

## Exploring Lexical Errors of Indonesian EFL Students in Writing Recount Texts

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### Abstract

*The study aimed to examine the EFL students' lexical errors in writing recount texts. This study employed a descriptive qualitative method involving 31 students and uses the taxonomy of James' lexical errors in analyzing the texts. The findings revealed that there was a total of 161 lexical errors in the students' recount writings. Likewise, it was claimed that misselection became the most frequent lexical error, with 73 errors. The next was suffix type with 35 errors and calque with 10 errors. Furthermore, the results showed that most students felt difficult to select the appropriate lexical types in writing recount texts and most of the formal errors resulted from the intralingual error. Thus, the study recommends that the teachers teach vocabulary in contexts rather than words and use English thesaurus or monolingual dictionaries to find the grammatical content, definitions, examples, spelling, or other structures. The study also recommends online lexical analyzers, drilling, and remedy as the other alternative methods of reducing lexical errors in writing.*

**Keywords:** *EFL, Lexical Errors, Recount Texts*

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## 1. Introduction

It widely consents that lexical matters pose a significant issue in language learning as the learners often make errors in creating second language writing. In second language acquisition, both researchers and teachers consider lexical knowledge essential to language mastery (Read & Chapelle, 2001). In addition, vocabulary is essentially the first linguistic item acquired in both first and second language acquisition (Llach, 2005). Therefore, students must master vocabulary to learn English well (Sa'adah, 2020). Without good vocabulary, students encounter problems communicating effectively and cannot express their ideas in both oral and written form.

A strong correlation has been established between the acquisition of vocabulary and lexical errors that are mostly regarded as fundamental aspects of the process of acquisition (Llach, 2007a). The occurrence of lexical errors directly impacts the process of learning vocabulary in second languages and is among the most common errors in student performance. Thus, lexical errors become a leading source of information about target language vocabulary acquisition in giving precise learner language data (Llach, 2007b). Since ancient times, language pedagogy has been used to study learner errors (Shin, 2002). Language teachers frequently pay attention to the errors that students create and to the strategies that will be developed in teaching ESL or EFL students. There are two main causes of students' errors, namely interlingual error or native-language interference and intralingual error, which is the over-generalization of English grammar rules (Fauzan et al., 2020). Recognizing some common mistakes made by students, according to Ratmaningsih & Azizah (2019), can help teachers improve their teaching and learning strategies and their learning outcomes in English.

Based on the previous studies, Floranti & Adiantika (2019) and Setyowati et al. (2020) discovered that 100 students of the twelfth grade of SMAN 1 Kuningan and 30 fourth-semester students of the English Education study program, Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology, University of PGRI Wiranegara committed numerous error types in the verb area caused by the incapability to understand the foreign language rules and the lack of vocabulary mastery. Similarly, Devi (2021) found that the error proportions as the result of her study in SMPN 2 Bandar Lampung were dominated by lexical errors, especially formal errors. The students claimed that they were still confused about writing a composition. Based on the data collection, an error was often produced due to the need for more vocabulary and the differences between the patterns of source and target language. Thus, they often produced an English sentence using an Indonesian language pattern, making their writing text awkward.

Ahamed (2019) and Andre & Jurianto (2015) discovered that lexical errors affect the quality of the students' compositions in many ways. First, if any errors occur in the students' compositions, the quality of students' writing skills is terrible. Second, the incorrect choice of words can lead the content directly to misinterpretation. In other words, errors can have several effects on the readers.

Fauzan et al. (2020) and Selvia (2020) discovered that students of SMA Negeri 4 Samarinda and MTs Aisyiyah Medan should use the correct words in writing a composition. The purpose of using correct words is to ease the readers in understanding the students' composition, as words are the central parts of the unit that connect each other. Therefore, the students should pay attention to the lexical aspect in producing sentences, as it is an important basic element in written communication. However, errors are often made in the students' sentences (Muhsin, 2016).

