

Volume 21, No. 1  June 2024

JOURNAL OF

Islam in Asia

A Refereed International Biannual Arabic – English Journal

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA

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JOURNAL OF *Islam in Asia*

Volume 21, No. 1 June 2024

ISSN: 1823-0970 E-ISSN: 2289-8077

Journal of Islam in Asia

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E-ISSN: 2289-8077

Exploring the History of Islamic Revivalism in Modern Sri Lanka	206
Mohamed Arkam and Fatmir Shehu	
A Comparative Analysis of Shariah Stock Screening Methodology for Securities Commission Malaysia and Major International Shariah Index Providers	230
Mohd Fuad Md Sawari, Miszairi Sitiris and Muntaha Artalim Zaim	
Rethinking the Concept of <i>Al-Saadah</i> (Happiness) in Light of the Quranic <i>Istikhlaf</i> Framework	277
Hidayah Wan Ismail and Abdelaziz Berghout	
Error Analysis of English Writing in Final Year Projects in Malaysia: The Case of IIUM	306
Homam Altabaa and Norsyazwina Zulkifli	

Error Analysis of English Writing in Final Year Projects in Malaysia: The Case of IIUM

Analisis Kesalahan Penulisan Bahasa Inggeris dalam Projek Tahun Akhir di Malaysia: Kajian di UIAM

Homam Altabaa* and Norsyazwina Zulkifli**

Abstract

This study conducted an Error Analysis (EA) on written dissertations by undergraduates from the English Language and Literature (BENL) department at International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). Despite the abundance of research on EA conducted with multiple samples and backgrounds, only a few studies concerning EA can be found and accessed in a Malaysian context. Thus, this paper aims to find the most common errors committed by undergraduates in Malaysia, focusing on their theses that adhered strictly to academic writing. Using Stephen Pit Corder's EA framework, a qualitative approach was employed to find the errors in the written samples. Additionally, this research synthesised the results of the Lunsford & Connors' study in 1988 with several studies on the Malaysian context that were compared and contrasted with findings from the interview session with lecturers from the BENL department to find the most

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common errors in writing among Malaysians. This paper's results demonstrate that the most common errors from IIUM undergraduates are word choice, punctuation, prepositions, plurality and singularity, verbs, articles, pronoun, ambiguity, adverbs, and subject-verb agreement. Similar to the synthesis, word choice remains the most highlighted classification of errors. In contrast, it is revealed that subject-verb agreement (SVA) is not the most frequent error. One possible justification for this finding is accessible online grammar checkers that revise students' writing with basic grammar rules. Therefore, this paper has contributed to Error Analysis in theses to benefit language learners, both learners and teachers and researchers interested in the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) field in Malaysia.

Keywords: Error Analysis, Pit Corder, Lunsford and Connors, Thesis Writing, Second Language Acquisition, English Writing.

Abstract

Kajian ini menjalankan Analisis Kesalahan (EA) terhadap disertasi bertulis oleh mahasiswa dari jabatan Bahasa dan Kesusasteraan Inggeris (BENL) di Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia (UIAM). Walaupun terdapat banyak penyelidikan mengenai EA yang dijalankan dengan pelbagai sampel dan latar belakang, hanya beberapa kajian mengenai EA boleh ditemui dan diakses dalam konteks Malaysia. Oleh itu, kertas kerja ini bertujuan untuk mencari kesilapan yang paling biasa dilakukan oleh mahasiswa di Malaysia, memfokuskan kepada tesis mereka yang berpegang teguh kepada penulisan akademik. Menggunakan rangka kerja EA Stephen Pit Corder, pendekatan kualitatif telah digunakan untuk mencari ralat dalam sampel penulisan. Selain itu, penyelidikan ini mensintesis hasil kajian Lunsford & Connors pada tahun 1988 dengan beberapa kajian tentang konteks Malaysia yang dibandingkan dan dibezakan dengan dapatan daripada sesi temu bual dengan pensyarah dari jabatan BENL untuk mencari kesilapan yang paling biasa dalam penulisan Bahasa Inggeris di kalangan rakyat Malaysia. Penulisan ini mendapati kesilapan yang paling kerap dalam kalangan pelajar UIAM ialah pemilihan kata, tanda baca, kata sendi nama, kata tunggal dan kata majmuk, kata kerja, rencana, kata ganti nama, kekaburan, kata keterangan, dan perjanjian subjek-kata kerja. Sama seperti sintesis, pemilihan kata kekal sebagai klasifikasi ralat yang paling

ketara. Sebaliknya, ia mendedahkan bahawa perjanjian subjek-kata kerja (SVA) bukanlah ralat yang paling kerap. Satu justifikasi yang mungkin untuk penemuan ini ialah penyemak tatabahasa atas talian yang boleh diakses untuk menyemak semula penulisan pelajar dengan peraturan tatabahasa asas. Oleh itu, kertas kerja ini telah menyumbang kepada Analisis Kesalahan dalam penulisan tesis untuk memberi manfaat kepada pelajar bahasa, sama ada pelajar dan guru serta penyelidik yang berminat dalam bidang Pemerolehan Bahasa Kedua (SLA) di Malaysia.

