

COMMON ERRORS IN DERIVATIONAL WORD FORMATION AMONG NON NATIVE ENGLISH LITERATURE STUDENTS

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DOI: 10.35473/pho.v8i2.4552

First received: October 22, 2025

Final proof received: November 26, 2025

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the types of errors and the factors causing derivative word formation errors in fourth semester students of the English Literature Study Program at Bina Darma University. The scope of the study is limited to analyzing errors in the use of affixes (prefixes and suffixes) that change the word class or meaning of the base word, based on students' academic texts. The research method used a qualitative descriptive design with purposive sampling of 10 students. Data were obtained through a 300 word essay writing test, then analyzed using Surface Strategy Taxonomy (Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982) which classifies errors into four types: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. The results showed that misformation was the most dominant error (48%), followed by addition (24%), omission (20%), and misordering (8%). Causal factors include first language interference, overgeneralization of morphological rules, limited morphological knowledge, and minimal exposure to academic vocabulary. The main conclusion of this study is the need for explicit and structured teaching of derivational morphology in writing courses, accompanied by contextual exercises to improve the accuracy of students' use of derived word forms.

Keywords: morphological errors, derivative word formation, English literature students, Bina Darma University, affixation

INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary mastery is a crucial component in learning English as a foreign language, particularly for students of the English Literature study program. This competence is not only related to the number of words known but also to the ability to form new words through morphological processes, one of which is derivational word formation. This process involves adding affixes, either prefixes or suffixes, to a base word, which can change its word class or meaning. Mastery of derivational morphology is essential for English Literature students as it is directly linked to their ability to comprehend academic texts, write essays, and analyze literary works accurately. However, in reality, many non native students still struggle to apply derivational forms correctly, such as misusing suffixes like *ness*, *tion*, or *able*, or forming non existent words that do not follow the rules of English morphology.

These errors are often caused by first language interference, overgeneralization of morphological rules, limited understanding of morphological structures, and insufficient exposure to academic vocabulary. This phenomenon highlights a gap in morphological competence that can impact students' academic communication quality. The urgency of this research lies in the need to systematically identify the types and causes of errors so that more effective teaching strategies can be developed. The novelty of this study lies in its focus on analyzing derivational morphology errors among English Literature students at Universitas Bina Darma using the Surface Strategy Taxonomy (Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982), an approach that has rarely been applied in the local context.

Previous studies have shown that errors in derivational word formation are a common issue among English learners.

Al Farsi (2008) found that EFL learners in Oman often made mistakes with suffixes such as *ness*, *ity*, and *ment* due to difficulties in selecting affixes that match the intended grammatical category. Rakhman (2013) identified that Indonesian EFL learners frequently produced non existent words such as *successify* or *development* due to a lack of explicit instruction in word formation. Fitriana (2017) concluded that misformation is the most dominant type of derivational error among Indonesian university students. These findings reinforce the importance of explicit instruction in derivational morphology within the curriculum.

This study is novel compared to previous studies in several aspects. First, this study specifically analyzes derivational word formation errors in English Literature students at Bina Darma University using the Surface Strategy Taxonomy approach (Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982), which is rarely applied in the context of morphology learning in Indonesia. Second, this study integrates an analysis of error forms (omission, addition, misformation, and misordering) with an in depth identification of linguistic and pedagogical causal factors, thus providing a more comprehensive picture of students' morphological competence gaps. Third, this study not only describes the types and frequencies of errors but also offers practical implications for morphological awareness based academic writing instruction, which has not been widely discussed in previous studies. Thus, the results of this study contribute to the development of more contextual teaching strategies based on the real needs of EFL students in Indonesia.

Based on this background, the objectives of this study are: (1) to identify the types of derivational word formation errors commonly made by fourth semester

English Literature students at Universitas Bina Darma, and (2) to analyze the factors contributing to these errors. The proposed problem solving plan is to conduct an in depth analysis of students' written works using the Surface Strategy Taxonomy framework to systematically map errors, followed by developing teaching recommendations aimed at improving the accuracy of derivational word usage in academic writing courses.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at identifying, classifying, and analyzing common errors in derivational word formation among English Literature students. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore the phenomenon in depth without manipulating variables, providing a comprehensive picture of the types and patterns of derivational morphology errors that occur. According to Creswell (2014), a descriptive qualitative design is suitable for studies that seek to describe a phenomenon as it naturally occurs, focusing on detailed descriptions rather than numerical analysis. Similarly, Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) emphasize that qualitative description enables researchers to systematically capture participants' experiences and observable linguistic behaviors, making it appropriate for error analysis in language learning contexts.

