

## **An Analysis of the Grammatical Errors Made by FLEE2113 Students and the Relation with L1 Interference**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Students always have difficulties in writing essays error-free and organized. There are a lot of aspects that contribute to that problem. Most of the students are lacking in comprehensibility in grammar and structure of phrases and sentences. Without proper understanding on how English grammar functions, countless of errors will be made and the idea that the students want to portray might not even be received by teachers or lecturer thus resulting in unsatisfying outcome. The purpose of this study is to explore the common grammatical errors made by the FLEE2113 students in their assignment in which they have to produce a write up on any desirable topics of an argumentative essay. The aim of this research is to find a correlation between the errors made by the students and the interference of their first language (L1) which is Malay language. The samples are collected from 75 students who are taking FLEE2113 class (English for Islamic Studies II / English II). Based on the analysis of the 75 essays, it is found that not many grammatical errors are made by the students and this is probably because this assignment allows them to refer to online sources and they might be using help from different software to lessen their grammatical errors. This is why the main focus of this research is extended to find another loophole in the students' essay writing. The students might not produce many grammatical errors however, their sentences are somehow translated directly from their first language. This is the case of intralingual and interlingual errors. There are a lot of sentences that somehow oddly presented and it is reckoned to be the product of the interference of their mother tongue. The result of this study shows that reinforcement and development in understanding English grammar and writing skills are needed for these students. Based on the findings of this research, significant suggestions and recommendations are provided for lecturers to better handle the FLEE2113 class.

Keywords: grammatical errors, L1 interference, intralingual errors, interlingual errors

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **WRITING SKILLS**

Writing is not a natural occurrence. It is a skill acquired from learning. An explanation is not needed as to why writing skill is a must for everyone to acquire. It is vital and it is needed in our daily life especially for students. According to Eberly Center (2015), writing is described as a complex intellectual task accompanied with numerous component skills. Some of the component skills are reading comprehension, analytical skills, writing mechanics which are derived from

many more small mechanisms. All these components are needed to write well. Students may completely lack all of these and some might master them partially (Eberly Center, 2015). Without proper understanding in these skills, students' writings could hardly reach satisfactory marks or level.

## **ERRORS AND MISTAKES**

There is a distinction between errors and mistakes. Allan (2015) stated that mistakes are options made by people that turned out to be wrong. It is based on people's performances and mostly accidental. When we make mistakes, we know it is wrong and we have the capability to correct them. Allan (2015) further argued that errors on the other hand are made due to lack of knowledge. When people made errors, they do not know how to correct them because they are not taught the right system and structures. According to Greenspan (2013), a mistake is made by choice and the outcome is found to be wrong. A mistake is a bad choice because the person committing the mistake knows the right choice. The person could already predict the bad outcome upon making mistakes. Errors are made when someone knows what is the right rule or structures of something but somehow did not commit it correctly due to lack of comprehension and understanding (Greenspan, 2013). This person made an error with reference to a certain ideal code or set of rules. The outcome of an error may be wrong but it happened not by choice but from lack of understanding of a particular system. The term error is used throughout this research based on the fact that the students make errors not mistakes in their writings. Errors can only be corrected by someone who already mastered a specific rule. In this case, the researcher has already mastered English grammar and writing skills, thus having the right to identify and analyse errors made by the students in their writings.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

There are definitely quite a number of errors made by the students in their write-ups and mostly because of their lack of understanding in English grammar. However, the numbers of errors are not as many as expected (the expectation is based on grammatical errors committed and uttered by students when listening to their in-class presentations). This is because the write-up is an assignment in which these students are allowed to refer to a lot of outside sources such as the internet and articles in magazines. There are also many available software for students to check their grammar. For instance, Word Microsoft Office. This software may correct the students' grammar but it cannot show the right word order and sentences structures. Even though there are not many grammatical errors in their essays, there are a lot of sentences that are somehow oddly presented and portrayed. The words are not in correct order and the sentences could be misinterpreted and misunderstood. These sentences seem like they are translated from Malay language which is the first language (L1) of these students. Malay language grammar are different from English grammar. Further explanation on how Malay language grammar functions is shown in the next section of this research. The main objective of this research is to identify the common grammatical errors made by the students. Even with the help of software and internet sources, majority of the students still produced essays with simple grammatical errors such as auxiliaries errors, articles errors, vocabulary errors and many more. This will be further discussed in error analysis section. The next objective is to study whether the students' L1 interference influence the grammatical errors made by them in their writing.