Kata kunci: Analisis Kesalahan, Pit Corder, Lunsford dan Connors, Penulisan Tesis, Pemerolehan Bahasa Kedua, Penulisan Bahasa Inggeris

Introduction

English is now considered a lingua franca, becoming a connecting bridge to communicate and share information globally. Although people generally acquire their mother tongue as their first language, due to globalisation, people seek to learn English as a second or foreign language. According to Edgar W. Schneider, Kachru has proposed a theory of “Three Circles” to label countries learning English as a second or a foreign language.¹ This theory of Kachru shows that most countries today are eager to adopt the language since it is significant in many essential areas, including economics, politics, and education. It is evident that learning English has become a growing demand to enable people to compete globally. Therefore, people must acquire and master English to be competent and proficient.

Mastering a language requires learners to study four macro communication skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Nunan (1991) divided these four skills into two categories: receptive and productive skills. Receptive skills include listening and reading skills,

¹ Edgar W Schneider, *English Around the World: An Introduction* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 29.

whereas productive skills focus on speaking and writing.² However, writing is deemed to be the most complicated task since it involves a planning process that is not spontaneous.³ Writing falls under productive skills since it is constructed as an output for language learners where they can express their thoughts and ideas in a written form. This written form is the product of one's understanding of the language since it shows a specific writing style and flaws committed by the writer.

The rules of grammar drive the way writing takes place and ensure the written work is readable by others. Poorly constructed sentences make reading hard for people and make the author's ideas and expressions illegible. Consequently, the aim of writing is not achieved since the audience cannot comprehend it. Achieving a high level of grammar proficiency is paramount to ensuring the quality of the writing is standard. Nevertheless, it is almost impossible for language learners to achieve perfect command of grammar since language is complex and errors are inevitable.

Grammatical error is defined as incorrect usage of language rules.⁴ For instance, the English language has its specific pattern for subject-verb-object arrangement. Failing to follow the specific patterns in English resulted in grammatical errors. These errors are more evident in writing than speaking, which are under productive skills because the former is in written form that can be looked through again in detail. Writers can also continuously fix their sentence structures by utilising their understanding of grammatical rules. Hence, it is easier to analyse errors or one's competency in mastering the English language through their writing.

Therefore, it can be concluded that writing can indicate one's level of proficiency in English. Consequently, various studies were

² As cited by Ali Özkayran and Emrullah Yilmaz, "Analysis of Higher Education Students' Errors in English Writing Tasks," *Advances in Language and Literary Studies* 11, no. 2 (2020): 2, <https://doi.org/10.7575/aial.v11n.2p.48>

³ Mary Ann Pescante-Malimas and Sonrisa C. Samson, "Linguistic Error Analysis on Students' Thesis Proposals," *IAFOR Journal of Language Learning* 3, no. 2 (2017): 3, <https://doi.org/10.22492/ijll.3.2.09>

⁴ Jack C Richards and Richard W Schmidt, *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, 3rd ed. (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2002), 232.

conducted to investigate language errors based on the written works of participants. This field of research is usually directed towards Second Language Acquisition (SLA), especially in the pedagogic area, since the findings benefit both students and teachers in language learning.

Statement of the Problem

Malaysia is considered an ESL country since English officially stands as a second language,⁵ so students are obligated to learn it throughout primary and secondary education. Students must take language lessons for eleven years, including passing the English language in Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM or Malaysian Certificate of Education), one of the most significant national examinations taken when they reach fifth-form secondary in school. Furthermore, the practice of the English language can continue until tertiary education and upon entering the workforce if the settings require the language to be used formally. The Malaysian education system focuses more on writing to the extent that they neglect other essential skills in mastering the language. For instance, SPM focuses on writing skills, with the majority of marks at 60% compared to reading (20%) and speaking (20%), according to the Malaysian Examination Council.⁶

After years of learning and mastering the language in writing skills, it can still be seen that some students still need help to grasp even the basic grammatical rules taught since primary education. Numerous studies show that most people are still struggling and committing errors in their writing. For instance, a study by Saadiyah Darus and Kaladevi Subramaniam highlights that secondary students still needed clarification about using singular and plural forms, especially on

⁵ Jantmary Thirusanku and Melor Md Yunus, "Status of English in Malaysia," *Asian Social Science* 10, no. 14 (2014): 4, <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v10n14p254>.

