualitatively classified the erroneous verbs against Biber et al.'s (1999) verb classifications (i.e., lexical, primary, and modal verbs), and Dulay et al.'s (1982) Surface Strategy Taxonomy for error classifications. Finally, we quantified the normed frequency for each error type due to variations in composition length. The standardized frequency of verb errors to a basis of 100 words each in each composition was determined using the formula: (Raw Frequency of verb errors/Total Words) * 100.

To address RQ2, based on the frameworks of Brown (2014) and James (2013), we qualitatively examined the potential linguistic sources of the detected verb errors, including interlingual factors, and intralingual factors. Intralingual factors were further categorized into overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restriction, incomplete application of rules, and false concept hypothesized. Our inferred classifications based on students' written texts were intended for profiling causative factors that could manifest in students' written products, rather than explaining students' cognitive processes. Frequencies and percentages were calculated to quantitatively describe the distribution of these factors.

In order to check the reliability of the data analysis, we conducted the percent agreement method (McHugh, 2012) by comparing detections and classifications on the whole data set between two coders (McHugh, 2012). High agreement percentages (Fraenkel et al., 2018) confirmed reliability across 224 paragraphs assessing verb correctness, error identification, and categorization. The results showed strong reliability: verb correctness agreement was about 97% (disagreements mainly on inflections), error type agreement exceeded 96% (with issues mostly in inflection omissions), and causative factor agreement was over 95% (disagreements on interlingual transfer, rule ignorance, and overgeneralization).

Ethical Consideration

We adhered to ethical guidelines outlined by Fraenkel et al. (2018), prioritizing key considerations such as privacy, anonymity, and avoidance of harm. All students' submissions were de-identified and assigned with our codes of letters and numbers based on topic and order (e.g., S1-T1 for the first student on Topic 1) to ensure anonymity and systematic data organization. Permission was obtained from the Head of the General English Division and four lecturers to access 224 student submissions.

Results and Discussion

Morphosyntactic Errors of Verbs in EFL Undergraduates' English Compositions

The results of data analysis, as shown in Figure 1, revealed that misformation errors were found the most frequent, totaling 569.06 instances, while misordering errors were negligible

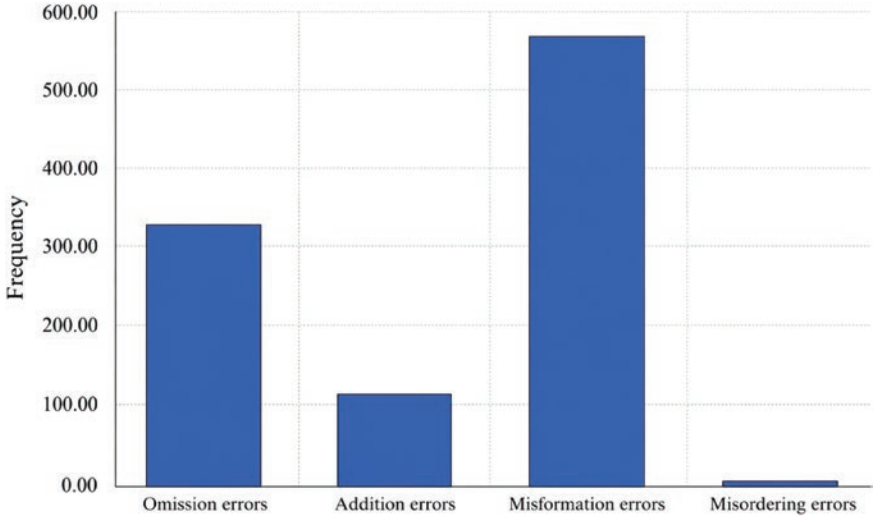


Figure 1. *Normed frequency of morphosyntactic errors of verbs*

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(4.23 instances). Omitted morphosyntactic verbs ranked second highest at 331.85 occurrences, followed by improper additions at 110.06 instances. This pattern is somewhat consistent with previous studies (e.g., Gayo & Widodo, 2018; Padilla & Padilla, 2021; Purinanda & Sutrisno, 2022; Issa et al., 2025), indicating that the majority of errors can be related to misformation, while misordering errors appear to have little influence.

In Figure 2, regular inflections (e.g., –ing, -ed, -s/-es) were the most frequently omitted, totaling 195.76 instances, while no instances of modal verb omission were found. The omission of irregular lexical verb inflections ranked second highest, with approximately half the frequency of regular lexical verb inflection omissions (100.82 instances). Additionally, primary verbs were irregularly omitted, with a frequency approximately one-third of that of irregular lexical verb inflection omissions, totaling 32.27 instances.

