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MORPHOLOGICAL ERRORS IN WRITING OF UZBEK EFL LEARNERS

Abstract: The aim of the study was to uncover the types of morphological errors that Uzbek EFL students write in their IELTS (International English Language Test System) essays. A petrified morphological error is defined as an error that arises or has arisen from the morphological aspect of their EFL student learning to write English in the IELTS. The nature of this study is descriptive. The study revealed that the students made inflectional morphological errors. In addition, the IELTS essay writing materials of Uzbek students were analysed. The results showed that Uzbek EFL learners still made morphological errors when writing. This study concluded with several findings based on samples and corresponding suggestions for both EFL learners and instructors.

Key words: writing, morphological errors, morphemes, language, acquisition.
Language: English
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Introduction

Learning grammar is one of the biggest challenges for ESL learners. This is because, due to the influence of the learner's mother tongue, mistakes are made when it comes to the grammatical rules of the language being learned. This is especially common in the written language of a foreign language learner. That is, when it comes to expressing thoughts or a certain meaning in the written language, grammatical weaknesses show up. One of these errors concerns morphology.

Therefore, this study investigates different types of errors that English-as-a-foreign-language learners in Uzbekistan (EFL) commit in their academic English essays. The aim of the study is to find answers to the following questions by analysing the morphological errors in the written papers of EFL students. To what extent do the learners of EFL understand their subject in such a way that they can overcome the mistakes they make? How much attention should be paid to the language skills of EFL students?

Therefore, this study analyses EFL students' mistakes in using compound morphemes in writing, especially inflectional morphemes, and suggests ways to eliminate them. This is because most students commit certain errors because they usually focus on generating ideas. In this study, the materials of the

"IELTS Mock Test" conducted at the Opus Study Centre in the Uzbek city of Fergana were selected for analysis. Some writing materials were happily accepted by the director of the centre. Thus, the students' results from EFL were used to study their morpheme errors. The result shows that in the written language of EFL learners, there is a tendency to generalise one grammatical rule to another. In other words, learners were confused in converting the rules because English has different patterns than Uzbek morphology. At the same time, they are not able to distinguish morpheme errors from the grammatical peculiarities of learning a foreign language (English) and the peculiarities of the mother tongue (Uzbek). One of the most important points is that some students do not have sufficient knowledge of English morphology.

2. Literature review

Writing is a complex task that requires EFL learners to be able to perform different actions simultaneously (Flynn and Stainthorp, 2006). Writing involves many different elements such as vocabulary, spelling, grammar, etc., which is challenging for EFL learners. This is because it involves more than putting words and sentences together. By default, writing should convey a certain message or content. It needs to include many different elements such as vocabulary, spelling, grammar, etc. Cam and Tran (2017) attribute the main reason for writing errors to a lack of grammatical knowledge. In this sense, the practise of writing is a difficult process for foreign language learners. Thus, there are many aspects that EFL students need to master in order to avoid essay writing mistakes. Even after many years of study, foreign language learners have difficulty with linguistic rules that are fundamentally different from those of their mother tongue. The reason is that the student has done something wrong in the course of frequent foreign language learning. Duray (et al., 1982) distinguishes errors according to their cause: firstly, performance errors due to factors such as fatigue and inattention, and secondly, ability errors due to lack of knowledge of a particular language. Performance errors are classified as errors. The above definition states that an error is "the student's mistake at that stage and can be corrected. An error, on the other hand, is a linguistic mistake made by the pupil that cannot be corrected. The points of error that the student has incorporated into an utterance or sentence should be identified. Furthermore, some explain that errors can be self-correcting, but errors are systematically deviant (Gas and Selinker, 2001; Abushihab 2014). In other words, errors cannot be separated from the language learning process. During the learning process, the student makes some mistakes in the spoken sentences, the teacher corrects them, and the student memorises them. Even if the students make mistakes the next time, they will make fewer mistakes and they already know the correct ones. When this is the case, students are usually able to recognise the mistakes they have made and reproduce the correct ones.