⁶ Kementerian Pendidikan Lembaga Peperiksaan, "Surat siaran Lembaga Peperiksaan bil. 4 Tahun 2020: Format instrumen peperiksaan Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) Dan Ujian Pencapaian Bahasa Antarabangsa (UPBA) mulai tahun 2021 bagi Mata Pelajaran Akademik Kurikulum standard Sekolah Menengah (KSSM)", (2020), Retrieved January 28, 2023, from <http://lp.moe.gov.my/index.php/ss-kv/909-surat-siaran-lembaga-peperiksaan-bil-4-tahun-2020-format-instrumen-peperiksaan-sijil-pelajaran-malaysia-spm-dan-ujian-pencapaian-bahasa-antarabangsa-upba-mulai-tahun-2021-bagi-mata-pelajaran-akademik-kurikulum-standard-sekolah-menengah-kssm>.

countable plural nouns.⁷ Another study by Mohammad Affiq Kamarul Azlan, Wan Yusoff Wan Shaharuddin, Qaziah Fatimah Berhanuddin, Khairul Hisyam Baharuddin finds that tertiary scholars in Malaysia needed help with verb tenses in their narrative essays.⁸ Studies are also done on samples from different ESL countries, such as Indonesia.⁹

Studies on error analysis have also been done to analyse errors in writing for standard or formal academic papers such as a thesis or dissertation. According to The Oxford English Dictionary, a thesis is a piece of extended writing usually done in a higher college or university degree.¹⁰ In many undergraduate programs, producing a thesis is crucial to graduate among final-year scholars. This academic paper allows students to conduct research related to the nature of their courses involving several processes such as data collection, research methodology, data analysis, and presentation skills to explain and demonstrate the paper's contents.¹¹ Because of that, the thesis is considered an achievement for students, and there is also a possibility for publication. Students have the opportunity to publish their papers in books or journals, which will be beneficial for future studies. However, writing a thesis should adhere strictly to academic writing rules where grammar plays a vital role to avoid committing errors.

Several studies are also conducted to identify errors in a thesis. For instance, Soraya Grabiella Dinamika studied grammatical errors in thesis abstracts among undergraduates, and the results show the highest errors in tense agreement.¹² Next, Mary Ann Pescante-Malimas and Sonrisa C. Samson researched thesis proposals from three majors:

⁷ Saadiyah Darus and Kaladevi Subramaniam, "Error analysis of the written English essays of secondary school students in Malaysia: A case study," *European journal of social sciences* 8, no. 3 (2009): 483-495.

⁸ Mohammad Affiq Kamarul Azlan et al., "Five Most Common Grammatical Errors in Narrative Essay," *Practicality of Islamic Alternatives: Issues and Challenges*, (2015): 71-78.

⁹ Faisal Hakim et al., "Patterns of Grammatical Errors in Students' Thesis," In *Journal of English Education Forum (JEEF)* 2, no. 1 (2022): 26-32, <https://doi.org/10.29303/j.v2i1.274>.

¹⁰ John Andrew Simpson, and Edmund SC Weiner, *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. Vol. 17, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 925.

¹¹ Hakim et al., "Patterns of Grammatical Errors in Students' Thesis," 1.

¹² Soraya Grabiella Dinamika, "Grammatical Errors in Thesis Abstracts Written by the Undergraduate Students of Management Study Program," *JOALL (Journal of Applied Linguistics and Literature)* 6, no. 1 (2021): 72-86, <https://doi.org/10.33369/joall.v6i1.12443>.

linguistics, literature, and advertising arts.¹³ The findings highlight that most students struggled with disagreement between the pronoun and antecedent. Another study is from Nguyen Thi Man, where the sample is published articles among non-English authors, and it is analysed that verb error is the highest committed.¹⁴ The findings of these studies are considered genuine and valuable since a thesis is an important document, and students are particularly meticulous in constructing its composition. Then, if an error is found in writing, it shows the extent of understanding of students' language competency in acquiring the English language.

Based on the above discussion, it is evident that language scholars still commit errors that fall under standard grammatical rules, even in academic papers. Because of that, this study is interested in seeing whether similar findings can be expected based on a different context, precisely Malaysian ESL learners. Written theses by undergraduates from the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) have been chosen randomly as the samples for this study. To ensure participants are those with good command of English, this research only focuses on one of the majors available in the university, which is the English Language and Literature (BENL) major under the Kulliyyah of Abdul Hamid Abdul Sulayman Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences (AHAS IRKHS).

The thesis is a crucial requirement to graduate for BENL students, so they need to make sure it is written excellently to academic writing standards in order to pass the course, which is Final Year Project (FYP). Consequently, the researcher decided to study the thesis because it is a planned written document where students will fully utilise their understanding of grammatical knowledge. Because of that, this study attempts to study error analysis on the thesis among BENL undergraduates in IIUM for their FYP.

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

¹³ Pescante-Malimas and Samson, "Linguistic Error Analysis on Students' Thesis Proposals," 193-209.

¹⁴ Nguyen Thi Man, "English language Errors in Academic writing: An analysis of English research papers of Thu Dau Mot University Journal of Science," *Journal of Thu Dau Mot University*, (2020): 238–254, <https://doi.org/10.37550/tdmu.ejs/2020.02.051>

1. In undergraduate theses from the English Language and Literature department, what are the most common errors committed by students and how can these errors be classified?
2. How do the findings of this research compare with previous relevant studies?

The study aims to achieve the following research objectives:

1. To identify the most common errors committed by students in undergraduate theses from the English Language and Literature department and classify these errors.
2. To compare the findings of this study with previous relevant studies.