Based on the previous studies that had various findings, the researcher intended to check the data relevance at SMKN 1 Singosari. The result of the study would be used for some purposes, including finding the best solutions and also the strategies, especially for the teachers in conducting better teaching-learning activities. The subjects of the study were the students of the tenth grade at a vocational high school to be examined in terms of lexical errors which were found in their compositions. This recent study aimed to find the answers to these two questions:

1. What kinds of lexical errors can be discovered in the recount writings written by students of grade X at SMKN 1 Singosari Malang?
2. What is the most frequent lexical error discovered in the recount writings written by students of grade X at SMKN 1 Singosari Malang?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Lexical Errors**

Lexical errors occur when two words are used in the wrong context due to the writer's confusion (Llach, 2007). Second-language learners often make lexical errors, and these errors have a significant

impact on acquiring their vocabulary (Ander & Yildirim, 2010). Consequentially, learners with more lexical errors have lower writing skills.

The reference used is taken from the taxonomy of lexical errors written by James (1998), which is divided into two main types: Formal and Semantic Errors. These two significant types are divided again into some details as follows.

### **2.1.1 Formal Errors**

Formal Errors are divided into three categories: distortions, formal misselections, and formal misformations.

***Distortions.*** Distortions are caused by misapplication of the second language, consisting of four subcategories: Overinclusion (for example, Deisease [disease]); Omission (for examples, Ridle [riddle], osteoporosis [osteoporosis], government [government]); Misordering (for example, Aslo [also]); and Misselection (for example, Disiness [dizziness]). The examples were taken from the previous studies by Ramli (2019) and Rudy et al. (2018).

***Formal Misselections.*** Formal misselections are errors that have similar spelling and pronunciation and have been divided into four subcategories: Consonant-Based Type (for example, The little red riding hood must bass [pass] the forest); Vowel-Based Type (for example, Important [important]); Prefix Type (for example, So that the quality of the environment to become less healthy [unhealthy] for the community); and Suffix Type (for example, Malin became a succeeded [successful] man). The examples were taken from the previous studies by Andre & Jurianto (2015) and Tursini & Prasetya (2020).

***Formal Misformations.*** Formal misformations are errors in constructing a word, phrase, or sentence consisting of three subcategories: Calque (for example, We do not look at something with one eye [We may not underestimate anyone].); Coinage (for example, The different culture of civitas academic [university stakeholders]); Borrowing (for example, Malin go to the darmaga [dock]). The examples were taken from the previous studies by Andre & Jurianto (2014) and Tursini & Prasetya (2020).

### **2.1.2 Semantic Errors**

There is a type of semantic error, namely confusion of sense relations. There are four subcategories of confusion in sense relations: Using Incorrect co-Hyponyms (for example, Who's the most beautiful girl [woman] in this land?); Using a Superonym for a Hyponym (for example, Someone who is on her bed with her grandmother's shirt [pajama]); and Using Incorrect near Synonym (for example, They never think about the consequence that they will get and sacrificed [the victim] of bullying will get). The examples were taken from the previous studies by Andre & Jurianto (2015) and Tursini & Prasetya (2020).

## **2.2 Recount Text**

Recount text is a text that retells events in order to inform the readers (Coogan, 2006). It is stated that recount texts consist of the writer's experience or anything that happened in the past. According to Barwick (1999), there are two kinds of recount texts, namely personal recount and factual recount. A personal recount may take the form of a diary, an oral story, or a personal letter. It is written in the first person by using personal pronouns, I and we. A factual recount records a series of events chronologically and can be represented as a traffic report, science experiment, historical recount, film, or sports report. This such recount is written in third person by using pronouns he, she, or they. It may also be written in the passive voice.

According to Mukarto et al. (2007), recount texts commonly have three parts of the generic structure, namely: a) orientation which provides background information of the story to the readers; b)

events which tell a sequence of events chronologically and describes what happened (Biber & Conrad, 2019); c) reorientation which consists of such a comment or conclusion of the story.