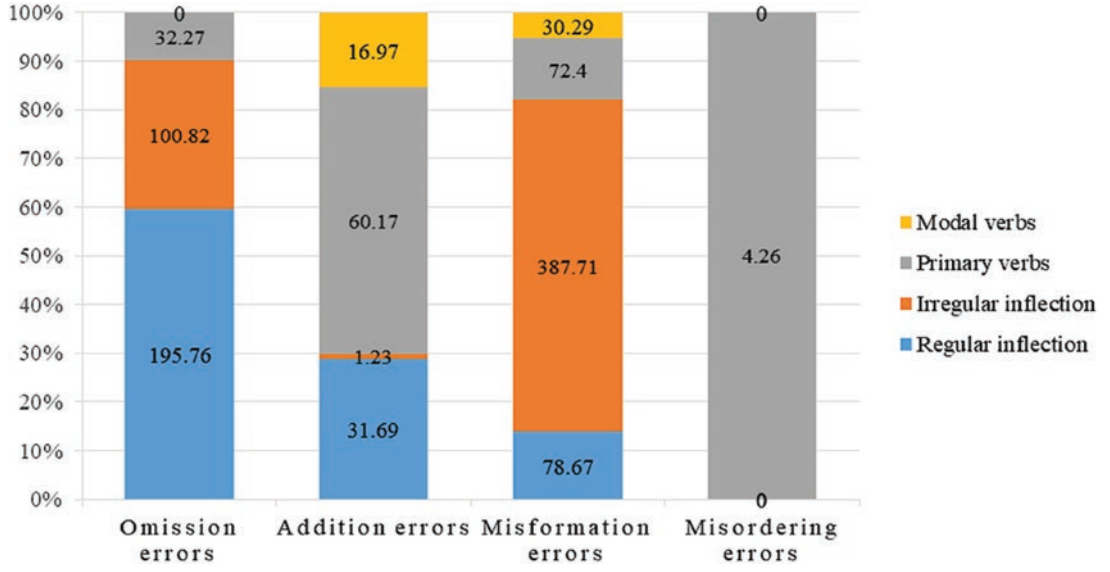


Figure 2. *Normed frequency of morphosyntactic errors with each type of verb*

Regarding the omission errors concerning regular inflections, these errors may reflect students' difficulty in recognizing time markers and aligning verb forms with sentence structure. For example, in Excerpt 4.1, the phrase "last summer" serves as a time marker for simple past tense, requiring the verb "travel" to be in past tense (-ed). In Excerpt 4.2, the student seemingly failed to produce the passive voice structure of the sentence with the auxiliary "be" and a past participle verb, resulting in omission errors. Concerning irregular inflections, in Excerpt 4.3, the verb "set" was positioned at the beginning of the adverbial clause, requiring it to be in present progressive form (-ing). In reference to primary verb omission errors, Excerpt 4.4 highlighted a case where a student omitted the required "be" verbs in passive voice constructions, despite the grammatical requirement to include them.

Excerpt 4.1: I **travel* (travelled) by plane last summer. (S1-T5)
Excerpt 4.2: It is often *call (called) /a highland city because it is *surround (surrounded) by mountains. (S3-T3)

Excerpt 4.3: Before *set (setting) off, I packed up my things early and felt excited. (S3-T5)

Excerpt 4.4: But we didn't arrive until noon because the bus *broke (was broken). (S19-T5)

In contrast to omission errors, the pattern of addition errors showed notable distinctions. Primary verbs were consistently overused, with a frequency of 60.17 instances, while irregular verbs were seldom erroneously added, occurring only 1.23 times. Following primary verbs, the addition of regular lexical verb inflections was the second most frequent, with 31.69 occurrences. Modal verb errors ranked third, constituting nearly one-third of the primary verb errors, with 16.97 instances.

Regarding addition errors, in Excerpt 4.5 to illustrate regular inflection, the student utilized "and" to link two grammatically similar items. This resulted in the conjunction connecting the verbs "call" and "ask" after the preposition "to." Consequently, since "call" was in its base form, the subsequent verb "ask" should have been in its base form as well. In the context of irregular inflection addition errors, as seen in Excerpt 4.6, a similar issue occurred where "and" was used to connect grammatically identical expressions. However, the student erred in utilizing the verb "tell" without its base form.