Literature Review

The second chapter of this research contains literature reviews about error analysis and its relevant previous studies. For this study, the researcher integrates the conceptual frameworks of earlier papers with Lunsford and Connors and local lecturers' opinions to adapt to the Malaysian sample. Since most Malaysians are ESL learners, it is interesting to see whether the findings differ from previous studies with different samplings. The conceptual framework for this study is explained in this chapter to answer the research questions. This chapter has five main sections: introduction, error analysis, previous studies, theoretical framework, and chapter summary.

2.2 Error Analysis (EA)

Error Analysis (EA) is a study of applied linguistics focusing on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) in both second language (L2) and foreign language (FL). EA emerged as a replacement for Contrastive Analysis (CA), an approach to compare and contrast two language systems conducted by structuralists and behaviourists in the 1950s.¹⁵ CA developed three primary language learning assumptions for L2 and FL

¹⁵ Henry Douglas Brown, *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*, 4th ed (New York: Longman, 2000).

acquisition.¹⁶ First, language learning difficulties depend on first-acquired language (L1) interference. Second, the difficulties can be predicted after comparing and contrasting two language systems where CA occurs. Last, teaching materials will be derived from CA to reduce L1 interference. However, the CA approach is heavily criticised by linguists since it needs to be more realistic and practicable. In response to CA, numerous studies on learner errors provide evidence that errors made by learners are not entirely caused by L1 interference.¹⁷ CA fails to consider other factors of errors, making it less applicable in research. Therefore, the CA approach was replaced with EA, a more effective and practical analysis methodology for language errors.

While CA predicted errors by comparing and contrasting, EA is more focused on analysing the errors made in the target language (TL), which is the L2. The meaning of EA is a study to analyse the errors committed by second language learners.¹⁸ Stephan Pit Corder (1981) pioneered and contributed extensive elaboration to the study of EA.¹⁹ He focused on errors and outlined five main stages in EA: (a) identification of an error, (b) description of an error, (c) explanation of an error, (d) evaluation of an error, and (e) correction of an error. This procedure allows researchers to narrow the errors into categories and find their causes and learners' proficiency level, including language understanding. Compared to CA, where L1 interference is significant, EA gathers more information based on the errors made by language learners, thus, making the latter a more prominent and realistic study in SLA.

According to Corder, EA can be divided into two parts: theoretical and applied. From the theoretical perspective, EA shows the progress

¹⁶ Richards and Schmidt, *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, 119.

¹⁷ Bandar Mohammad Saeed Al-Sobhi, "The Nitty-Gritty of Language Learners' Errors-- Contrastive Analysis, Error Analysis and Interlanguage," *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies* 7, no. 3 (2019): 4. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.7n.3p.49>; Naimi Amara, "Understanding Language Transfer and Error Analysis Transfer or Not: I Am The Biggest In My Family," *The Online Journal of New Horizons in Education* 9, no. 1 (2019): 1, <https://doi.org/10.52127/2240-005-016-028>.

¹⁸ Hossein Tavakoli, *A Dictionary of Language Acquisition: A Comprehensive Overview of Key Terms in First and Second Language Acquisition* (Rahnama Press, 2012), 118.

¹⁹ As cited by Peter G. Sercombe, "Errors in English: Description, classification, explanation and remedy," *Journal of Modern Languages* 14, no. 1 (2002): 5.

and understanding of language learners toward their L2 acquisition. The latter part is where the learners apply the knowledge based on EA to improve their proficiency.²⁰ For instance, students will be aware of their competence level by analysing their writing frequency and patterns of errors based on EA. Therefore, it is evident that EA is essential for SLA, especially in teaching and learning, since it provides resources and materials for teachers and students to acquire a second language, including researchers interested in this field.

2.2.1 Errors and mistakes

Generally, the terms errors and mistakes can be used synonymously to indicate a flaw or blunder. However, from a linguistic point of view, a slight difference divides the usage of both words. Corder's article entitled "The Significance of Learners' Errors" in 1967 distinguished errors from mistakes by addressing the latter as akin to slips of the tongue.²¹ He mentioned that learners can recognize their mistakes since they have prior knowledge of the language system, and it can be self-corrected if necessary. For instance, mistakes are caused by non-linguistic factors such as fatigue, affecting the writing quality. Mistakes are also referred to as performance errors.²²

On the other hand, an error is systematic rather than accidental. Errors can be recognized from their repeating occurrences in writing. It is obvious that the learners are unaware of the errors they commit due to a lack of knowledge and competence in the language, hence the repetition.²³ Then, it is clear that errors and mistakes are two distinct things, although they can be used interchangeably. Therefore, linguists are only interested in studying language errors since it provides essential information about the learners' understanding of acquiring a

²⁰ Nguyen, "English language Errors in Academic writing: An analysis of English research papers of Thu Dau Mot University Journal of Science," 3.

²¹ Susan M Gass and Larry Selinker, *Second Language Acquisition: An Introductory Course*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 102.

²² Sanaa Khatter, "An Analysis of the Most Common Essay Writing Errors among EFL Saudi Female Learners (Majmaah University)," *Arab World English Journal* 10, no. 3 (2019): 3, <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol10no3.26>.