Therefore, EFL students often make spelling mistakes related to morphology and many other aspects of language. Although it is human nature to make mistakes, these errors can be persistent due to factors such as lack of concentration in the foreign language classroom, lack of work on the errors or lack of use of effective language teaching methods by the teacher. As a result, these problems become apparent when analysing written utterances. For example, many EFL learners have problems choosing the correct word forms. The presence of morphological errors indicates that EFL learners do not fully understand the meaning and function of morphemes and morphological norms. To write well, morphology must be considered as one of several aspects of language (Bauer 2007). This is because language is a human communication system consisting of structure and order, from morpheme to speech (Richards and Schmidt, 2002).

Based on the above description, it can be defined that it is possible to divide error types into categories: Omission is the absence of an element that must occur in a well-formed utterance, for instance, *"John has two apple"* (correction: John has two apples). Addition, on the other hand, is indicated by the presence of *"unwanted"* items in sentences. This item does not appear in well-formed utterances, such as, *"I will coming"* (correction: I will come). Mis-formation is the use of wrong forms of certain morphemes or structures, such as *"Kate runned"* (correction: Kate ran). Mis-ordering is indicated by the incorrect placement of certain morphemes, for instance, *"Peter went yesterday to his grandma's house"* (correction: Peter went to his grandmother's house, yesterday).

Morphological Errors

In linguistics, morphology is the study of words, their formation, and their relationships to other words of the same language. In other words, morphology is the study of the smallest meaningful units and how they are formed into words. According to Aronoff and Fudeman (2011), morphology refers to the mental systems involved in word formation, or the branch of linguistics that deals with words, their internal structure, and formation. This idea was developed by Carstairs-McCarthy (2002). Morphology describes the area of grammar that deals with the structure of words, including the morphemes that make up words. Morphology deals with word formation, where words can be formed from the smallest units in the correct form, usually called morphemes.

There are different ways words are formed in English. The most obvious way is to add something to the beginning or end of the word. For example, you can add "–*ed*" to the end of a word to indicate a past

action ("play" becomes "play + ed=played"). Another example is the word "*un*believable".

The first two characters "*un-*" have meaning independently, just as the first character "*u-*" alone has no meaning. The morpheme "*un-*" means *"not"* or expresses a negative or opposite force in adjectives and their derived adverbs and nouns. The word "-*believe-*" is a free morpheme. In other words, a pause can be meaningful and stand alone as a word. The last part of the word can mean able, susceptible, suitable, prone, or given. "-*able*" is also a free morpheme because it can stand alone. Therefore, "*unbelievable*" has three morphemes: "*un-believe-able*". It should be noted that when the last part -*able* is added the letter -e disappeared from the part of -*believe*. However, there are other ways to form words. B. By changing the root form of the word. For example, "*drink*" becomes "*drank*" in the past tense, and "*woman*" becomes "*women*" in the plural. Some words have only one morpheme and cannot be broken down into smaller meaningful subparts.

A morpheme is sometimes a single syllable, but other times a morpheme may have several syllables. Aronoff and Fudeman (2011) state that a morpheme may consist of a word, such as *"apple"*, or a meaningful piece of a word, such as the "-ed" of "played", that cannot be divided into smaller meaningful parts. Since morphology deals with the formation and modification of words, it determines how words are composed into phrases and sentences. In morphology, a meaningful unit is called a

morpheme. A morpheme can be represented by one or two sounds or syllables. English morphology can be divided into free and bound morphemes. In morphology, morphemes are divided into two types known as free morphemes and combinatory morphemes. A morpheme that can stand on its own is known as a free morpheme and a morpheme that cannot stand on its own is known as a bound morpheme. A bound morpheme must be connected to another unit *(affix) prefix, suffix, and infix*. Affixes are also classified according to whether they are before or after the base form. An affix that precedes a base form is called a "prefix". Anything in the middle of the base form is called an infix. And everything that comes after the base form is called a "suffix". English morphemes can be divided into two categories: derived morphemes and inflectional morphemes. They have different functions. Derived morphemes create new words from the root and can significantly change its meaning, while inflectional morphemes fulfil grammatical functions and create new forms of the same word but with the same meaning. However, there are very few true infixes in English. For example, the suffix -er is a derivative suffix that turns a verb into a noun. "Punch" (v) + -er = puncher (n). Inflectional morphemes are added to create new forms of the same part of speech to indicate grammatical characteristics. For example, adding "–s" to noun-based words: "apples" (s) + -s = apples(n). In table 1, there are several examples of inflectional morphemes.

Table 1.