Scope and Object of the Study

The scope of the research is limited to errors in derivational word formation involving the use of affixes (prefixes and suffixes) in students' academic writing. The object of the study is fourth semester students of the English Literature Study Program at Universitas Bina Darma, who are non native speakers of English. The ana-

lysis focuses on changes in word class or meaning of base words through affixation processes.

Data and Data Sources

The data consist of academic essays produced by the students during a structured writing test. The data sources are ten fourth semester students selected through purposive sampling based on the following criteria:

They have completed courses related to English grammar and academic writing.
They possess intermediate to advanced English proficiency.
They have produced written work suitable for morphological analysis, such as essays or reports.

Place and Time of the Study

The study was conducted at the English Literature Study Program, Universitas Bina Darma, Palembang, during the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic year.

Data Collection Technique

Data were collected through a structured writing test in which each participant was asked to produce an essay of approximately 300 words within 60 minutes on a given topic. The data collection process consisted of the following steps:

Permission – The researcher obtained permission from the course lecturer to access and collect students' written works.

Test Administration – Identified errors were classified using the Surface Strategy Taxonomy proposed by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) into four categories: *omission*, *addition*, *misformation*, and *misordering*. This framework was chosen because it provides a comprehensive and pedagogi-

cally relevant classification of learner errors that focuses on observable linguistic forms rather than computational or probabilistic patterns. Although newer models such as Vilar et al. (2006) emphasize error detection in computational linguistics and machine translation, Dulay et al.'s taxonomy remains more suitable for classroom based qualitative research, where the goal is to understand morphological and interlanguage development in human learners. Its interpretive clarity and focus on linguistic form make it particularly effective for analyzing derivational word formation errors in EFL contexts.

Documentation – All essays were collected, anonymized, and stored in digital format for further analysis.

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was carried out in several stages:

Error Identification – Each derivational word in the students' essays was examined to determine its correctness.

Error Classification – Identified errors were classified using the *Surface Strategy Taxonomy* (Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982) into four categories: *omission*, *addition*, *misformation*, and *misordering*.

Frequency Count – The number of

occurrences for each error type was recorded to identify the most dominant type.

Error Cause Analysis – The classified errors were analyzed to identify possible causes, such as first language interference, overgeneralization, limited morphological knowledge, or insufficient exposure to academic vocabulary.

Conclusion Drawing – The results were synthesized to address the research questions and to formulate teaching recommendations aimed at improving the accuracy of derivational word usage.

This methodological approach is expected to provide a thorough understanding of the derivational morphology challenges faced by the students and to offer practical implications for more effective teaching strategies.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the findings of derivational word formation errors identified in the students' academic essays. The analysis was based on the Surface Strategy Taxonomy proposed by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982), which classifies errors into four types: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. Each category is explained in detail below.

Table 1. Classification of Derivational Morphology **Errors**

Error Type	Definition	Example from Data	Correct Form
Omission	Omission of a necessary affix or Element	<i>benefit me in slightest</i>	benefit me in the slightest
Addition	Addition of an unnecessary or redundant affix	<i>unforgettable</i>	unforgettable
Misformation	Use of an incorrect affix or an incorrect derived form	<i>beautiffulness</i>	beauty / beautiful
Misordering	Incorrect arrangement of morphemes or affixes	<i>most wonderfulest</i>	most wonderful / the most wonderful

Table 2. Frequency of Error Types

Error Type	Frequency	Percentage
Omission	5	20%
Addition	6	24%
Misformation	12	48%
Misordering	2	8%
Total	25	100%

1. Omission Errors

Omission errors refer to the absence of necessary affixes or morphological elements required to express grammatical or semantic meaning. These errors reveal students' incomplete understanding of derivational processes, particularly when forming adjectives or adverbs from base words. Learners tend to prioritize content over grammatical structure, omitting essential affixes that change the word class or meaning.

