

English writing errors among multilingual foreign language learners: A psycholinguistic approach

Dini Eka Maulida ^① , Madeleine Winday ^②, Gustianingsih ^③

^{①②③} Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

 diniekamaulida8@gmail.com

Abstract

This research investigates the types and sources of English writing errors among students and alumni from non-English foreign language departments, including German, French, Mandarin, Arabic, and Japanese. The study aims to bridge the gap in error analysis research which predominantly focuses on English majors. A descriptive qualitative method was employed, utilizing an Error Analysis (EA) framework. Data were collected from 10 spontaneous essays on the topic "Why did you choose your major?" and analyzed using Ellis's (1994) procedure and Dulay et al.'s (1982) surface strategy taxonomy. To ensure authenticity, participants were prohibited from using AI or translation tools. The findings reveal that misformation is the most dominant error type, accounting for 55% of the total findings, followed by omission (30%), addition (9%), and misordering (6%). This demonstrates that learners primarily struggle with accurate grammatical and lexical formations. Regarding error sources, the results show a significant dominance of intralingual interference (77%) over interlingual interference (23%). This leads to the conclusion that the participants' difficulties stem more from the inherent complexity of the English grammatical system and incomplete mastery of its rules than from native language interference. These results highlight a unique linguistic profile for multilingual learners, where developmental confusion outweighs mother-tongue influence. The study recommends that English instruction for foreign language majors should prioritize target language rules to mitigate internal linguistic confusion.

Keywords

error analysis, ESL, psycholinguistic, grammatical error

How to cite this article in APA format:

Maulida, D. E., Winday, M., & Gustianingsih, G. (2026). English writing errors among multilingual foreign language learners: A psycholinguistic approach. *Linguistics Initiative*, 6(2), 252-265. <https://doi.org/10.53696/27753719.62449>

Introduction

English contains four skills, reading, speaking, listening, then writing, which is considered the most complex skill, especially for non-native speakers as Indonesian (Ananda et.al, 2014; Ariyanti, 2016; Muhsin, 2016; Wahyuni, 2017; Mubarak & Budiono, 2022; Tantri et.al, 2023). Writing is a complex English language ability that needs a thorough thought process in order to successfully convert thoughts and emotions into a comprehensible written form. Students must practice a lot while keeping a solid command of grammar and diction in order to develop this ability and convey clear meaning (Jayanti, 2019; Fitria, 2020; Seddik, 2023; Fiaz & Rubab, 2024). Writing is a productive skill that requires constant practice and internalization, which sets it apart from receptive abilities like hearing (Mufidah & Islam, 2022). However, learners frequently run into a number of linguistic barriers that impede their writing competence as they work to master this useful skill.

Students encounter considerable difficulties when writing in English, which are mostly caused by a lack of vocabulary knowledge, problems with grammatical structure, and linguistic interference from their mother tongue (Alisa et al., 2019; Nasser, 2018; Wau, 2022; Hapsari et al., 2022). Unawareness of technical rules like punctuation, capitalization, and paragraph components, which frequently diverge significantly from the student native tongue, contributes to these challenges. This implies that writing mistakes are frequently a logical outcome of the cognitive attempt to harmonize two different linguistic systems rather than being purely unintentional. A more thorough theoretical explanation of what constitutes a linguistic error within the context of second language acquisition is required in light of the appearance of these deviations. Higher students in the non-English country tend to have particular difficulties in English writing (Azizah & Budiman, 2022).

Language errors are systematic deviations from the rules of a target language produced by second language (L2) learners. Richards (1971) defines an error as the use of a linguistic item that a native speaker would consider faulty. In the context of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), however, errors are viewed as essential indicators of the learner's interlanguage, a unique and evolving linguistic system that exists between the native language and the target language (Selinker, 1972). Taken together, SLA research supports the idea that, while not all error correction is equally effective, principled feedback on errors, especially when focused, timely, and linked to revision, can support acquisition and provide a strong empirical foundation for pedagogies that explicitly treat errors as learning opportunities rather than as purely negative phenomena (Ellis, 2008; Bitchener & Storch, 2016; Ferris, 2011; Li, 2017; Abdallah, 2026). To decode these patterns, researchers employ a specialized methodology known as Error Analysis (EA). Error Analysis, pioneered by Corder (1967, 1974), is a methodological approach that identifies, describes, and explains L2 learner errors by examining actual output. As a branch of applied linguistics, EA demonstrates that many errors reflect universal learning strategies rather than just mother-tongue interference (Richards & Schmidt, 2013).