### **2.3 Previous Studies**

In the previous studies, Devi (2021), Selvia (2020), and Amin (2014) discovered that the students of SMPN 2 Bandar Lampung, MTs Aisyiyah Medan, and SMP Unismuh Makassar still had confusion in writing a text because of a lack of vocabulary and structure mastery. Some studies involved higher-level students and even dealt with lexical errors in writing recount texts. Purmasari (2017) found that 32 students of the eleventh grade of MAN Sidoarjo made most lexical errors in the form of formal rather than semantic ones. Based on the data, the researcher investigates the sources of the errors produced by the students in recount texts. She found that the students had limited vocabulary, so they should improve their vocabulary knowledge.

In contrast to previous studies, Hutauruk et al. (2022) discovered that 31 students of the English Department of Universitas HKBP Nommensen (UHN) who wrote recount texts made four types of errors, namely omission errors, addition errors, misformation errors, and disorder errors. The most frequent error the students made was a misformation error (79%). It can also be assumed that the students of the English department of UHN needed help in writing recount text, especially in using tenses.

## **3. Research Methods**

### **3.1 Research Design**

This study employed a descriptive research method. It is stated that descriptive research aims to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics (Nassaji, 2015). Therefore, the researcher described, identified, and analyzed the data obtained from the student's work.

### **3.2 Participants**

The study involved tenth-grade vocational high school students as the participants who were studying at SMK Negeri 1 Singosari Malang in the academic year 2022/2023. The criteria to choose the participants were because the class had male and female students and they were from different junior high school. The participants were 31 students, consisting of 26 males and 5 females, in the same class and at the age of between 16 and 17 years old. They were requested to compose a recount writing. They felt free to write based on their own experience.

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

The researcher collected data from 31 recount writings of the students of grade X at SMKN 1 Singosari Malang. The students were asked to write a recount text about their holiday. Based on the number of categories proposed by James (1998), the 31 texts were divided into 14 subcategories of lexical errors (James, 1998). The researcher conducted some steps to identify the lexical errors committed by the students of SMKN 1 Singosari. Each student's work was read and checked by the researcher. Consequently, the researcher made a classification of the lexical errors into sheets. Based on these calculations, the researcher made a general analysis.

## **4. Results**

This study unveiled two main types of lexical error: formal error and semantic error. Formal error consists of 11 sub-types, while semantic error consists of 3 sub-types.

### **4.1 Formal Error**

Formal error is a certain kind of lexical error that affects the form of the word. The researcher found three sub-types. Examples of each sub-type are listed below:

**Table 1 :** The formal error examples (the data were taken from this study)

No	Types and Sub-types	Student's Writing Errors
I.	Distortions	
1.	Overinclusion	Grandma's house was never empty [empty]; Afther [After] that .... ; We set upa [up] tent with a capacity of 6 people.
2.	Omission	..., we were still to [too] tired after a long trip form Malang to Yogyakarta; Such as bringing a change of clothes, pillows, bolsers [bolsters].
3.	Misordering	It was my frist [first] day for offroad; It was my frist [first] day for offroad; Then put on the unifrom [uniform].
4.	Misselection	I went there by car with [and brought] lunch and snacks to eat; ... when we go [went] back; I just stay at home for two weeks to did [do]the same activities routinely.
II.	Formal Misselections	
1.	Consonant-Based Type	...clothes thas [that] are suitable to wear on Eid day; ... we want [went] to the hotel to stay; I couldn't meel [meet] because of the covid-19 disease.
2.	Vowel-Based Type	... that are infinite and very momorable [memorable] in my life; ... and T-short [shirt] with the word "Yogyakarta" printed on it.
3.	Prefix Type	... and the other [another house] was so small.
4.	Suffix Type	It was an excited [exciting]experience I had last week; I was kinda feel [feeling] that...
III.	Formal Misformations	
1.	Calque	I followed a trip [went on a trip] with our guide; my Junior Hight School friend [schoolmate] went to Art Exhibition in Galeri Raos.
2.	Coinage	The Jimmy [jeep] I have has history.
3.	Borrowing	we went snorkeling [snorkling]; chronic gastritis; We went to galeri [gallery] by motorcycle.