## Research Objectives

1. To identify the grammatical errors made by the students in their write-ups.
2. To study the relation between the grammatical errors made by the students and their L1 interference.

## Research Questions

1. What are the common grammatical errors made by the students in their write-ups?
2. Does the students' L1 interference influence the grammatical errors made by them?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

There are several previous studies that highlighted grammatical errors made by students due to first language interference. Not many researchers relate and use interlingual and intralingual errors as the factors of first language interference in students' grammatical errors. However there is this one research made by Taiseer (2008) that apply the rules and functions of interlingual errors and intralingual errors in identifying his samples. The title of his research is "An Analysis of the Common Grammatical Errors in the English Writing made the 3rd Secondary Male Students in the Eastern Coast of the UAE". The purpose of his study is similar to this research in which to explore the common types of grammatical errors made by students in their English essay writing. His samples are Emirati secondary male students. Their first language is Arabic and it is vastly different from English. He managed to differentiate Arabic language and English in detail in his research. He included four aims of this study and one of them is the same as the main purpose of this research. Taiseer (2008) wanted to find out whether mother tongue interference is the major cause for errors in the English writings of Emirati male students. Based on his analysis on 105 samples, it is found out that the UAE students make different types of grammatical errors in a lot of aspects such as passive voice, verb tense and form, subject-verb agreement, word order, prepositions, articles, plurality, and auxiliaries. All of these grammatical errors are mostly contributed due to intralingual errors. Intralingual errors were more frequent than interlingual errors. The Emirati students applied the rules of L2 in their writings without comprehending the whole rules first. Taiseer's findings were not made solely on his analysis, but he also put forward the answers from questionnaires that he provided to the supervisors of those students. The main purpose of the questionnaires is to get perspectives from the students' supervisors. Based on the answers given by the supervisors, there are other reasons that contribute to the students weak performance in writing such as less practice, not having enough experience in this skill, changes in education system, new language curriculum, and minimum time allotted for acquiring writing skill. Those are the additional reasons that were added up to the students underachievement in writing. With those findings, it showed that the English writing skills of the secondary male students needs more reinforcement and development because they still have a long way to go in writing satisfactory essays in English (Taiseer, 2008).

## CHARACTERISTICS OF MALAY LANGUAGE

Malay language is spoken in most parts of Malaysia. There are also other languages used in this country such as Mandarin, Tamil and English. Even though Malaysian widely use Malay

language, Malaysia higher education institutions require all students to learn English. Students find it difficult to learn English mainly because of the rules of grammar. According to them, Malay language has simpler rules of grammar. This is because they do not need to use complex Malay language in their daily routine to communicate with one another. Malay language can be as challenging as English. In daily communication, Malay language has less complexities than English. This explanation only concerns to differentiate informal Malay and English. English is all about tenses. There are timeline for everything. Malay language does not apply tenses at all. In English, the notion of time is crucial and it alters the sentences according to the timeline. Time makes no difference at all in Malay language (Iskandar, 2016). The next component of grammar is the rule of subject verb agreement. This is the part where students get confused the most. Take this sentences as examples. “He runs to the library”. A singular noun must be accompanied by a singular verb. “They run to the library”. A plural noun must be accompanied by a plural verb. Iskandar (2016) further argued that there is no such thing as plural and singular verb in Malay language. This example will prove the statement. “Dia lari ke perpustakaan”. “Mereka lari ke perpustakaan”. The verb used in both sentences is the same. English article system which consists of definite and indefinite articles can also be a problem for students. Malay language does not need articles to describe the numbers of nouns in sentences. For example in English; “An apple” is used to say one apple, also “A bottle” is used to say one bottle. It concerns on vowel of the noun. In Malay, there is no need to use different articles for different nouns. Besides having problem with English article system, these students also have a problem in which they are influenced by Malay language word order. The sentences made by the students in their write up are strangely put. The sentences somehow appear to be partially correct and understandable but it is not how English sentences supposed to be. This example is taken in one of the essays. “Our body will healthy when our body receive good nutrients”. This sentence is translated directly from Malay language. The sentence made by this student is comprehensible, but there are other proper ways in putting the words.