²³ Samet Taşçi and Bengü Aksu Ataç, "Written Grammatical Errors of Turkish Adult Learners of English: An Analysis," *Journal of International Social Sciences Education* 4, no. 1 (2018): 3.

language in SLA rather than a one-time mistake that can be self-corrected.

2.2.2 Five stages of EA procedures

Errors can be analysed to gain information and feedback on a learner's process in SLA. To obtain this input, most linguists deployed the few stages of EA suggested by Corder in the 1970s. Researchers also make modifications in these steps to adapt to their study sample. For instance, Muftah Hamed adopted four steps suggested by Ellis (1997) and Gass & Selinker (2001) consisting of data collection, identification, classification, and a statement of error frequency.²⁴ The first few steps are similar to Corder, except that the following stages are usually changed to achieve different research objectives. The five stages of EA outlined by Corder in 1974 are; **collection of a sample of learner language, identification of errors, classification/Description of errors, explanation of errors, and evaluation/Correction of errors.**

This study of EA procedures helps to conceptualise the language pedagogic process. Researchers analyse the SLA, including interlanguage sources, and provide evidence that errors should not be seen as "undesirable or unwanted forms." Instead, it signals the learner's progress in acquiring the target language.²⁵ The progress of SLA can also be a strategy for teaching and learning purposes since it provides information on errors that students commonly commit in general.²⁶

2.3 Previous Studies on Error Analysis

Many studies have been conducted to analyse errors in EA within different contexts to provide further insights into the SLA branch of applied linguistics. Some studies focus on the EA procedures outlined by Corder in the 1970s, which involve five steps from data collection to

²⁴ Muftah Hamed, "Common linguistic errors among non-English major Libyan students writing," *Arab World English Journal* 9, no. 3 (2018): 7, <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol9no3.15>.

²⁵ Ahmad Taufik Hidayah Abdullah et al., "Investigation into Common Errors in English Writing Among Non-Academic Staff at a Malaysian Public University," *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)* 12 (2021): 5, <https://doi.org/https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol12no4.29>

²⁶ Amara, "Understanding Language Transfer and Error Analysis Transfer or Not: I Am The Biggest In My Family," 3.

evaluating the errors.²⁷ However, some studies altered the stages to achieve their objectives. For instance, a study by Muftah Hamed uses a different procedure for EA by Ellis (1997) and Gass and Selinker (2001) that ends with the frequency of errors to achieve his research objectives of finding common linguistic errors among non-English major Libyan students.²⁸ From here, it is clear that Hamed wants to find frequency rather than evaluate the errors from his samples.

Similarly, Faisal Hakim, Untung Waluyo and Henny Soepriyanti²⁹ conducted a study where they followed EA procedures by Ellis & Barkhuizen³⁰ that includes five steps which are data collection, errors classifications, interpretation, explanation, and evaluation by counting their frequency.³¹ These two studies adopted modified procedures by other linguists to achieve their objectives. Most studies are interested in analysing the frequency of errors, hence why most opted for Corder's EA procedure or any similar stages proposed by Ellis and Barkhuizen or Gas and Selinker.

Although the EA procedures are not fixed as proposed by Corder, and changes were made by a few other linguists such as Ellis, Gass, and Selinker, one particular step is seen to be included in most of the studies, which is the step of classifying errors. As mentioned earlier, researchers categorise the identified errors into different linguistics groups in the classification stage. Commonly, several studies replicate classification from existing frameworks, but some also established their categorisation. One framework is used extensively among previous relevant studies on EA,³² which is Surface Strategy Taxonomy

²⁷ Ahmad et al., "Investigation into Common Errors in English Writing Among Non-Academic Staff at a Malaysian Public University," 5; Özkayran and Yilmaz, "Analysis of Higher Education Students' Errors in English Writing Tasks," 51; Khatter, "An Analysis of the Most Common Essay Writing Errors among EFL Saudi Female Learners (Majmaah University)," 8.

²⁸ Hamed, "Common linguistic errors among non-English major Libyan students writing," 7.

²⁹ Hakim et al., "Patterns of Grammatical Errors in Students' Thesis."

³⁰ As cited in Fatemeh Amiri and Marlia Puteh, "Error Analysis in Academic Writing: A Case of International Postgraduate Students in Malaysia," *Advances in Language and Literary Studies* 8, no. 4 (2017): 141-145, <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.all.v.8n.4p.141>

³¹ Hakim et al., "Patterns of Grammatical Errors in Students' Thesis," 4.

³² Dewi Atikah et al., "Examining Frequent Grammatical Errors in Student Theses: A Case Study of a Private University in Sulawesi," *KnE Social Sciences* (2022): 91-109, <https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v7i8.10726>; Vicente S. Esmalde, "Surface strategy taxonomy in

Classification (SSTC) from Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982). SSTC classifies errors into four categories: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. Under each category, some subsections focus on grammatical aspects such as the omission of articles or misformation of SVA.