One of the most widely utilized frameworks for describing these errors is the Surface Strategy Taxonomy proposed by Dulay et al. (1982). This taxonomy is instrumental in highlighting how learners modify surface structures by omitting, adding, substituting, or misordering elements. Based on this taxonomy, errors are categorized into four primary types: omission (missing a required element), addition (including unnecessary elements), misformation (using the wrong form of a morpheme or structure), and misordering (incorrect placement of a constituent). Beyond mere description, it is crucial to analyze the psychological and linguistic sources of these errors. Richards (1972) distinguishes between interlingual errors, which result from negative transfer (interference) from the mother tongue, and intralingual errors, which arise from faulty generalizations or incomplete learning of the target language rules themselves. Ultimately, this

comprehensive analysis allows researchers to determine whether a student's struggle is rooted in native language habits or is a natural developmental stage in their acquisition of English.

The significance of this research stems from its focus on a distinct demographic that remains underrepresented in the literature: active students and alumni from non-English foreign language departments, such as French, Mandarin, German, and Arabic. While much of the existing Error Analysis (EA) research centers on English majors or general student populations, this study investigates learners for whom English serves as a formal second language (L2) despite their primary academic focus being another foreign tongue. This unique linguistic position creates a complex environment where cross-linguistic transfer may arise not only from their mother tongue but potentially from the other foreign languages they are mastering. Moreover, because English instruction in these specialized departments is typically less intensive, certain error patterns may become more persistent over time. Understanding the systematic deviations produced by these multilingual learners is essential for developing more effective ESL curricula tailored to their specific needs. To provide a broader context for these findings, it is necessary to examine how previous studies have categorized and analyzed language errors across various learner profiles.

Numerous studies have been conducted to investigate learner errors in English writing. For instance, Batubara and Batubara (2025) investigated language errors from a psycholinguistic perspective, focusing on third-semester English students at an Islamic higher education institution. Their study utilized a descriptive qualitative method to analyze 312 errors found in students' essays and oral performances. The findings revealed that interlingual errors were the most dominant category (42.3%), primarily caused by the strong interference of the students' native language (Indonesian) into their English production. Furthermore, the researchers highlighted that these errors are deeply rooted in cognitive constraints, such as limited working memory capacity and disruptions during the formulation stage of speech production. The study concluded that such errors should be treated as essential indicators of interlanguage development rather than mere linguistic deficiencies.

Olimat & Al-Jamal (2022) investigated the phenomenon of native language interference in the writing of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Their research utilized a descriptive-analytical approach to examine 50 writing samples from Jordanian university students, focusing on how Arabic (L1) linguistic structures negatively transferred into English (L2). The findings identified several critical areas of interference, most notably in the misuse of articles, prepositions, and word order, as well as the literal translation of idioms and expressions from the mother tongue. The study concluded that these persistent errors stem from the structural differences between Arabic and English, suggesting that learners rely heavily on their L1 grammar as a compensatory strategy during the writing process.

Raissah & Aziz (2020) conducted an investigation into the interlingual and intralingual interferences present in the English writing of university students majoring in the English Language Education Department. By analyzing 20 argumentative essays, their study identified a total of 170 errors, with intralingual interference emerging as the more frequent source (61.76%) compared to interlingual factors (38.24%). The findings highlighted that learners struggled most with misformation and omission, particularly regarding subject-verb agreement and the use of articles, which were often attributed to overgeneralization and incomplete application of target language rules. The researchers emphasized that these errors reflect the learners' evolving strategies in internalizing the complex grammatical system of English.

Most previous research has focused mainly on students majoring in English. As a result, there is still much to learn about the types of errors made by multilingual learners from other language departments, such as German, French, Mandarin, Arabic, and Japanese. This study adopts a different approach by examining current students and alumni from these backgrounds who use

English as their second language. By focusing on this group, the research aims to better understand how different language environments affect writing skills. The main goals are to identify four types of language errors, omission, addition, misformation, and misordering—in English essays written by these learners, and to explore whether these errors come from differences between languages or from challenges within English itself.

Methods

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach integrated with an Error Analysis (EA) framework to interpretively identify and classify linguistic deviations in written texts. The informants were selected through purposive sampling, consisting of ten active students and alumni from non-English language departments, specifically German, French, Mandarin, Arabic, and Japanese majors. To ensure data validity, participants had to meet specific criteria: they must treat English as a second language (L2), have completed at least two semesters of English courses, and be willing to produce an essay independently. Data collection was conducted by instructing informants to write a 100-200 word essay on the topic "Why did you choose your major?" to elicit spontaneous production. To maintain the authenticity of their interlanguage, participants were strictly prohibited from using AI tools or translation software. The raw data were collected via WhatsApp messages, which were then screenshotted and transcribed verbatim for analysis without any prior feedback or corrections.