#### 4.2 Semantic Errors

Semantic errors are a certain kind of lexical errors that affect the definition of the meant word. According to the data, the examples of each sub-type can be observed in the following table below:

**Table 2 :** The semantic error examples (the data were taken from this study)

No	Types and Sub-types	Student's Writing Errors
I.	Confusion of Sense Relations	
1.	Using incorrect co-Hyponyms	My brother and I decided to rent a PS to accompany us [to play a game] when bored; my stomach felt pain [hurt]
2.	Using a Superonym for a Hyponym	We saw so many merchants [street vendors] with various of product
3.	Using incorrect near Synonym	not long after that [a few minutes later]

Based on the types and sub-types of lexical errors found in students' recount writings, the following table shows the distribution of lexical errors.

**Table 3 :** Result of the Study

NO	Types of Lexical Errors														Total
	Formal Errors											Semantic Errors			
	Distortions				Formal Misselections				Formal Misformations			Confusion of Sense Relations			
	Overinclusion	Omission	Misordering	Misselection	Consonant-Based Type	Vowel-Based Type	Prefix Type	Suffix Type	Calque	Coinage	Borrowing	Using Incorrect Co-Hyponyms	Using a Superonym for a Hyponym	Using an Incorrect Near-Synonym	
1		1		1		1	1	8					2		14
2				2		1		1			1	1			6
3				2								2			4
4								1	1		1				3
5	1			3	1				1					3	9
6				9					1		2				12
7			1			1			1	1			1	1	6
8				2				4						2	8
9		1				1									2
10				2					1						3
11				1										1	2
12	1			1											2
13	1			3				4	1	1					10
14			2												2
15				1				1	1						3
16															0
17				3											3
18				2					1					1	4
19				3				5							8
20				7					1						8
21				1	1				1						3
22				5				1							6
23	2	1													3
24				3											3
25	1			2											3
26				8				3							11
27				5				5				1			11
28		2			1			1							4
29								1							1
30				5											5
31				2											2
Total	6	5	3	73	3	4	1	35	10	2	4	4	3	8	161
Sub-total	87				43				15			16			161
Percent age of Errors	54,04				26,71				9,31			9,94			100

## 5. Discussion

Based on the study's findings, the most frequent lexical error identified in the students' recount writings was misselection (the sub-type of distortions that reached 45,34%), one of the occurrences of formal error sub-types (see Table 3). The second most frequent lexical error was suffix (the sub-type of formal misselection that reached 21,73%), then followed by Calque (the sub-type of formal misformations that reached 6,21%).

Formal errors occurred as the most prevalent error in the students' recount writing found in this study (see Table 3), reaching 54,04%. Additionally, the study's findings concerning formal error highlight a crucial problem: most students appear to have significant difficulty recognizing the proper form of lexical items. Additionally, based on James (1992) and Brown (2007), the error was mainly from the intralingual transfer. More issues that arose were the usage of a suffix or prefix, which is unsuitable in examining the right word, the spelling of lexical items, which is incorrect as a result of adding or deleting one item in a word, and an incorrect analogy of the students to determine the form of plural.

Additionally, the findings of the study on formal errors are in contrast to the previous studies conducted by Anggraeni (2015), Kasriyati et al. (2018), Nuraini et al. (2020), Shalaby (2009), and Wells (2006) that revealed the most frequent errors discovered in students' works were semantic errors. Another study by Ananda & Wijaya (2021) discovered that students with low proficiency produced more semantic error types than high ones. This finding was probably because the low-proficiency students had more problems expressing the words they intended as they still lacked vocabulary knowledge.