Excerpt 4.5: Anna's first step was to call Mary and *asked (ask) for assistance. (S28–T6)

Excerpt 4.6: They taught me how to create unique lanterns and *told (tell) me about the fairy tale of the Moon Goddess. (S19-T3)

Concerning primary verb addition errors, as illustrated in Excerpt 4.7, the student might apply prior knowledge of making direct wh-word questions into this case; specifically, he/she redundantly placed the primary verb "did" in front of the subject "I" in a wh-clause "what I expected". Regarding modal verb addition errors, instances of superfluous modal verbs of ability emerged. As shown in Excerpt 4.8, the unnecessary inclusion of "can" created ambiguity in the sentence's intended meaning. The sentence seemingly conveyed that the family visited various places in the following days, making the addition of "can" redundant and introducing unintended uncertainty. These findings partially support H. Nguyen's (2020) analysis, indicating that many students may experience difficulty with the simple past tense, leading to confusion. Additionally, Gayo and Widodo (2018) highlight that students tend to add linguistic features leading to error-prone utterances in English, with such addition errors primarily manifesting at the morphological rather than syntactic level. In the realm of regular lexical verb inflections, this study echoes Zainuddin's (2016) discovery of the redundant addition of "-s/es" morphemes to verbs following plural nouns, thereby affecting subject-verb agreement.

Excerpt 4.7: Because I prepared very well for the exam, the result was not what *did ("remove") I expected. (S24-T4)

Excerpt 4.8: In the following days, my family *can ("remove") go to many places: Yang Bay resort, Vinpearl, Thap Ba Ponagar, etc. (S7-T3)

With regards to misformation errors, irregular lexical verb inflections inclined to exhibit the highest frequency (387.71 occurrences). Specifically, regular lexical verb inflections and primary verbs were misformed with 78.67 and 72.4 instances, respectively. Conversely, the morphosyntactic aspect of modal verbs was the least frequently misapplied, with 30.29 instances.

Regarding misformation errors of regular inflections, in Excerpt 4.9, the student erroneously chose the wrong participle form of the verb "wait." The first clause was a reduced form of an adverb clause, and two clauses of this sentence shared the same underlying subject "Anna"; thus, the verb "wait" needed adhering to the rule of using present participles "waiting" after the joining word after (Danielson & Hayden, 1973).

Excerpt 4.9: After *waited (waiting) for forty-five minutes, Anna's father came to pick her up, she was happy. (S7-T6)

Concerning misformation errors of irregular inflections, Excerpt 4.10 demonstrates the student's failure to differentiate between tenses. It is important to note that this grammatical feature may not have been explicitly covered in instruction. However, the instance was still classified as an error based on standard grammatical conventions. Several misformation errors of irregular inflections were found evident in subsequent excerpts. In Excerpt 4.11, the student seemed to encounter difficulty applying the passive voice structure to utilize the past participle verb of "take" in the verb phrase "is taken." This structure, as elucidated by Larsen-Freeman and Celce-Murcia (2015), requires a form of the "be" verb and a past participle form of main verbs. In Excerpt 4.12, the student might experience difficulty in the basic rules of negative statements by placing a bare-infinitive verb of "feel" after an auxiliary verb with "not," like "didn't". In Excerpt 4.13, the student unsuccessfully employed the irregular lexical verb inflection of "keep," forming it improperly with a regular form "keeped" instead of its irregular form "kept," despite recognizing the requirement of inflecting the main verb "keep" in the passive voice structure.

Excerpt 4.10: Because the air in Sapa was quite cold, we *have (had) prepared warm clothes such as scarves, sweaters. (S7-T5)

Excerpt 4.11: The first step is *took (taken) when children receive their lucky money in a small red envelope. (S1-T2)

Excerpt 4.12: Everyone greeted us warmly that we didn't *felt (feel) like strangers. (S29-T5)

Excerpt 4.13: It was *keeped (kept) traditionally. (S5-T2)

With regards to misformation errors of primary verbs, the student was most likely to struggle with subject-verb agreement (Excerpt 4.14). The verb "were" was incorrect in this sentence as it disagreed with the singular noun "food." Therefore, the correct verb should have been in a singular form "was."