Another framework that can be replicated is Hubbard et al. (1996) taxonomy, which includes four classifications which are grammatical, syntactic, substance, and lexical errors. These categories are further divided into several subcategories in English linguistics.³³ For instance, grammatical errors focus on prepositions, singularity/plurality, adjectives, tenses, possessive cases, relative clauses, and articles. Compared to Hubbard's framework, SSTC is extensively used among researchers. There are also other studies conducted with their classification of errors. Still, it will be similar to the two frameworks discussed earlier. For instance, Nguyen categorised errors into three types which are lexical, morphological, and syntactic.³⁴ The subcategories are similar to the two frameworks. Researchers will then highlight the most frequent errors from the subcategories and derive learners' language competency from the findings.

Andrea A. Lunsford and Robert J. Connors discovered the most frequent formal errors committed in the mid-1980s and ranked them accordingly.³⁵ The top five listed in the rank are wrong words, no comma

error analysis: Basis for Grammatical Competence Enhancement Program (GCEP)," *International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)* 9, no. 7 (2020): 785-792, <https://doi.org/10.21275/SR20707113109>; Hakim et al., "Patterns of Grammatical Errors in Students' Thesis;"

Özkayran and Yilmaz, "Analysis of Higher Education Students' Errors in English Writing Tasks;" Rusmiati Rusmiati, "Surface Strategy Taxonomy on Foreign Language Writing: A Study on Verb Tense Usage," *JURNAL SERAMBI ILMU* 20, no. 2 (2019): 189-201, <https://doi.org/10.32672/si.v20i2.1453>.

³³ Sabar Manik et al., "Investigating Linguistic Errors in English Composition: A Case Study of Non-English Department EFL Undergraduate Students," *International Journal of Education and Practice* 5, no. 9 (2017): 4, <https://doi.org/10.18488/journal.61.2017.59.146.154>.

³⁴ Nguyen, "English language Errors in Academic writing: An analysis of English research papers of Thu Dau Mot University Journal of Science," 8.

³⁵ Andrea A. Lunsford and Robert J. Connors, "Frequency of Formal Errors in Current College Writing, or Ma and Pa Kettle Do Research," *College Composition and Communication* 39, no. 4 (1988): 403, <https://doi.org/10.2307/357695>.

after the introductory element, possessive apostrophe error, vague pronoun reference, and wrong or missing inflected endings. However, recent studies show different results and ranking for the classification of errors. For instance, Tasci & Aksu Ataç highlights that Turkish adult learners need help with prepositions based on their narrative essays.³⁶ Next, Khatter studied EFL Saudi learners and found they committed the most punctuation errors.³⁷ Furthermore, Nguyen's results show that published papers from Thu Dau Mot University Journal of Science have the highest frequency of errors on verbs, with 53% occurrences.³⁸ Therefore, it can be expected that this current study will have a different result for common errors in EA since it focuses more on Malaysian English learners as the context.

2.3.1 Malaysia-based research on EA

Studies on EA are extensively conducted among Malaysian researchers, especially on ESL sampling. This section reviews three past studies in the Malaysian context relevant to this research, where participants from three levels: secondary, tertiary students, and workers, were discussed to see if there is any difference in commonly committed errors among these three samples. The first study was conducted by Darus & Subramaniam and titled "Error Analysis of the Written English Essays of Secondary School Students in Malaysia: A Case Study."³⁹ This study aims to investigate the errors made by Malaysian secondary students with non-English speaking backgrounds who only use English in the classroom. Seventy-two students who participated in this study were administered to write a report entitled "Cleanliness of the School Canteen." The participants are required to type their essays using Microsoft Word 2003 since the researchers use computer software called Markin, developed by Martin Holmes (1996).⁴⁰ They also follow

³⁶ Taşçi and Ataç, "Written Grammatical Errors of Turkish Adult Learners of English: An Analysis."

³⁷ Khatter, "An Analysis of the Most Common Essay Writing Errors among EFL Saudi Female Learners (Majmaah University)."

³⁸ Nguyen, "English language Errors in Academic writing: An analysis of English research papers of Thu Dau Mot University Journal of Science."

³⁹ Darus and Subramaniam, "Error analysis of the written English essays of secondary school students in Malaysia: A case study."

⁴⁰ Darus and Subramaniam, 8.

Corder's EA stages but only focus on three steps; collection, identification, and description of errors (1974).

The Markin software is a program that analyses errors electronically. Automatically, the software compiles and includes error statistics from the sample. From the result, the highest number of errors committed by the students is a singular and plural form with 412 frequency of errors out of 3090 in total, followed by verb tense and word choice, etcetera. For singular and plural classification, it is related to errors with numbers to indicate singularity or plurality of nouns. For example, one student wrote, 'it leads to many other problem' where the word 'problem' is not plural after the plurality marker, 'many other.' Most errors fall under grammatical errors, highlighting that students still need to improve in applying correct grammar rules in writing.