## CAUSES OF ERRORS

It is stated earlier that the students’ essays seem to have traits of influence of L1 interference. This section will explore the cause of the interference and how it contributes to the grammatical errors made in the essays. According to Taiseer (2008), there are two types of errors which are interlingual errors and intralingual errors. Interlingual errors happen when a learner is distracted by the system and rules of L1 when acquiring the patterns and rules of the second language (L2). Due to this, learners will find it confusing to learn the system of L2. Interlingual errors are about the L1 interference in learning L2. Intralingual errors happen when a learner is trying to apply the rule of L2 without completely comprehending the rule. Learners make intralingual errors because of partial exposure of the L2 system. With little exposure of L2, learners make their own hypotheses on how the rules should be. Learners should not apply any rules of L2 without completely understanding it to avoid making intralingual errors. For example, L2 learners know that the article “an” is used in front of nouns starting with vowel sounds; “an apple”. With that rule, learners apply the rule to any noun starting with a vowel. For instance “an unicorn”. It is wrong because the word “unicorn” cannot be accompanied with the article “an” since it is pronounced as “yoo-ni-corn” or phonetically it takes /j/ sound. The vowel sound starts with “Y” not “U”. This is how intralingual errors happen. Language transfer is another error found in the

essays. It is an error where language learners generate their ideas using their native language/ L1. The section before explained on how one of the essays presented odd sentences and the sentences seem to be translated from the student's L1. That is the case of language transfer in which the student conjured up ideas and words using his/her L1. Interlingual and intralingual errors contribute to the grammatical errors made by the students. Students are distracted by the interference of L1. They keep on applying the rule of L1 when writing in L2. They also do not entirely grasp the idea of L2 structures. They learned a part of L2, and they apply the only rule that they understand to everything else. The presence of both interlingual and intralingual errors in the students' essays, indirectly contribute to a lot of grammatical errors. Taiseer (2008) further stated that there are other factors of errors such as carelessness and ignorance of the language constructions. However, these factors are difficult to be analysed and proven. The outcome might be presumptuous and the research could solely be depending on assumptions.

## ERROR ANALYSIS

The main objective of this research is to identify the grammatical errors made by the FLEE2113 students. Besides that, it also aims to find whether students' L1 interference influence the grammatical errors made by them in their assignment. After analyzing all 78 essays, it is found that there are still numerous grammatical errors made by them despite having the chance to refer to outside sources. One of the grammatical errors found is errors in verb tense and form. Majority of the students do not really understand tenses. Examples are shown below. There are also errors in the aspect of subject verb agreement. Subject and verb phrase in a sentence should agree in number and person (Taiseer, 2008). Errors happen when plural subject does not agree with singular verb or when singular subject does not agree with plural verb. Word order is another complication in the essays. This reckons to be influenced by language transfer of the students' L1. Words will be incorrectly put when L1 system interferes with L2 structures. Prepositions errors fill the students' essays as well. They often leave out prepositions from their sentences. There are also essays with wrong choice of prepositions. In addition to that, the students also commit articles errors. They either ignore the function of articles in their sentences or redundantly use certain articles. The next errors done by the students are vocabulary errors. Vocabulary errors occur when students wrongly choose certain words. There are a lot of sentences that are misrepresented because of the wrong choice of words. And also some of them mentioned that they used the synonym words apps to give a try for bombastic vocabulary which are usually overlooked in the context of suitability of the word for the intended context. The last type of error found is auxiliaries errors. Wrong use of "be", "have", and "do" is the reason why students make auxiliaries errors. Some of the examples of grammatical errors are shown below. All of these grammatical errors are categorized in both interlingual and intralingual errors.