Excerpt 4.14: The food they made *were (was) very salty and I couldn't eat it. (S3-T1)

Respecting misformation errors of modal verbs, a typical error is demonstrated in Excerpt 4.15, where the student unequally applied the past tense for a sequence of events in a statement. The modal verb "can" was erroneous in this sentence as it did not agree in tense with the preceding verb "was," which was in the past tense. Consequently, the correct verb form in this sentence would be "could," the past tense form of "can."

Excerpt 4.15: When I was 10 years old, it was a shame that I *can (could) never forget. (S5-T4)

At the morphological level, the results in this study align with Purinanda and Sutrisno's (2022) observation of a high frequency of misformed inflections. Concerning syntactical errors,

this corresponds with Gayo and Widodo's (2018) and Purinanda and Sutrisno's (2022) findings, which noted errors in verb and "be" misformation for passive voice constructions and tenses, as well as misformations related to verb tense and subject-verb agreement. This finding aligns partially with Padilla and Padilla's (2021) conclusion that faulty verb tense is a major morphosyntactic error and with Issa et al. 's (2025) report that such errors accounted for 58% of all cases.

As for misordering errors, the students rarely committed regular and irregular lexical verb inflections and modal verbs in their compositions. However, primary verbs were often misplaced, with an instance standing at 4.16. These typical errors occurred because students appeared to struggle with subject-verb inversion in indirect questions. They might apply previously accumulated knowledge in constructing direct wh-word questions.

> Excerpt 4.16: "It was eleven in the evening, and Anna didn't know where *was she (she was)." (S2–T6)

Comparably, Gayo and Widodo (2018) also find primary verbs in students' descriptive essays. As Padilla and Padilla (2021) explain, such errors often stem from the incorrect placement of morphemes or groups of morphemes within an utterance. Similarly, Purinanda and Sutrisno (2022) also find that misordering errors typically occur at the syntactic level due to ambiguity in the relationships between elements within a phrase or clause. These findings align with Dizon Gatchalian (2025), noting that such errors reflect students' misunderstanding of grammatical rules governing subject–verb agreement, especially in complex sentences. Our findings support previous research indicating that L2 students often exhibit verb errors in narrative writing due to challenges in tense control and verb sequencing (Hayati et al., 2011).

It is worth noting that our study focusing on narrative texts inherently presented the challenges in tense control and verb sequencing. As our data were collected through timed written tasks, the observed errors in student written texts might reflect task-induced performance constraints rather than adequately representing students' underlying grammatical competence. Linguistic accuracy in EFL learners' writing, as Khoram (2025) notes, can be modulated by task difficulty. Given the complexity of narrative writing, an in-depth analysis into the influence of narrative structures on verb errors in L2 student writing would provide evidence of specific impact of genre.

Causative Factors of Morphosyntactic Errors of Verbs in EFL Undergraduates' English Compositions

In order to describe causative factors from the analysis of learners' written texts, rather than definitive evidence of underlying cognitive processes, we identified the error sources of intralingua and interlingual interference based on Dulay et al.'s (1982) Surface Strategy Taxonomy and interpreted them as follows.

Intralingual Interference

The prominent morphosyntactic errors of verbs, as presented in Table 1, could be attributed to intralingual interference, accounting for 1,596 errors (75%). This finding may result from intralingual factors that possibly obstruct students from recognizing the relationships between words within L2 sentences. Once students have begun to absorb components of the new system, as Hayati et al. (2011) explain, intralingual transfer generalization increases inside the target language.

Under the category of intralingual factors, as shown in Table 2, the errors caused by the false concept hypothesized (FCH) were evidently the most influential determinant of students'

Table 1. *Number of morphosyntactic verb errors by predetermined causative factors*

Causative factors	Instances of verb errors	Percentages
Intralingual interference	1,596	75%
Interlingual interference	536	25%
Total number	2,132	100%

Table 2. *Number of morphosyntactic verb errors by intralingual factors*

Intralingual factors	Frequency	Percentages
Overgeneralization (OV)	178	11%
Ignorance of rule restriction (IRR)	189	12%
Incomplete application of rules (IAR)	319	20%
False concept hypothesized (FCH)	910	57%
Total number	1,596	100%

errors. The verb errors might reflect incomplete application of rules were much fewer, despite being the second-highest intralingual cause. The remaining factors, overgeneralization, and ignorance of rule restriction, had almost comparable proportions.