English Inflectional Morphemes		Added to	Examples
-s	plural	*Nouns*	*She has got two guita**r**s.*
-'s	possessive	*Nouns*	*Zeynep**'s** hair is long.*
-er	comparative	*Adjectives*	*Zeynep has long**er** hair than Derya.*
-est	superlative	*Adjectives*	*Zeynep has the long**est** hair.*
-s	3rd person singular present tense	*Verbs*	*Zeynep play**s** the guitar.*
-ed	past tense	*Verbs*	*She play**ed** the guitar at the party.*
-ing	progressive	*Verbs*	*She is play**ing** the guitar at the party*
-en	past participle*	*Verbs*	*She has tak**en** the guitar to the party.*

Source: Husein Oz, Oct 2014.

Ramadhan (2015) classified errors for refractive morphemes as plural forms of nouns -s omission of morpheme, noun plural -s added morpheme, incorrect formation of past tense of irregular verbs; omission of possessive morpheme, misuse of possessive morpheme, omission of third person present tense. Santoso (2017) also classified inflectional morpheme errors as plural inflexion, singular inflexion and

present inflexion. Morphological errors concern word affixes. This concerns both derived and inflected affixes (Whitaker 2010).

Morphological errors of EFL learners mostly manifest in the intermediate language. In relation to English, the errors usually occur because the student's first language (L1) EFL is impeded and he does not fully understand the English system of inflectional

morphemes. Some common morphological errors include plural markers (–s), possessive markers (–s), third singular markers (–s), past tense markers (–ed), Progressive markers (–ing), perfect and participle markers (–ed and –en), and comparative and superlative adjective makers (–er and –est). Thus, morphological errors made by students can lead to changes in traits and hinder the reader's interpretation of the essay. From the explanation above, errors in inflectional morpheme can distinguish include:

1. Omission in plural nouns: *–s/-es* morpheme as the absence of the *–s* plural suffix that must be attached to singular noun: *Andy has three apple* (correction: *Andy has three apples*);

2. Addition to plural nouns: *–s/-es* morpheme which is indicated by the presence of *–s* morpheme to singular noun: *Can you give me a hamburgers?* (Correction: *Can you give me a hamburger?*). A similar case also appears in double mark plurality by adding the *–s* morpheme to irregular plural nouns: *Peoples are coming to Korea.* (correction: *People are coming to Korea*). The other case is overgeneralization by adding the *–s* plural morpheme to uncountable nouns: *I have informations about Jeju island*. (correction: *I have information about Jeju island*).

3. The wrong formation of the past form of irregular verbs is the wrong use of the *–ed* past morpheme by adding the *–ed* past suffix to the irregular main verb. It also can be recognized as overgeneralization: She catched a bird yesterday (correction: She caught a bird yesterday).

4. Omission of the possessive *–s* morpheme could be divided into two types of errors: a) in which students omit the apostrophe: players uniforms (correction: players' uniforms); a player's uniform (correction: a player's uniform) and b) in which students omit the apostrophe and the *–s* morpheme: my teacher book (correction: my teacher's book).

5. Misuse of possessive *–s* morpheme by adding the *–„s* morpheme: speaking's club (correction: speaking club).

6. Omission of the 3rd person-present tense morpheme as the absence of *–s* morpheme that is added to the 3rd person verb in the present simple tense: Jane play tennis (correction: Jane plays tennis).

7. Omission of the morpheme *–er* in comparative adjective: I am smart than you (correction: I am smarter than you);

8. Omission of the morpheme *–est* in superlative adjective: I am smart in the class (correction: I am the smartest in the class);

9. Misformation of the morpheme *–er* in comparative adjective: This shirt expensiver than yours. (correction: This shirt is more expensive than yours);

10. Misformation of the morpheme *–est* in superlative adjective: I am the gooddest boy in my class. (correction: I am the best boy in my class).

3. Method

In this study, several essays were collected from students in an IELTS writing test conducted at the above language centre to test their language proficiency before the actual IELTS examination. The purpose of the IELTS writing test was to check the students' performance until the real IELTS exam in order to give them feedback and corrections. The essays helped to examine morphological errors. The learners who wrote the essays were between 18 and 22 years old and are preparing for the IELTS academic exam, which they will use to apply to universities overseas. The learners had been studying English since middle school (around the age of 12), but the public school curriculum did not provide enough lessons and time for this subject to improve their English skills. So they attended IELTS courses at various private English teaching centres. So their language skills varied: from Pre-Intermediate to Advanced. Therefore, the essays in this study were evaluated morphologically, and the study focused primarily on morphological errors to define the exact boundaries of the study.