### Verb tense and form

#### 1. The school uniform are represents an organizational entity

The word 'are' is unnecessary in this sentence. This might be over-generalization of the rule of simple present tense. The student may be using the rule of putting is or are in simple present tenses. This is considered as an intralingual error. The correct form of the sentence is "The school uniform represents an organizational entity."

2. Free public transport is ensure a timeliness trip.

The sentence above shows another example of over-generalization of the simple present tense rule. “Is” in the sentence should not be inserted. The word “ensure” should be in singular form because the singular noun “public transport” must agree with singular verb. The correct form of the sentence is “Free public transport ensures a timeliness trip.”

### **Subject Verb Agreement**

1. Malaysians wants to achieve...

The phrase contains subject verb agreement error because the plural subject does not agree with the singular verb. The word Malaysians are plural, so the verb after that must be plural as well. In this case, the word “wants” which is in its’ singular form in the phrase should be “want”. The correct form of the phrase above is “Malaysians want to achieve.”

2. It show that few of them are poor.

Most of the students somehow made this error repeatedly. They keep on using plural verb after the word “it”. “It” is a singular subject and it must be followed by a singular verb. “It show” should be “It shows”. A singular subject must agree with a singular verb. The correct form of the sentence is “It shows that few of them are poor”.

### **Word Order**

1. Homeowners already provide furniture home.

Word order errors are the outcome of L1 interference in L2 system. Language transfer occurs here. It is an error where language learners generate their ideas using their native language/ L1. In the sentence above, it seems like this student generates the words in L1. “Furniture home” could be “Home furniture” or “furniture for homes”. The correct form of the sentence could be “Homeowners already provided home furniture”. It could also be “Homeowners already provided furniture for the home”.

2. It is easier to take care of car themselves.

This is an example of an interlingual error. The student is distracted by his/her L1 upon trying to come up with appropriate words. The whole idea of this sentence may be misinterpreted because the words are conjured out using the student’s native language. The words order is not appropriately put in the sentence causing it to portray other meanings. The possible correct form of this sentence is “It is easier for them to take care of their own car”.

### **Prepositions**

1. We can learn how people survive when they travel other country.

Prepositions are important in English because it shows the right situation or position of something. In Malay language, there are not many prepositions available and usually the prepositions are left out from daily conversation among Malaysians. For example: “Saya hendak

pergi ke kedai makan” is simply changed to “saya hendak pergi kedai makan” this is where Malay language speakers normally omit prepositions when they converse with one another. All informal conversations in Malay language ignore the function of prepositions. This might be the reason why students ignore the existence of prepositions in their sentences. The example above is missing the preposition “to”. The sentence above should be as follows. “We can learn how people survive when they travel to other country”.

2. Too many of them are caught up with the image being skinny and pretty.

Prepositions errors are found throughout all essays written by the students. Majority of them left out the word “of”. Most of these errors are caused by interference for Malay language. It is explained in the first example why the students often ignore the use of prepositions. The correct form of the sentence is “Too many of them are caught up with the image of being skinny and pretty”.

### Articles

1. We should know what the social media is.

Shoebottom (2017) stated that there are three articles exist in English grammar which are the, a, and an. These three articles are used in front of nouns. “The” refers to specific nouns only while “a/an” is used to modify non-particular nouns. In the sentence above, article “the” should not be inserted due to a few reasons. The first reason is the sentence is written as the first sentence of the first paragraph. The student does not yet properly introduced what is social media. In order to use the article “the”, the particular noun must be presented first then it can be represented as “the”. The second reason is, “social media” is a general countable noun. Articles must be omitted when generalizing about uncountable nouns and plural countable nouns (EnglishPage.com, 2017). The correct form of the sentence is “We should know what social media is”.