Table 1. Characteristics of Participants and the Essays Used as the Data Source

Participant	Status	Department	Essay Length	Total Errors
P1	Alumni	German Education	161 words	15
P2	Alumni	German Education	140 words	9
P3	Alumni	France Education	181 words	11
P4	Alumni	Arabic Literature	200 words	15
P5	Student	Arabic Literature	110 words	10
P6	Alumni	Japanese Literature	100 words	9
P7	Alumni	Mandarin	155 words	7
P8	Alumni	Arabic Literature	101 words	3
P9	Student	France Education	108 words	6
P10	Student	Mandarin	190 words	15

The analytical procedure follows the formal steps of Error Analysis as proposed by Ellis (1994), which refines Corder's (1974) original model. The process began with the collection of a sample of learner language, followed by the identification of errors, where every deviation from standard English grammar and syntax was meticulously marked. Subsequently, the description of errors involved classifying each identified deviation into the four categories of surface strategy taxonomy: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. To support the qualitative description, simple frequency counts and percentages were calculated. The final stage was the explanation of errors, which involved a deep discussion of the possible sources of these deviations, specifically interlingual interference from the informants' diverse foreign language backgrounds or intralingual factors, to provide a comprehensive contextual understanding of their linguistic development.

This study employed investigator triangulation and member checking as validation strategies to enhance the rigor and trustworthiness of the findings. In the investigator triangulation process, two researchers independently examined each essay, identified linguistic errors, and classified them according to the surface strategy taxonomy (omission, addition, misformation, and

misordering) as well as their possible sources (interlingual or intralingual). The independent coding was then compared, and any discrepancies in error identification or classification were discussed systematically until consensus was achieved based on the definitions proposed by Corder (1974) and Ellis (1994). This procedure reduced individual researcher bias and increased the consistency of the coding process.

Member checking was conducted after the preliminary analysis by returning the identified errors and their contextual interpretations to the respective participants. Rather than asking participants to evaluate grammatical correctness, they were invited to confirm whether the researchers had accurately understood the intended meanings of their original sentences and whether the interpretations reflected what they had intended to express. Any clarification provided by the participants was considered during the final interpretation of the data. The combination of investigator triangulation and member checking strengthened the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the qualitative findings by ensuring that both the coding process and the interpretation of learner language were systematically verified.

Results

Based on the analysis of ten essays written by active students and alumni from non-English foreign language departments, this study reveals that English errors still occur in the written production of learners with a linguistic academic background. The findings demonstrate that these errors can be examined not only in terms of their surface forms, namely omission, addition, misformation, and misordering, but also in terms of their sources, particularly interlingual and intralingual transfer. Among the four categories of error forms, misformation emerged as the most frequent, indicating that the participants mainly struggled with inaccurate grammatical and lexical formations. In terms of error sources, intralingual errors were found to be more dominant than interlingual ones, suggesting that the participants' difficulties were more closely related to incomplete mastery of English rules than to direct influence from their first language, which is Bahasa Indonesia. These findings provide a clearer picture of how English is produced by learners who are no longer actively engaged in studying or using it, and they offer an important basis for discussing both the patterns and the underlying causes of the errors identified in this study.

A. Classification of Errors: A Surface Strategy Perspective

By focusing on the physical modification of target forms, Dulay et al. (1982) categorize errors into four distinct types: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. As presented in Table 2, the data reveals that misformation is the most dominant type of error, occurring 55 times (55%), which indicates that students frequently use the wrong form of a morpheme or structure. This is followed by omission with 30 occurrences (30%), where students often leave out mandatory elements of a sentence. Addition and misordering represent the less frequent categories, with 9% and 6% respectively. This descriptive approach is widely utilized in error analysis as it provides an objective framework for identifying how learners' utterances deviate from target language norms. According to Ellis (1997), classifying errors in these ways helps diagnose learning problems and plot changes in error patterns over time, offering deeper insights into the students' interlanguage development.

Table 2. Frequency of Form of Language Errors by Non-English Department

Participant	Category				Total
	Ommi	Add	Misform	Misorder	
P1-GE	2	3	9	1	15
P2-GE	4	1	4	0	9
P3-FE	5	0	6	0	11
P4-AL	4	0	10	1	15
P5-AL	4	0	4	2	10
P6-JL	2	1	5	1	9
P7-M	1	3	3	0	7
P8-AL	2	0	1	0	3
P9-FE	2	0	3	1	6
P10-M	4	1	10	0	15
Frequency	30	9	55	6	100
Percentage	30%	9%	55%	6%	100%

A.1 Omission

The category of omission is characterized by the absence of an obligatory item or grammatical element that must appear in a well-formed and complete sentence. According to Ellis (1997), omission occurs when a learner leaves out a required component of an utterance, such as an auxiliary, an inflection, or a preposition. In the present study, omission was found to be a significant issue, with 30 occurrences (30%) identified in the participants' writing. Table 2 shows that P3-FE (Participant 3 from French Education Department) is the dominant who did the omission. This high frequency suggests that many learners tend to prioritize the delivery of core semantic meaning, focusing on the "message", while neglecting morphological elements that are perceived as minor but are structurally crucial in English syntax. These errors were prominently observed in the omission of mandatory components such as articles (a, an, the), auxiliary verbs (copula 'be'), contraction marks (apostrophes), and plural markers (-s suffix).