4. Morphological error types in writing tasks.

The number of morphological errors and their types were attentively evaluated, and the errors were classified into categories according to the frequency of the occurrences which could be seen (Table 2).

Table 2.

No.	1	2	3
Type of Morphological Errors	Omission	Addition	Misformation

As Table 2 shows, learners committed three types of morphological errors. The errors occurred in all areas of morphology. The most noticeable type with the highest frequency of errors is omission. Most morphological errors were committed in omission, followed by addition, with fewer errors committed in addition in the writing materials. The fewest errors committed by learners were errors of form.

According to the study, the test takers committed morphological errors. Most of them were able to write English essays, but still, there are enough errors in the texts. Their errors are found at many different levels.

In the observed materials, the learners repeatedly made mistakes or errors. Many persistent errors have become fossilised errors. In this study, errors are categorised into different types: Omission (absence of an element that must occur in a well-written form), Addition (presence of an element that must not occur in a well-written form) and Misformation (use of the wrong morphological form). A description of each type follows.

1) Omission
(Omission of morpheme –s /–es in countable plural noun)

Omission errors are characterized by the omission of elements that must appear in a well-formed document. In this case, it has been found several mistakes belong to forming plurals. In general, to show a plurality of nouns in the English number system is used –s and –es morphemes. There are two ways of forming plurals.

First, regular plural nouns called overt morphemes, by adding –s and –es. e.g., student-students, story-stories.

Second, irregular plural nouns are called zero morphemes, such as man-men, and child-children. Here are the examples of the omission of morpheme –s and –es occurring in plural form:

E.g.: made up a third of *"viewer"*

Thus, the error occurs in the form of using the plural form of the noun. It seems, some learners wanted to write "made up a third of viewers" in English, but some others wrote, "made up a third of viewer". The word "viewer" must be written in the plural form, "viewers". The consideration is it refers to the previous word "a third of" which gives the plurality to the word "viewers" but one of the writings, there was a put singular form "viewer". They made an error because the morpheme –s was omitted in the word "viewer", it should be „a third of viewers".

The same condition is also found in other students' cases including:

E.g.: many *"kind"* of songs

Some of the writing materials have such sentence: "in reasonable price" (here the student did not use "a" article after "in". That's why "s" plural marker should be added to the word of "price".

Another example: for many *"traveller"*(The word of "many" should provide morpheme "s" to the word of "traveller").

Omission of morpheme –s / –es in the third person singular in the present tense.

Omission in inflectional morpheme –e and –es is also found in verbs, especially in regular verbs to form a simple present tense in the third person singular. It is called subject-verb agreement where a singular subject requires a singular verb, and a plural verb requires a plural verb. In the present tense third person singular (she/he/it) takes a singular verb that verb ends in –s or –es. So, most learners being investigated in this research omitted –s/-es for the third-person singular verb form in the present tense. Fewer students omitted the errors of this form.

For instance, "It *"show"* that"

Or, "*continuous usage of laptops or other electronic equipments "create" high risk of health issues"*.

The use subject third singular person (she/he/it) in simple present tense must be followed by singular verb. So, the English learners committed errors because they omitted the morpheme –s or – es in singular verbs. Here are the reconstructions:

1. E.g.: It shows that
2. E.g.: continuous usage of laptops or other electronic equipment create high risk of health issues

Omission of morpheme –s in possessive

The possessive form is used to show a relationship of belonging between one thing and another. To form the possessive, add apostrophe + s to the noun. The possessive of singular nouns is formed by adding an apostrophe and –s, and the possessive of plural nouns is formed by adding only an apostrophe, and by adding both an apostrophe and –s when it ends in a letter other than s. Here some examples again:

1. rapid increase in senior citizens numbers may put government into a trouble…

2. important role in youngsters life…

2) Addition
Addition of morpheme –s/–es in singular noun

As the opposite of omission, addition is characterized by the presence of an item that must not appear in well-formed writing. In this case, there are also several errors committed by the EFL students. There are some errors committed by them in forming singular noun forms. A singular noun is a noun that refers to one person, one place, one thing, or one idea. Singular nouns do not need to be attached to the morpheme –s/-es. Here are the examples of errors of addition morpheme –s/–es in singular form:

1. E.g.: to use public transports...
2. E.g.: I agree this views

In the examples above, the students added the morpheme –s at the end of the singular noun (transports, views). In this case, the morpheme –s should be omitted at the end of the singular noun (transport, view). Because in the first sentence meaning of the context demands singularity and the pronoun *"this"* demands the singular form of a noun after itself (e.g., 2). Here are the reconstructions:

E.g. 1: to use public transport...

E.g. 2: I agree this view…

Addition of morpheme –s/ –es in non-third person singular in the simple present tense

Error in addition to inflectional morpheme –e / –es is also found in verbs. In this case, some students add the morpheme –s/-es in infinitive verbs after the plural subject in the simple present tense. A singular subject requires a singular verb, and a plural verb requires a plural verb.

Addition plurality -s in the exceptional plural forms *(see the samples below)*

- communicating *peoples*
- who do different *researches*

Addition of morpheme –ing in Infinitive Verb

In this term, the error is related to the additional suffix –ing in a verb. In this case, the students use the verb +suffix -ing (the present continuous) in the present simple tense.

E.g.: do not speaking

You may also see the morphemic error in the usage of (verb + suffix + ing) after to "to speaking". The correct form of the verb should be an infinitive verb or main verb "speak". The reconstruction is: "do not speak...".

3) Mis-formation

Mis-formation of morpheme –en in the present simple tense

Mis-formation error occurs when the students chose the wrong form of a morpheme. In this case, the students commit some errors in choosing tenses. The students tend to choose present tense instead of past tense or past participle, especially irregular verbs: "It *shown* that (correction: It shows that)". Here, the errors occurred in the form of using a past participle verb. So, you may count those sentences as an error. Thus, the students commit some errors in choosing tenses. The EFL students tend to choose present participle instead of simple present tense or past tense. The students were confused about constructing sentences consisting of tenses. It happened because they did not find an equivalent tense or morphological feature in the Uzbek language.

5. Findings

The following three main points emerged from the above discussions:

1. The student EFL made a morphological error, especially in the use of inflectional morphemes. Students generally made three types of morphological errors: omission, addition, and malformation.

2. The student from EFL made a morphological error in using the morphemes -s/-es with plural nouns. Learners made many errors in forming plural nouns. The learners made mistakes because they did not really know the correct form.

3. Interference with the native language is one of the most basic mistakes that the learners made. It interferes with the English language in a way that greatly affects language production. For example, students often forgot the rules of inflectional morphology and formed crooked sentences. They may be familiar with grammar, but this knowledge does not occur to them when writing. In addition, lack of language skills, lack of pedagogical measures, and lack of opportunities to use English also contribute to the main causes of learners' fossilized errors.

6. Conclusion

The results of the study show that in addition to morphological errors, errors related to other language features, such as phonetics, syntax, and punctuation, also occur in essay writing. Thus, errors are made in the process of language learning. However, it is very important to identify the reasons why errors occur. Within the framework of this ban, the most frequent types of morphological errors in the written works of Uzbek students were identified: Omission, Addition, and Incorrect Formation. The study also showed that these errors occur mainly in inflectional morphemes. At the same time, there is an influence of native language on L2. The participants in this study were only adolescents, so further research is needed to determine the differences between children and early and late bilinguals in terms of morphological errors. Thus, the errors that students make in writing in English are often related to morphology. Morphology encompasses many aspects of language. Morphological errors were found in students' written work from EFL in the form of incorrect construction or disorganization.

Recommendations are also given to EFL instructors on the research results: it is necessary to change their own teaching methods based on the students' writing errors. In this case, feedback can be given after grading the essays. We conclude that the results will inform teachers on how to help their students write their essays better by understanding their students' writing weaknesses. Although this study was conducted on a very small scale, the results of the study point to effective solutions. In other words, solutions to such errors can be found by explaining intra- and/or interlanguage factors. It should be noted that these conclusions help predict or reduce morphological errors in EFL teaching and learning.

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Clarivate
Analytics *indexed*

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