Such FCH errors, as Richards (1971) explains, could stem from an inadequate grasp of distinctions in the target language, leading students to logically yet incorrectly conclude certain rules (Corder, 1981). Numerous misformation and omission errors may be attributed to this factor. Firstly, misformation and omission of regular and irregular lexical verb inflections, omission of primary verbs, and misformation of primary and modal verbs were closely linked to students' difficulty in distinguishing the appropriate use of different tenses. According to error analysis, students may misinterpret time markers as indicators of tense, as exemplified in Excerpts 4.17, 4.18, and 4.21 (see Appendix B). Another specific scenario,

> Excerpt 4.20: But unfortunately her phone ran out of battery when she *sat (was sitting) on the bus. (S11-T6)

As seen in Excerpt 4.20, occurred when a sentence described actions that were in progress when something else happened; thus, the past continuous tense should have been applied in the dependent clause instead of the simple past tense. Secondly, several misformation instances of past tense verbs were related to spelling errors, as shown in Excerpt 4.19. These findings support Gayo and Widodo's (2018) claim which proved that FCH resulted in the misformation of irregular verbs in the written compositions of students. Evidently, Richards' (1971) investigation into the effects of FCH on students' ability to differentiate between tenses revealed that students exhibited confusion about tenses, as evidenced by their improper verb inflections.

As for ignorance of rule restriction (IRR), this category refers to the use of grammar rules in situations where they are not correctly followed, potentially resulting in numerous addition errors. For instance, in Excerpt 4.22, redundancy of tense-related primary verbs or inflections

occurred. One noticeable example was when students unsuccessfully applied the rules of using "and" to connect two or more grammatically equal elements, leading to the surplus addition of irregular lexical verb inflections, such as the verb "tell" in Excerpt 4.23. This finding echoes Gayo and Widodo's (2018) observations that students unnecessarily inflected verbs due to not adhering to the rules of accordance with the subject. This finding is consistent with Richards' (1971) explanation that students struggle to comply with the limitations of certain structures.

Regarding overgeneralization (OV), this factor can refer to the student's tendency to apply target language norms where they are not justified. Excerpts 4.24 and 4.25, showed students redundantly placing and misordering primary verbs in front of subjects in noun clauses with a wh-question word, potentially relating to applying prior knowledge of making direct wh-word questions to this case. These findings are not entirely congruent with previous studies. While Gayo and Widodo (2018) analyzed this factor's role in triggering superfluous addition of inflections after a modal verb, Hariri (2012) and Ramadhan et al. (2018) indicated that OV resulted in omission of regular inflection, causing disagreement of subject and verb. Remarkably, these findings are supported by instances of OV given by Hummel (2014) who emphasizes the prevalence of overapplication of the –ed past tense marker on verbs that do not conform to the general rule, a phenomenon known as overregularization, as exemplified in the utterance "I eated" instead of "I ate".

Misformation errors tentatively attributed by overgeneralization (OV) and false concept hypothesized (FCH) were identified using the established error-analysis framework adopted in this study. While these categories capture the observable pattern of rule extension beyond appropriate contexts, SLA research suggests that the underlying mechanism may not be rule-based generalization alone. Usage-based accounts propose that learners also extend inflectional forms through analogy based on frequent surface patterns and stored examples (Bybee, 2008). Such analogy-driven pattern learning can influence written production. This perspective is particularly relevant for Vietnamese learners, whose first language lacks inflectional morphology and who may rely more on surface-form pattern recognition than morphological structure when producing English verb forms. Empirical work on Vietnamese students' morphological awareness reports limited sensitivity to internal morphological structure, which may contribute to misformed inflectional patterns (Nguyen, 2021).

Relating to the incomplete application of rules (IAR), Excerpt 4.26 presents students' failure to fully develop a structure, potentially leading to most omission errors.

Excerpt 4.26: This coffee shop * (is) in district 12, Ho Chi Minh city. (S7-T1)

This is a typical case where several students omitted the main verb in sentences, especially the auxiliary "be" verbs. Secondly, IAR might result in insufficient production of the passive structure due to a deficit of the "be" verbs as primary verbs or omission of inflections for participles, as seen in Excerpts 4.27, 4.28, and 4.30. Finally, another case was related to subject-verb disagreement as a result of omission of inflections; in other words, a verb was not conjugated to suit its subject in Excerpt 4.29 (e.g., singular noun, third person, indefinite noun). Similarly, Gayo and Widodo (2018) and Ramadhan et al. (2018) acknowledge the deleterious influence of IAR on the omission of the main verb, especially the "be" verbs, resulting in subject-verb disagreement. These findings are also confirmed by Richards's (1971) examples of errors triggered by IAR, which mainly revolve around omissions of parts of speech in sentences.