- (1) *So i chose learn German in collage.*
- (2) *Long time ago when i just graduated from senior high school.*
- (3) *I happy have a lot friends and more aducate about Islam.*

From the examples above, The three examples provided above demonstrate the omission of crucial grammatical elements necessary for the structural integrity of English sentences. In sentence (1), the learner omits the infinitive marker "to" after the verb chose (chose to learn), which is syntactically required to connect two verbs. In sentence (2), there is an omission of the indefinite article "A" at the beginning of the temporal phrase (A long time ago), which functions as a necessary noun determiner. Furthermore, sentence (3) exhibits multiple omissions, specifically the auxiliary verb or copula be "am" (I am happy) and the preposition "of" within the quantifier phrase (a lot of friends). These missing elements result in syntactically incomplete constructions, even though the core intended meaning remains somewhat accessible to the reader.

A.2 Addition

Addition is the inverse of omission, characterized by the presence of an unnecessary element that should not appear in a well-formed sentence. According to Dulay, et al. (1982), in addition as learner language often contains extra forms that deviate from target structures. As presented in Table 2, addition was the least frequent category in this study, occurring 9 times (9%). These

errors prominently manifested as the use of double conjunctions (e.g., even though... but) or the redundant insertion of articles before specific languages or subjects. It is proven by the data display on table 2 which German Education (P1-GE) and Mandarin (P7-M) students dominantly did addition. Such findings indicate that learners occasionally over-elaborate their intended meaning or apply grammatical rules in inappropriate contexts due to an incomplete mastery of the target language's syntax.

- (4) *The German is not difficult to pronounce*
- (5) *But as a to tourism or a teacher, teaching this language offers many benefits.*
- (6) *why i'm choose this major (japanese literature) started from my brother worked in japan.*

The three examples provided above are classified as addition errors because they involve the insertion of unnecessary grammatical elements that deviate from standard English structures. In sentence (4), the definite article "The" is redundantly added before the name of a language (German), which typically does not require an article unless referring to a specific noun. Sentence (5) shows an unnecessary prepositional addition with "to" before the noun (to tourism), which disrupts the phrase's function as a complement. Furthermore, sentence (6) demonstrates the erroneous insertion of the auxiliary verb or copula be "m" (i'm choose) before a main verb in the present tense, reflecting a strategy of overgeneralization where the learner inappropriately applies continuous or nominal sentence rules to a simple verbal structure. The errors indicate that learners occasionally over-elaborate their sentences or misapply grammatical rules in contexts where they are not required.

A.3 Misformation

Misformation occurs when a learner provides the required grammatical element but uses the incorrect morpheme or structure. As shown in Table 2, misformation is the most dominant error category in this study, occurring 55 times (55%). P4-AL and P10-M are the dominant who did misformation on their essay. These errors prominently manifest in subject-verb agreement, inconsistent verb tenses, and word class inaccuracies (e.g., using a verb instead of a noun). The high frequency of misformation suggests that the participants' primary difficulty lies not in omitting or adding elements, but in the complex process of selecting and forming the appropriate English structures required by specific grammatical contexts.

- (7) *After do my research, I chose the French Education major.*
- (8) *But i think this what my journey was wrote by God.*

The example (7) and (8) above are classified as **misformation** because the learners have provided the required grammatical elements but used the incorrect morpheme or structural form. In sentence (7), a morphological error occurs in the verb form following the preposition *after*; the learner uses the base form (*after do*) instead of the required gerund form (*after doing*). Meanwhile, sentence (8) demonstrates an error in the formation of the passive voice; the learner uses the simple past form (*was wrote*) instead of the obligatory past participle (*was written*). The high frequency of this category, totaling **55 occurrences (55%)**, indicates that while learners recognize the need for certain grammatical structures, they continue to struggle with selecting the correct word forms required by specific English syntactic contexts.

A.4 Misordering

Misordering is characterized by the incorrect placement of linguistic elements within a sentence structure. According to Dulay, et al. (1982), these errors occur when a learner provides the correct morphemes but arranges them in an unacceptable sequence. As presented in Table 2, misordering was found to be the least frequent category, occurring only 6 times (6%). In the

participants' data, these errors prominently manifested in the construction of noun phrases that still followed the Indonesian "Diterangkan-Menerangkan" (DM) pattern, as well as the unnatural placement of adverbs. Table 2 also shows that P5-AL who did the misordering on the essay dominantly. These findings indicate a strong interlingual interference, where learners directly transfer Indonesian syntactic structures into English, resulting in sentences that remain intelligible but are structurally unconventional.

(9) I want to **more** understand about Arabic language.

(10) I'm very grateful to be **japanese literature graduated**.