2. The people will have a respect on the school.

Similar like the first example, the article “a” must not be in the sentence because it is a general uncountable noun. “Respect” is a nouns that refers to attitude of consideration and cannot be counted. There is no one respect or two respects. This is an intralingual error because the student is trying to apply the rule where all nouns must be led by articles. There are also other errors in this sentence. A better way to portray the sentence is “The people will respect the school”.

### Vocabulary errors

1. The competition between Android and IOS is one of the most talked topic.

Vocabulary errors are all about language transfer in which students generate words from their L1. Naturally, people will have more vocabularies in their native language. The students’ L1 is Malay language and they own more Malay words in their mind than English words. Thus forcing them to choose from limited English vocabularies. The only way to prevent this from happening is to encourage them to read more English materials such as educational magazine, novels, newspaper, and research articles. There are two possible ways to write the sentence above. The first one is “The competition between Android and IOS is one of the most discussed topic”. The second one is “The competition between Android and IOS is one of the most talked about topic”.

2. Both have impressive functionalists and features.

The example above shows a sentence with a word that is not even exist. This is the case where the student is experimenting with words. He/she is trying to come up with better word resulting to a vocabulary error. This could be categorized under intralingual errors. Experimenting with words are encouraged by teachers and lecturer, but the students have to be careful not to create their own version of words. They need to refer to dictionaries. The correct form of the sentence is “Both have impressive functions and features”.

### **Auxiliaries**

#### 1. It is dress codes give benefits?

GrammarMonster.com (2017) highlighted that an auxiliary verb accompanies a main verb to help express its tense, mood, or voice. The most common auxiliary verbs are; be, do, and have (GrammarMonster.com, 2017). The example shows a sentence in question form. In creating a question, auxiliary verbs should be in front of main verbs. Auxiliary verbs also known as helping verbs. Auxiliary verbs are used along with the main verb in a sentence to make questions (McCarthy, 2009). The correct form of the question above is “Do dress codes give benefits?”. The word “do” is the helping verb or auxiliary verb and the word “give” is the main verb.

#### 2. It is may make someone look pretty and beautiful.

This sentence contains three types of verbs which should never happen in sentences. There are linking verb, modal verb, and main verb in it. In a sentence, there should only be not more than two types of verbs. A linking verb such as “is” could be paired with a gerund. For example, “She is singing”. The next possibility is when a modal verb is paired with a main verb. For instance, “She might come”. Main verb can also work alone for example “She cooks”. The correct form of the sentence is “It may make someone look pretty and beautiful”. Another correct form of the sentence above is “It makes someone look pretty and beautiful”.

## **RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION**

It is understandable that English is not easy language for Malay students. Thus, whoever hold the responsibility to teach Malay students or whoever speaks L1 other than English as mentioned in this research paper, must simplify their teaching and learning methods into a simpler system that can be referred by students when they need to use this new knowledge. Upon all recommendations that have been suggested in this research, there is one crucial thing that teacher or lecturer might have overlooked. Instead of repetitively emphasizing on empowerment of vocabularies, the importance of exposing students about what is “singular”, “plural” and the special rules for the word “I” should be focused. Additionally, the understanding of what, when, where, why, and how (4W and 1H questions) in applying Subject-Verb-Agreemnt (SVA) in their sentences should be given the emphasis too since these rules are absent in Malay language. With a strong belief that teachers or lecturers that teach English will be able to clearly explain the “4 W and 1 H” questions regarding SVA and auxiliary verbs, four simple tables (purposely created to help students’ memorization process), and 1 simple table that summarize SVA (to show example of sentences for SVA and auxiliary verbs) are shared in the appendix. In which it might be helpful since the SVA rules have never existed in their L1. The first objective of this research is to study the common grammatical errors in the essays written by the students. It is proven that