The second study is by Singh, Singh, Nur Qistina, and Ravinthar entitled "Grammar Errors Made by ESL Tertiary Students in Writing."⁴¹ This study aims to identify grammatical errors committed by ESL learners in writing, and it was done among Diploma students from various schools who sat for a university entrance examination. Data is collected from their essays and further analysed by a proficient English lecturer using content analysis by Crowley & Delfico (1996).⁴² The grammatical errors are identified and categorised into nine types, and their frequencies are recorded. The nine categories include subject-verb agreement, verb tense, noun, preposition, adjective, article, pronoun, adverb, and conjunction.

From the forty-four participants, the findings show that most of them are having difficulty in the subject-verb agreement (SVA) section, with 258 frequency out of 744 errors. The result is followed by verb tense and noun errors with 226 and 141 frequencies, respectively. For SVA, it is discussed that students can still not form sentences correctly since they did not manage to match the number of subjects to verbs. For example, one participant wrote, 'These facts shows us the importance and the impact created by the Internet in our daily life.' where the plural

⁴¹ Charanjit Kaur Swaran Singh et al., "Grammar Errors Made by ESL Tertiary Students in Writing," *English Language Teaching* 10, no. 5 (2017): 16-27, <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v10n5p16>.

⁴² As cited by Charanjit Kaur Swaran Singh et al., 6.

subject 'these facts' does not agree with the singular verb 'shows.' Since this paper also focuses on undergraduates, the researcher expects to see similar findings from data analysis.

The third paper is from Ahmad et al. on "Investigation into Common Errors in English Writing among Non-Academic Staff at a Malaysian Public University," where the researchers employed EA on non-academic staff at Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA).⁴³ The reasoning behind this study is that an English instructor who came to teach an English Intensive Course to non-academic staff in the university concluded that most of them still need to improve their written work. Hence, this paper aimed to find the most common errors committed by non-academic officers in UniSZA.

A qualitative methodology focuses on EA where respondents were asked to compose a paragraph on "My Greatest Challenge as a UniSZA Officer." The results of 139 collected samples show that subject-verb agreement (SVA) is the most common error participants commit. From the sample, one respondent wrote, 'Usually, this task need to be completed in a short period,' where he failed to add the -s suffix to make the verb agree with the singularity of the noun 'task.' This study concluded that most officers must grasp the SVA concept in English writing. Other errors include be+verb, plurality, adjectives, passive voice, articles, etcetera.

The above discussion regarding EA studies in the Malaysian context shows three samples: secondary students, tertiary learners, and working adults. From the findings, it is clear that most Malaysians still need help understanding the English language's grammatical rules, especially in SVA and singularity/plurality. To conclude, there is a plethora of research on EA involving both EFL and ESL learners. However, most of the studies, especially for Malaysian-based research, are conducted with various essays and tests which are short in length and written on the spot without proper proofreading. Therefore, this current study employs the EA for graduate students who have already submitted their written thesis for Final Year Project (FYP). The findings are expected to be slightly different due to the data being lengthier and

⁴³ Ahmad et al., "Investigation into Common Errors in English Writing Among Non-Academic Staff at a Malaysian Public University."

more formal to academic writing, including the possibility of proofreading before submission. Hence, multiple frameworks from various studies are integrated to form a conceptual framework suitable for this paper with Malaysian tertiary learner samples.

Methodology

Research Design

Since the nature of this research is text-based analysis, a qualitative method has been implemented to obtain data that provide a deep and detailed inspection of common errors committed by students in writing their theses. A qualitative textual analysis allowed the researcher to examine the structures and patterns of the errors from the sample. However, this paper has also conducted data calculations to answer the second research question on error frequencies. Therefore, a large part of this study is conducted qualitatively, where the data is analysed using the theoretical framework discussed in chapter two. Still, a quantitative approach is implemented to evaluate the frequency using statistical data.

Sampling Design

According to Dörnyei Zoltán, qualitative research is best paired with purposive sampling under non-probability sampling since it can narrow down aspects that will assist researchers focus on by selecting respondents with specific qualifications.⁴⁴ This study utilised purposive sampling, where specific requirements will be adhered to in the sample selection process. This paper studies textual data consisting of seven theses from undergraduates who specialised in literature and were submitted for the Final Year Project (FYP) course in semester 2, session 2021/2022. The collected theses are in the range of 40-60 pages. This paper focuses on the final chapter of the thesis, Chapter Four. Chapter Four of the FYP is usually written in three to four pages, where students summarise the whole idea of the thesis. The theses submitted are also taken from the latest batch to represent the latest generation's

⁴⁴ Dörnyei Zoltán, *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methodologies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 126.

comprehension and application of grammatical rules in academic writing based on the English lessons they took from all three education levels. To conclude, seven samples have been chosen randomly as the textual data for this study, as befits the nature of the purposive, non-probability sampling method.

Data Collection and Analysis

This study utilises EA procedures from Gass & Selinker with six steps adapted from their book, *Second Language Acquisition: An Introductory Course*.⁴⁵ This EA framework includes six stages: collecting the data, identifying, classifying, quantifying, analysing, and correcting the errors.