The two examples above are classified as misordering because they involve the incorrect placement of words within English syntactic sequences, often influenced by Indonesian structural patterns. In sentence (9), the adverb "more" is incorrectly placed between the to-infinitive (to more understand), whereas it should naturally follow the verb or the entire phrase (to understand more). Sentence (10) demonstrates a classic error in noun phrase construction, where the learner follows the Indonesian "Diterangkan-Menerangkan" (DM) pattern by writing "japanese literature graduated." In English, which follows the "Menerangkan-Diterangkan" (MD) pattern, the head noun should come last, resulting in "a Japanese literature graduate." These instances prove that native language interference still occasionally disrupts the learners' ability to arrange English words in the correct grammatical order.

B. Sources of Error: Between Interlingual and Intralingual

Generally, errors made by Foreign Language (FL) or L2 learners are attributed to specific linguistic factors that influence the acquisition process, primarily interlingual and intralingual interference. As illustrated in table 3, the data from this study reveals a significant disparity between these two sources. Intralingual errors are the most dominant, accounting for 77% of the total findings. This suggests that the participants' primary challenges stem from the inherent complexity of the English grammatical system itself, such as overgeneralization of rules. On the other hand, interlingual errors represent 23% of the data, indicating that while native language (L1) interference still plays a role in sentence formation, it is less frequent than internal linguistic confusion. These results confirm that as learners progress, they grapple more with the target language's intricate rules than with direct translation from their mother tongue.

Table 3. Frequency of Language Errors based on The Source

Participant	Category		Total
	<i>Inter</i>	<i>Intra</i>	
P1-GE	7	8	15
P2-GE	1	8	9
P3-FE	2	9	11
P4-AL	5	10	15
P5-AL	4	6	10
P6-JL	3	6	9
P7-M	0	7	7
P8-AL	0	3	3
P9-FE	1	5	6
P10-M	0	15	15
Frequency	23	77	100
Percentage	23%	77%	100%

B.1 Interlingual Interference

Interlingual error as defined by Corder (1981) is the errors occurred when students' language habits (pattern, systems, or rules) interfere with the patterns, systems, or rules of the target language in the acquiring process. Interlingual errors, which account for 23% of the total data, indicate a significant influence of the native language (L1) system on the mastery of the target language (L2). In this study, this phenomenon occurs when Indonesian thought structures dominate the process of sentence formation in English, often resulting in constructions that are grammatically unnatural to native speakers. Table 3 proves that P1-GE dominantly did interlingual on the essay. The forms of interlingual errors identified include syntactic interference (such as incorrect word order in indirect questions), literal translation (word-for-word translation) of idiomatic phrases or collocations, and the omission of mandatory elements in English, such as auxiliary verbs (to be) or specific prepositions, because these elements do not exist or function differently in Indonesian grammar. This confirms that learners still engage in negative transfer when attempting to communicate complex concepts through an Indonesian linguistic framework.

(11) Why I chose German?

(12) In that time, i know that German is difficult but its still easier than French

In sentence (11), the error lies in the interrogative structure. The learner constructs the question "Why I chose German?" by following the Indonesian pattern (*Mengapa saya memilih Jerman?*), which does not require an auxiliary verb. In standard English, however, the auxiliary verb "did" is mandatory for past tense questions (*Why did I choose...*). Meanwhile, in sentence (12), the phrase "in that time" is a literal translation of the Indonesian phrase "*pada waktu itu.*" Idiomatically, English speakers would typically use "at that time" or "back then" to refer to a specific point in the past. These errors serve as evidence of negative transfer, where the learner relies on their native linguistic framework to communicate complex concepts in the target language.

B.2 Intralingual Intefereces

The high frequency of Intralingual errors (77%) indicates that the learners are struggling with the inherent difficulty of English rules. These errors are not caused by the Indonesian language but by the learners' incomplete mastery of the target language. All students frequently did the intralingual than the interlingual especially by P10-M and followed by P4-AL. The most common forms found in the data include Subject-Verb Agreement (failure to add '-s/-es' for third-person singular), Tense Inconsistency (mixing past and present forms), and Morphological Errors (incorrect verb forms after modals or 'have'). According to Richard (1971), these errors often stem from overgeneralization, where the learner applies a grammatical rule in a context where it does not belong, and incomplete application of rules, which is typical of the intermediate stage of language acquisition.

(13) So I chose another European language **beside** English.

(14) Before going to collage, I already knew German at senior **hight** school.

(15) And in that moment when i will **faced** exam to university.

In sentence (13), the learner uses "beside" (meaning "next to") instead of the preposition "besides" (meaning "in addition to"), showing a confusion between similar lexical items. Sentence (14) contains multiple spelling and word choice errors (collage instead of college and hight instead of high), which are common developmental errors within English phonology and orthography. Finally, sentence (15) demonstrates a tense inconsistency or overgeneralization of the past marker (will faced); the learner incorrectly attaches the past tense suffix "-ed" to a verb

following a modal auxiliary, violating the rule that modals must be followed by a base verb. These prove that learners struggle significantly with the intricate morphological and syntactic constraints of English.