However, the findings revealed that semantic errors grew less prevalent in the recount compositions written by the students (can be seen in Table 3). The findings showed that the error in using incorrect near synonym was the most frequent in semantic errors. This conclusion is comparable to Andre & Jurianto (2014), that found the most frequent semantic error was the use of incorrect near synonym.

Additionally, the intralingual error was the source of the semantic errors discovered in the students' recount writings. This conclusion is also consistent with Hemchua & Schmitt's study (2006), which found that intralingual errors accounted for most errors in incorrect near synonyms. Some students appear to have difficulty in distinguishing between the usage of some terms that share a similar meaning but are used differently in various contexts when there are semantic errors. Additionally, these students have difficulty in distinguishing the link between some lexical items' inclusion and the usage of words with a broader meaning than the incorrect co-hyponyms.

Overall, the conclusion was drawn that most of the lexical errors in the recount writings of SMKN 1 Singosari students were often impacted by intralingual errors. Students mostly need help in transferring their thoughts to their writings due to the effect of L1. Other studies, like Mastura et al. (2022), Tursini & Prasetya (2020), Qasem et al. (2022), also identified the impact of intralingual errors. They discovered in their studies that the fourth-semester students of the Department of English Education at Kanjuruhan University in Malang, MTsN 2 Aceh Besar students, and Yemeni secondary school students were making the most intralingual errors in their written compositions. The amount of vocabulary taught in the English topic throughout the teaching-learning process may be related to the students' issues with lexical errors caused by the intralingual transfer. Likewise, the limited student vocabulary in the target language was also found in Alisya et al. (2021), Devi (2021), Maizu et al. (2022), and Sijono (2019).

The researcher infers from the mentioned phenomena that vocabulary instruction is necessary for students to reduce lexical errors in their writing. Additionally, through teaching vocabulary, the teacher may help the students add more words to their vocabulary. Andre & Jurianto (2015) recommends that using an English-only dictionary may be a beneficial tool for students to solve their difficulties during the

teaching-learning process. In this situation, the teacher should instruct the students on efficiently utilizing an English monolingual dictionary so they can use it correctly by comprehending its grammatical content, definitions, examples, spelling, and other structures. The students may also get help by using a thesaurus to get more various words (Rahayu et al., 2021).

The alternative methods for reducing lexical errors in students' writings are drilling (Ardaniah, 2014) and remedy (Andre & Jurianto, 2015) throughout the teaching-learning process. In order to recognize the students' oral or written utterances as mistakes and ensure that they are not repeated, remediation aims to help them revise their mental models of the linguistic rule they were using. Additionally, teachers should be aware that they must correct students' errors when they make incorrect oral or written statements when carrying out remediation. In order to identify the students' mistakes while speaking with their classmates and teachers or when they make any in recount writings, the teachers can guide the class discussion. Choemue & Bram (2021) also state that ESL and EFL teachers, lecturers, and instructors are encouraged to use online lexical analyzers to detect students struggling with writing due to poor productive vocabulary. Those tools can be used to reduce the problem of assisting students to improve their writing skills.

## 6. Conclusion

Based on the findings, there were two kinds of lexical errors obtained from the students' recount texts called formal (11 sub-types) and semantic errors (3 sub-types). There are 161 lexical errors. The common error obtained from the students' recount texts was misselection, which reached 73 errors. More specifically, according to the lexical errors classification, formal errors were claimed to be the highest common error which was occurred in the recount texts of the students. A correlation may exist between formal errors and students' major problems (most of the students felt difficult to determine the right type of lexical things). Furthermore, the researcher found that most of the formal errors resulted from intralingual errors. Thus, the present study suggests that students need more vocabulary teaching. Teachers may also suggest thesaurus, English monolingual dictionaries, online lexical analyzers, drilling or remediation to minimize the students' problems in lexical errors.

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