Interlingual Factor

A smaller proportion of morphosyntactic errors in verb usage, as presented in Table 1, was found to be ascribed to interlingual interference as compared to intralingual factors. This

finding can reveal a minority of errors potentially caused by students' L1 (Myles, 2015), i.e., Vietnamese language in this study. Appendix C summarizes typical errors possibly resulting from Vietnamese transfer. A primary obstacle for Vietnamese students was seemingly their difficulty in grasping the concept of tense. Excerpts 4.31, 4.32, and 4.36 illustrate how Vietnamese could influence students' struggles with tense usage. The verb errors were prevalent in modal verbs and primary verbs. Additionally, the students tended to overlook time markers indicating past tense, leading to the omission or misuse of past tense verb inflections, as demonstrated in Example 4.36. In line with research conducted by H. Nguyen, (2020), errors related to verbal inflection, particularly concerning tenses, were frequently observed in student compositions.

The somewhat expected results revealed that Vietnamese students were likely to face challenges in ensuring subject-verb agreement. The students' difficulties with tense marking and subject–verb agreement could result from a tense-related system in Vietnamese language. Unlike English, Vietnamese language, as Cao (1998) notes, is deemed to lack a clearly defined tense system, where tense and aspect are typically inferred from context of language use, which is not strictly subject-prominent. This disparity was found in Excerpt 4.33, where a singular subject, "a car," is paired with a plural verb, "come," highlighting the difficulty in aligning subjects and verbs accurately. N. Nguyen (2020) highlights variations in subject-verb agreement between English and Vietnamese verbs, noting that Vietnamese verbs remain unchanged for person and number. Additionally, excerpts 4.34 and 4.35 illustrate how Vietnamese interference could contribute to errors in verb morphology because students may struggle to inflect verbs correctly, particularly in passive voice constructions and adverbial clauses

Conclusion

The study revealed a high prevalence of morphosyntactic errors in verb usage among EFL undergraduates, especially misformation errors such as incorrect irregular verb inflections. The findings demonstrated that omission errors (missing inflections) and addition errors (wrong tense use) were also notable, while misordering errors, though rarer, involved misplaced verbs in clauses with wh-questions. This study extends previous research by examining less-studied verb structures such as omission of "-ing" or participle forms in adverbial clauses, redundant modals, and errors in noun clauses with wh-words. It provides new value by applying the Surface Strategy Taxonomy to systematically categorize these verb errors. The study also identified interlingual and intralingual factors as primary causes. Vietnamese interference led to omission and misformation errors in tenses and agreement. Among intralingual causes, false concept hypothesized (FCH) had the strongest impact, while the other intralingual factors contributed less. Unlike broader past studies, this work focuses specifically on verb errors in narrative writing, offering detailed insights into how these errors arise.

These findings offer several pedagogical implications. Teachers should design targeted morphosyntactic exercises that directly address common verb-related errors. Exercises such as tense transformation drills, verb form correction in short narratives, and clause reordering activities can help students internalize grammatical rules through repeated, meaningful practice. Given the participants' elementary proficiency, a rule-based approach may be especially effective for consolidating understanding (Gamon et al., 2013). In addition, feedback coding systems, such as ORI for omission, can help students notice recurring errors and apply rules more independently.

For research implications, the findings on Vietnamese influence in English verb morphosyntactic errors in this study can contribute to the broader literature on L2 verb errors. Although L1 influence has been well recognized in previous learner corpus research, studies rarely examine Vietnamese students, focusing instead on languages such as French, German, Japanese,

or Taiwanese as listed in Gilquin's (2015) chapter. This study therefore can add to the current body of literature by profiling English verb errors made by Vietnamese students through key contrasts between the two languages.

Future research should address some limitations of the present study. The use of convenience sampling and the timing of data collection shortly after midterm assessments may limit the generalizability of the study. Subsequent studies could adopt random sampling and longitudinal designs to capture more stable developmental patterns of verbs in various writing genres. Another concern relates to the writing tasks which were based on scaffolded, form-focused narrative prompts administered under time constraints. The profile of certain verb error types might reflect task-induced performance pressure rather than students' underlying grammatical competence. The narrative genre itself could also impose specific linguistic demands, such as chronological sequencing, sustained past-time reference, and tense shifting, which may have contributed to the genre-specific issues as observed in this study. The use of diverse writing tasks in real-world genres would reveal students' morphosyntactic errors under different communicative pressures. In addition, error analysis, as Brown (2014) notes, can overemphasize students' products. It would be fruitful to triangulate data with process-oriented data such as learner interviews or stimulated recall for plausible inferences of underlying cognitive processes. Future research should also further examine the roles of teaching materials, pedagogical approaches, and other contextual factors influencing learner error production.