Examples:

She is a care person → She is a careful person

They act polite → They act politely

benefit me in slightest → benefit me in the slightest

He success in his study → He succeeded in his study

These omissions suggest that students often neglect suffixes such as *-ful*, *-ly*, or inflectional endings like *-ed*, indicating insufficient mastery of English derivational and inflectional morphology. According to Ellis (2018), such omissions are common in second language acquisition when learners focus on conveying ideas rather than grammatical precision. This finding also supports Corder (1981), who states that omission errors reflect an early stage of interlanguage development where learners simplify linguistic rules to reduce processing effort.

2. Addition Errors

Addition errors occur when learners insert unnecessary or redundant morphemes, creating non-existent or grammatically incorrect words. These errors are often the result of overgeneralization the incorrect extension of known morphological rules to inappropriate contexts.

Examples:

unforgettable → unforgettable

developtation → development

beautifullest → most beautiful

happynessly → happily

Learners appear to assume that longer or more complex words are more accurate or formal. For example, *developtation* shows confusion between derivational and inflectional rules, where the suffix *-ation* is applied to a verb (*develop*) that already has a standard derived noun form (*development*). Rakhman (2013) and Fitriana (2017) both observed similar patterns in Indonesian EFL learners, concluding that addition errors arise when students apply affixation patterns mechanically without considering grammatical or semantic suitability. This overgeneralization may also stem from direct translation from Indonesian, which uses consistent affixation to form nominalized words.

3. Misformation Errors

Misformation errors were the most frequent type found in this study (48% of total errors). They involve using an incorrect affix or combining affixes inappropriately with a base word. Such errors often result from L1 interference, false analogy, or limited morphological awareness.

Examples:

successness → success / successful

friendity → friendship

happymment → happiness

comfortful → comfortable

understability → understanding /

comprehensibility

Students' tendency to select incorrect suffixes like *-ness*, *-ity*, or *-ment* suggests confusion regarding the distribution and grammatical function of derivational morphemes. As Fitriana (2017) explains, misformation errors are the most prevalent in EFL contexts because learners rely on analogy-based formation constructing words that seem correct based on familiar patterns. This reflects interlanguage creativity (Corder, 1981), where learners attempt to apply morphological knowledge productively but inaccurately. The high frequency of misformation also implies a lack of exposure to academic vocabulary and insufficient feedback in writing instruction.

4. Misordering Errors

Misordering errors are relatively rare (8%) but significant, as they reveal learners' confusion in the sequential arrangement of morphemes or the combination of multiple affixes. These errors show difficulty in integrating morphological rules within syntactic structures.

Examples:

most wonderfulest → most wonderful

unuseful → useless

disunhappy → unhappy

reunpossible → impossible

Misordering reflects the challenge of recognizing hierarchical morphological structures particularly in comparative or negative constructions. Learners often combine multiple prefixes (*dis-*, *un-*, *re-*) incorrectly or redundantly. According to Bauer (2003) and Booij (2005), such misordering indicates incomplete understanding of how derivational morphology interacts with word syntax and semantics. Even though rare, these errors demonstrate that morphological competence has not yet been internalized at the syntactic level.

5. Summary of Findings

The analysis reveals that misformation errors dominate, followed by addition, omission, and misordering. This hierarchy indicates that while learners possess some awareness of affixation, they often misapply morphological rules due to interference, limited exposure, and incomplete morphological awareness.

These results align with previous findings by Fitriana (2017) and Nugraha & Rahman (2020), emphasizing that explicit instruction in morphological rules especially in derivational word formation is crucial to improving students' academic writing accuracy. Therefore, structured morphological instruction, integrated with vocabulary development and contextualized writing tasks, is recommended to address these recurrent errors.

CONCLUSION

This study examined derivational morphology errors in the academic writing of fourth semester English Literature students at Universitas Bina Darma. The analysis, conducted using the Surface Strategy Taxonomy, identified four types of errors: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. Among these, misformation was the most frequent (48%), followed by addition (24%), omission (20%), and misordering (8%).

The findings indicate that the main sources of these errors include first language interference, overgeneralization of affixation rules, limited morphological awareness, and insufficient exposure to authentic academic vocabulary. These errors were systematic and recurrent, demonstrating gaps in morphological competence that affect the accuracy and clarity of students' academic writing. The study highlights the importance of targeted morphological instruction to improve students' derivatio-

nal word formation skills and overall language proficiency.

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