there are a lot of grammatical errors committed by them and most of the errors are contributed by the interference of their L1. From that, it is confirmed that there are influences of L1 interference in the grammatical errors made by the students. Interference of native language or L1 is proven present because of the interlingual and intralingual errors exist in the essays. Intralingual and interlingual errors are both made due to the influence of L1 structures in L2 system. Based on the findings of this research, it is encouraged for students to get more reinforcement on how English grammar works. The students also need exposure on the difference between their native language grammar and English grammar. This way, they will not apply the rules and system of Malay language when writing English essays. It is not unusual for learners to be influenced by their native language because they have been using the language to communicate with each other. It might be difficult to teach them to generate ideas using English but with additional reinforcement, it is possible. The students also need to be encouraged to read more English language reading materials in class and during their leisure time. So that they will gain more vocabularies. Besides that, by reading, they could be familiar with English grammar which this will encourage them to recall and apply grammatically correct sentences that they experience reading them before. The result of this study shows that reinforcement and development in understanding English grammar and writing skills are needed for these students to avoid making intralingual and interlingual errors.

## APPENDIX

Reminder:

The sole purpose of these tables is only for basic comprehension. Lecturer or teacher MUST give explanations and provide more examples.

Subject - Verb Agreement		PRESENT TENSE	PAST TENSE
	SUBJECT	VERBS	VERBS
SINGULAR	XS	+S	regular verbs = + ed OR irregular verbs = refer to dictionary
	cat	loves	
PLURAL	+S	XS	
	cats	love	
I	I	XS	
		LOVE	

Table 1

<b>Auxiliary verbs: to BE</b>		
<b>TENSES</b>	<b>PRESENT TENSE</b>	<b>PAST TENSE</b>
<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>VERBS</b>	<b>VERBS</b>
<b>SINGULAR</b>	is	was
<b>PLURAL</b>	are	were
<b>I</b>	am	was : possible event were : impossible event

*Table 2*

<b>Auxiliary verbs: to DO</b>		
<b>TENSE</b>	<b>PRESENT TENSE</b>	<b>PAST TENSE</b>
<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>VERBS</b>	<b>VERBS</b>
<b>SINGULAR</b>	does	did
<b>PLURAL</b>	do	did
<b>I</b>	do	did

*Table 3*

<b>Auxiliary verbs: to HAVE</b>		
<b>TENSES</b>	<b>PRESENT TENSE</b>	<b>PAST TENSE</b>
<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>VERBS</b>	<b>VERBS</b>
<b>SINGULAR</b>	has	had
<b>PLURAL</b>	have	had
<b>I</b>	have	had

*Table 4*

SUBJECT		POSSIBLE SENTENCES	AGREEMENT
SINGULAR	He	eats the sandwich alone	+S
	She	is now sweeping the floor (action)	is
		is hardworking (description)	
	It	was chasing its prey	was
	Ahmad	does the homework	does
	A doctor	did the best treatment for her	did
	The lecturer	has given that lecture before	has
Sakinah	had a kitten named Ubi	had	
PLURAL	You	care(xs) about him.	XS
	They	are writing a letter to the principal (action)	are
		are wonderful people (description)	
	Samad and his team	were bragging about the success	were
	We	do prepare a special dish for mommy	do
	Aman and Amanda	did their best in the final examinations	did
	The boys	have jogged along the hallway	have
My friends	had a wonderful experiences there	had	
SPECIAL	I	drive a bentley	XS
		am attending the event (action )	am
		am a successful person (description)	
		was solving the problem (possible)	was
		dreamed that I were a hideous crocodile that ate my brother! (impossible)	were
		do love ballad and pop rock	do
		did it again!	did
		have cleared the bushes there	have
		had a tooth out	had

Table 5

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