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Appendices

Appendix A

A Sample of Student Paragraph

Hi, my name is ***. Me and my family went to Quang Nam 7 months ago during my summer vacation. We spended time visit a lot of old and historical places in Hoi An. We feel very comfortable when stayed here. We ate together special dishes such as: Phuong bread, Cao Lau, Quang noodles…. It's very delicious! The water here was cool and clean, the weather here was very comfortable not too hot and not too cold. We walked, went to the beach, and even had the opportunity to visited our grandparents and relatives after a year of not returned. I am very happy and looking forward to this holiday for a long time. I really enjoyed that vacation. I liked the most here is the poetic and peaceful scenery and the food here too. Because this is the ideal place to visit, and I will definitely come back here. (S8-T5).

Appendix B

Typical errors caused by intralingual factors

Factors	Error types	Excerpts and possible correct forms
False concept hypothesized (FCH)	Misformation of Irregular lexical verb inflection	Excerpt 4.17: Last summer, the trip to Da Nang with my family, this *is (was) the trip with many memories for me. (S2-T3)
	Misformation of modal verb	Excerpt 4.18: She goes (went) out with her friends last night but *can't (couldn't) be contacted. (S26-T6)
	Misformation of regular lexical verb inflection	Excerpt 4.19: And then I suddenly *triped (tripped) right in front of the classroom. (S7-T4)
	Omission of regular lexical verb inflection	Excerpt 4.20: But unfortunately her phone ran out of battery when she *sat (was sitting) on the bus. (S11-T6)
	Omission of irregular and regular lexical verb inflection	Excerpt 4.21: Last week, I heard you *say you *want to go to your old restaurant to eat. (S18-T1)
Ignorance of rule restriction (IRR)	Addition of primary verb	Excerpt 4.22: Then I do something else and suddenly I *am ("remove") screaming (scream) again. (S5-T1)
	Addition of irregular lexical verb inflection	Excerpt 4.23: They taught me how to create unique lanterns and *told (tell) me about the fairy tale of the Moon Goddess. (S19-T3)
Overgeneralization (OV)	Misordered primary verb	Excerpt 4.24: It was eleven in the evening, and Anna didn't know where *was she (she was) standing. (S17-T6)
	Addition of primary verb	Excerpt 4.25: Because I prepared the exam, the result wasn't what *did ("remove) I expect (expected). (S24-T4)
Incomplete application of rules (IAR)	Omission of irregular lexical verb inflection	Excerpt 4.26: This coffee shop * (is) in district 12, Ho Chi Minh city. (S7-T1)
		Excerpt 4.27: *See (Seen) from a distance, the water pours into a rainbow. (S4-T3)
	Omission of primary verb	Excerpt 4.28: Nam Du consists of the main island and many small islands, with clear blue sea, as well as a lighthouse from which the entire island can *seen (be seen). (S9-T5)
	Omission of regular lexical verb inflection	Excerpt 4.29: Banh Chung is a traditional food, everyone in the family *gather (gathers) to make it. (S5-T2)
		Excerpt 4.30: It is often *call (called) a highland city. (S3-T3)

Castledown

Appendix C

Typical errors caused by Vietnamese transfer

Misformation of modal verb	Excerpt 4.31: I knew this would be a problem, because I *will (would) become stuttering. (S27-T4)
Misformation of primary verb	Excerpt 4.32: I really *don't (didn't) understand why people passed by me not dare to stop. (S6-T6)
Omission of irregular lexical verb inflection	Excerpt 4.33: A car *come (comes) to pick you up at my house. (S1-T1)
	Excerpt 4.34: It is often *call (called) a highland city because it is *surround (surrounded) by mountains. (S3-T5)
	Excerpt 4.35: After *have (having) breakfast, we started our journey to discover Da Lat. (S13-T5)
Omission of regular lexical verb inflection	Excerpt 4.36: Last week, I heard you *say (said) you *want (wanted) to go to your old restaurant to eat. (S9-T1)