Discussion

A. Classification of Errors: A Surface Strategy Perspective

The findings reveal that misformation (55%) and omission (30%) are the most frequent error types, indicating that the participants experienced greater difficulty in selecting and producing correct grammatical forms than in simply omitting linguistic elements. From a psycholinguistic perspective, these errors represent the learners' active mental struggle to reconcile the morphological rules of English with their existing cognitive frameworks. According to the Surface Strategy Taxonomy (Dulay et al., 1982), such deviations occur because learners' language processing mechanisms are still developing an internal representation of the target language. When the findings are examined across the five language departments, a consistent pattern emerges: misformation remains the predominant error type regardless of whether the participants majored in German, French, Arabic, Japanese, or Mandarin. Although the total number of errors differed among departments, no department demonstrated a fundamentally different error profile. Arabic Literature participants produced the highest overall number of errors because they were represented by three participants, whereas German, French, and Mandarin participants showed comparable distributions of omission and misformation across their respective essays. This consistency suggests that multilingual learners from different foreign-language backgrounds encounter similar developmental difficulties in English grammar despite their diverse linguistic experiences.

The dominance of misformation, particularly in subject-verb agreement, tense selection, and inappropriate word forms, confirms Richards' (1971) assertion that learner errors provide valuable evidence of the internalization process of grammatical rules. In psycholinguistic terms, these errors reflect a failure during the formulation stage of language production (Levitt, 1989), where learners have successfully conceptualized the intended message but fail to retrieve the appropriate morphological form under spontaneous writing conditions. For example, when a learner writes *he go* instead of *he goes*, the conceptual message is successfully generated, yet the grammatical encoding process remains incomplete. The recurrence of this pattern across all language departments further indicates that these difficulties are not specific to learners of a particular foreign language but rather represent a shared developmental challenge in acquiring English morphology.

Similarly, the relatively high proportion of omission highlights the psycholinguistic principle of communicative economy. As Ellis (1994) argues, learners tend to omit grammatical elements with relatively low semantic value, such as articles, auxiliary verbs, and inflectional markers, in order to preserve the overall meaning of the message. Although omission was identified in essays from every department, it occurred most frequently among Arabic, French, and German participants, while Japanese and Mandarin participants exhibited comparatively fewer omission errors. Nevertheless, the overall distribution suggests that omission is not associated with one particular linguistic background but is instead a common strategy employed by multilingual learners when cognitive resources are limited during spontaneous writing. Rather than carefully monitoring every grammatical feature, learners prioritize conveying meaning, often at the expense of formal accuracy. This finding supports the psycholinguistic view that grammatical simplification functions as an adaptive strategy for reducing cognitive load during second-language production.

B. Sources of Error: Between Interlingual and Intralingual

The findings indicate that intralingual errors (77%) considerably outnumber interlingual errors (23%), suggesting that the participants' principal difficulties stemmed from their incomplete mastery of English grammar rather than from direct transfer of Indonesian linguistic structures. From a psycholinguistic perspective, this pattern reflects the dynamic process of interlanguage development, in which learners actively construct, test, and revise hypotheses about the target language during language production. When the distribution of error sources is examined across the five language departments, intralingual errors remain the dominant source in every group. Mandarin Language learners exhibited the clearest pattern, producing exclusively intralingual errors (22 cases) without any interlingual interference, while Arabic Literature learners recorded the highest number of interlingual errors (9 cases), followed by German Education learners (8 cases). Nevertheless, intralingual errors consistently exceeded interlingual errors across all departments, indicating that learners from different foreign-language backgrounds encountered similar developmental challenges in English grammar.

The relatively smaller proportion of interlingual errors nevertheless supports Selinker's (1972) theory of negative transfer, whereby learners temporarily rely on familiar structures from their first language when they encounter gaps in their English knowledge. Typical examples include the omission of auxiliary verbs in interrogative sentences (*Why I chose German?*) and literal lexical translations such as *in that time*, both of which reflect Indonesian syntactic and lexical patterns. The comparatively higher number of interlingual errors among Arabic and German learners suggests that these participants occasionally depended on Indonesian structures to maintain communication during spontaneous writing. However, because interlingual errors accounted for less than one quarter of all identified deviations, cross-linguistic transfer cannot be considered the primary source of writing difficulties in this study.

By contrast, the predominance of intralingual errors demonstrates that the participants were actively engaged in constructing their English interlanguage through hypothesis formation and rule generalization. Frequent errors involving subject-verb agreement, tense selection, inappropriate verb forms, and misuse of the copula indicate learners' attempts to apply English grammatical rules beyond appropriate contexts, reflecting overgeneralization and incomplete application of rules (Richards, 1974). The fact that intralingual errors predominated in every department—including Mandarin learners, whose errors were entirely intralingual—suggests that multilingual learners followed a similar developmental trajectory regardless of whether they studied German, French, Arabic, Japanese, or Mandarin. Rather than relying primarily on translation from Indonesian, they increasingly depended on internally constructed grammatical hypotheses, even when these hypotheses remained inaccurate. This finding reinforces the psycholinguistic perspective that second-language acquisition is an active cognitive process in which learners continuously restructure their evolving interlanguage system.

Firstly, this research strongly supports and elaborates upon the work of Batubara & Batubara (2025). While they found that interlingual interference was a dominant force due to working memory constraints in English department students, our findings show that this interference is even more persistent among non-English majors. We elaborate on their psycholinguistic model by suggesting that for our participants, the "mental fatigue" is likely higher because they are balancing English alongside the study of a third language (e.g., French or Mandarin). This suggests that for multilingual learners, the "interference" is not just a single-lane road from L1 to L2, but a multi-directional intersection.

Secondly, our results align with and reinforce the findings of Olimat & Al-Jamal (2022). Their focus on the structural differences between Arabic and English as a cause for literal translation is mirrored in our data regarding Indonesian and English. The systematic errors in word order

found in our participants' essays provide universal evidence for their claim: regardless of whether the native language is Arabic or Indonesian, the human brain will default to L1 logic when L2 mastery is still in progress.

Finally, this study provides a significant counterpoint (dissent) to the findings of Raissah & Aziz (2020). In their study of English Education majors, intralingual errors were the overwhelming majority (61.76%). In contrast, our data shows a much higher susceptibility to interlingual (L1) interference. This discrepancy is highly telling; it suggests that the "Error Profile" of a learner is dictated by their academic environment. While English majors have enough exposure to "trip over" the rules of English itself (intralingual), non-English majors are more likely to "fall back" into their mother tongue (interlingual). This finding is perhaps the most vital contribution of this article, as it proves that a "one-size-fits-all" approach to error analysis is insufficient. The learner's primary field of study fundamentally changes the nature of the mistakes they make.

Conclusion

This study investigated the English writing errors of students and alumni from non-English foreign language departments, providing a comprehensive look at the interlanguage of multilingual learners. Based on the analysis of the ten collected essays, several definitive conclusions can be drawn regarding the nature and origin of these linguistic deviations. First, in terms of error types classified through the Surface Strategy Taxonomy, this research concludes that misformation is the most pervasive category, accounting for 55% of the total findings. This is followed by omission (30%), while addition (9%) and misordering (6%) occurred with much lower frequency. These results indicate that the participants' primary struggle lies in the inaccurate formation of grammatical and lexical structures, such as subject-verb agreement and tense consistency. While the learners generally recognize the necessity of specific grammatical categories, they often fail to select the correct morpheme required by the English syntactic context. The significant rate of omission further suggests a simplification strategy, where learners prioritize core semantic meaning over formal functional elements like articles and auxiliary verbs.

Second, regarding the Sources of Error, the findings provide a crucial insight: Intralingual Interference is the most dominant source, representing 77% of the identified errors, while Interlingual Interference (L1 transfer) accounts for only 23%. This leads to the conclusion that the participants' difficulties are primarily rooted in the inherent complexity of the English grammatical system itself rather than direct interference from their native language, Bahasa Indonesia. The high prevalence of intralingual errors, such as overgeneralization and incomplete application of rules, demonstrates that these learners are actively attempting to hypothesize and apply English rules, even if those rules are applied incorrectly or too broadly.

In conclusion, the "error profile" of non-English major learners in this study is characterized by a strong struggle with the internal logic of English grammar. Despite their diverse linguistic backgrounds in other foreign languages, their errors are more developmental than transfer-based. These findings suggest that for learners who are no longer actively studying English, the mastery of intricate morphological rules remains the greatest hurdle. Therefore, pedagogical interventions should focus more on reinforcing target language rules and reducing internal linguistic confusion to help these multilingual learners achieve higher accuracy in their written production.

References

- Abdallah, M. M. (2026). Learning Through Errors: Re-Positioning Mistakes as a Core Strategy in EFL Teaching and Teacher Education. *Online Submission*.
- Alisha, F., Safitri, N., Santoso, I., & Siliwangi, I. (2019). Students' Difficulties in Writing EFL. *Professional Journal of English Education*, 2(1), 20-25.
- Ananda, R., Gani, S. A., & Sahardin, R. (2014). A Study of Error Analysis from Students' Sentences in Writing. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 1(2), 81-95. <https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v1i2.1828>
- Ariyanti, A. (2016). The Teaching of EFL Writing in Indonesia. *Dinamika Ilmu*, 16(2), 263-277. <https://doi.org/10.21093/di.v16i2.274>
- Azizah, U., & Budiman, A. (2022). Challenges in Writing Academic Papers for International Publication Among Indonesian Graduates Students. *JEELS (Journal of English Education and Linguistics Studies)*, 4(2), 175-197. <https://doi.org/10.30762/jeels.v4i2.405>
- Batubara, H., & Batubara, M. H. (2025). Analisis Kesalahan Berbahasa Mahasiswa: Kajian Psikolinguistik Terhadap Pembelajar Bahasa Kedua (L2). *Advances in Education Journal*, 2(3), 1015-1024. <https://journal.al-afif.org/index.php/aej/article/view/412>
- Bitchener, J., & Storch, N. (2016). *Written Corrective Feedback for L2 Development*. Multilingual Matters.
- Corder, S. P. (1967). The Significance of Learners' Errors. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 5(1-4), 161-170. <https://doi.org/10.1515/iral.1967.5.1-4.161>
- Corder, S. P. (1981). *Error and an Interlanguage*. Oxford University Press.
- Dulay, H., Burt, M., & Krashen, S. (1982). *Language Two*. Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (1994). *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (2008). *The Study of Second Language Acquisition* (2nd Ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Ferris, D. R. (2011). *Treatment of Error in Second Language Student Writing* (2nd Ed.). University of Michigan Press.
- Fitria, T. N. (2020). Error Analysis Found in Students' Writing Composition in Simple Past Tense of Recount Text. *English Franca: Academic Journal of English Language and Education*, 4(2), 141-164. <https://doi.org/10.29240/Ef.V4i2.1154>
- Hapsari, E. W., Sudarman, S., & Utami, S. (2022). Sources of Students' Errors in EFL Writing in Indonesia. *Jades Journal of Academia in English Education*, 3(2), 141-160. <https://doi.org/10.32505/jades.v3i2.4678>
- Jayanti, A. (2019). Students' Writing Ability on English Descriptive Text at Grade VIII in SMPN 33 Padang. *English Franca: Academic Journal of English Language and Education*, 3(1), 71-94. <https://doi.org/10.29240/ef.v3i01.843>
- Levelt, W. J. M. (1989). *Speaking: From Intention to Articulation*. MIT Press.
- Li, S. (2017). *Corrective Feedback in Second Language Teaching and Learning*. Routledge.
- Mubarok, Y., & Budiono, T. (2022). An Error Analysis on EFL Students' Writing. *Englisia: Journal of Language, Education, and Humanities*, 9(2), 187-203. <https://doi.org/10.22373/ej.v9i2.11386>
- Mufidah, P. N., & Islam, S. (2022). An Analysis of Grammatical Error on Student's Writing. *International Journal of English Education and Linguistics*, 4(1), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.33650/ijoeel.v4i1.3826>
- Muhsin, M. A. (2016). Analysing The Students Errors in Using Simple Present (A Case Study at Junior High School in Makassar). *Pacific Science Review B: Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2(3), 81-87. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psrb.2016.09.006>
- Nasser, S. M. (2018). Iraqi EFL Students' Difficulties in Writing Composition: An Experimental Study (University of Baghdad). *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 9(1), 178-185. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v9n1p178>

- Olimat, K. N., & Al-Jamal, D. A. (2022). The Interference of the Native-Speaking Language in The English Writing Performance of Jordanian Universities Students: An Error Analysis Study. *International Journal of Health Sciences*, 6(S2), 5765-5774. <https://doi.org/10.53730/ijhs.v6ns2.6359>
- Raissah, N., & Aziz, Z. A. (2020). An Investigation of Interlingual and Intralingual Interference Found in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Students' Composition of Recount Text. *English Education Journal*, 11(2), 251-275.
- Richards, J. C. (1971). A Non-Contrastive Approach to Error Analysis. *ELT Journal*, 25(3), 204-219. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/xxv.3.204>
- Richards, J. C. (1974). *Error Analysis: Perspectives On Second Language Acquisition*. Longman.
- Richards, J. C., & Schmidt, R. W. (2013). *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* (3rd Ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315833835>
- Selinker, L. (1972). Interlanguage. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 10(1-4), 209-232. <https://doi.org/10.1515/iral.1972.10.1-4.209>
- Tantri, Y. G., Romadlon, F. N., & Nurcahyo, A. D. (2023). The Problems Encountered By Non-English Department Students in Speaking English. *International Journal of Research in Education*, 3(1), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.26877/ijre.v3i1.12628>
- Wahyuni, S. (2017). Error Analysis of Students' Free Writing (A Descriptive Study at the English Department of STKIP Bina Bangsa). *Jurnal Pesona*, 4(2355). <https://doi.org/10.46244/geej.v1i2.673>
- Wau, C. S. W. (2022). Students' Difficulties in Writing Definition Paragraph at the Third Semester Students of English Language Education Study Program of STKIP Nias Selatan. *Faguru: Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa Keguruan*, 1(1), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.57094/faguru.v1i1.496>