Following the first step in the EA process, samples are collected by randomly selecting seven submitted theses, as highlighted above in the previous section. From these samples, errors are identified and subjected to error identification and classification. The researcher goes through seven theses and identifies the errors with supervision from an expert in English. The identified errors are then put into categories. The researcher categorises the errors with labels based on the synthesis of other relevant previous studies and interview sessions with lecturers from the English department.

The first of these relevant studies is Lunsford and Connors, which listed 20 errors classifications from students in the mid-1980s.⁴⁶ Lunsford and Connors conducted one of the largest and most influential recent studies consisting of 19,615 papers with 300 teachers. Since their study includes a detailed analysis of errors with a massive number of samples, their error classification is helpful as a reference. However, several categories of errors from their research are too specific, and their study was conducted in the United States in the context of native speakers of English. Consequently, the researcher considers other studies from Malaysia and the interview sessions with lecturers from the

⁴⁵ Gass and Selinker, *Second Language Acquisition: An Introductory Course*, 3rd ed.

⁴⁶ Lunsford and Connors, "Frequency of Formal Errors in Current College Writing, or Ma and Pa Kettle Do Research," 403.

local university to ensure the error classifications are most suited to the samples of this paper.

Accordingly, the classification by Lunsford and Connors is synthesised with five Malaysia-based studies on EA.⁴⁷ This study also conducted interview sessions with five lecturers from the Department of English Language and Literature to find errors that are commonly committed by their students in thesis writing based on their experience as supervisors. The set of questions for the interview has been established and vetted by three experts.

The synthesis of the classifications of errors in other studies and interview sessions allows the researcher to have labels for errors that are easily understandable by students so they could benefit from the findings. Additionally, the synthesis with Malaysian studies and the interview sessions leads to a more localised version of error classification that sounds more familiar and common among language learners in Malaysia. Hence, this paper has identified nine error categories: word choice, SVA, punctuation, verb, preposition, plurality and singularity, article, pronoun, and adverb.

After classifying the errors, the researcher proceeds to the quantification process to find the most common errors the English Language and Literature undergraduates commit in their theses. The errors are then analysed and corrected to fulfil the EA procedure. Lastly, the findings of this paper are compared with previous studies to see if any differences should be put into emphasis for EA research.

⁴⁷ Lunsford and Connors, "Frequency of Formal Errors in Current College Writing, or Ma and Pa Kettle Do Research"; Darus and Subramaniam, "Error analysis of the written English essays of secondary school students in Malaysia: A case study"; Mohammad et al., "Five Most Common Grammatical Errors in Narrative Essay"; Singh et al., "Grammar Errors Made by ESL Tertiary Students in Writing"; Siti Zawani Mehat and Lilliaty Ismail, "Malaysian Tertiary ESL Students' Writing Errors and Their Implications on English Language Teaching," *Asian Journal of University Education* 17, no. 3 (2021): 235-242, <https://doi.org/10.24191/ajue.v17i3.14504>; Ahmad et al., "Investigation into Common Errors in English Writing Among Non-Academic Staff at a Malaysian Public University."

Findings and Discussions

Tabulation of Data

In the first step of EA, data collection is done by randomly selecting seven theses from undergraduates specialising in literature. This study focuses on the final chapters of each thesis. These chapters provide the conclusion of the theses. On average, the samples ranged from 790 to 1600 words for the final chapter.

Next, errors are identified by manual rather than mechanical means of using the software. This identification process is carried out by the researcher with supervision from an English expert. Going through the seven theses, the researcher found 364 errors placed into ten categories of errors, as shown in the table below.

No.	Error Classification	Frequency
1	Word Choice	67
2	Punctuation	64
3	Verbs	53
4	Prepositions	41
5	Plurality and Singularity	39
6	Articles	36
7	Pronoun	22
8	Ambiguity	19

9	Adverbs	14
10	Subject-Verb Agreement (SVA)	9
TOTAL		364

Table 4.1 List of Error Classifications

4.3 Data Analysis

This section elaborates on the classification of errors, focusing on error analysis and correction from the EA framework. As highlighted before in the third chapter, specifically in section 3.4, Data Collection and Analysis, nine classifications of errors are derived by considering the labels from other studies and interview sessions conducted with IIUM lecturers. However, the researcher found a new category of errors: redundancy and ambiguity, which are not evident in previous relevant studies on EA.

4.3.1 Word Choice

Word choice is the incorrect usage of words or phrases based on the context. The incorrect usages can be further categorised into three subcategories: wrong vocabulary, redundancy, and parts of speech. Firstly, the wrong vocabulary is where the words or phrases used are inaccurate. Next is redundancy, where repetitive words are used in the same sentence. The last one is parts of speech, where the usage of word class is confused, usually between adjectives and nouns. Altogether, there are 67 errors in word choice. Examples of each subcategory of errors and their corrections are listed as follows:

Subcategories	Errors	Corrections
Wrong Vocabulary	Although it is a book that circulates on the life of a sixteen-year-old Somali	Although it is a book that focuses on the life of a sixteen-year-old Somali

	girl...	girl...
Redundancy	... this thesis unravels the underlying meanings of the true meaning of Islam.	... this thesis unravels the underlying message of the true meaning of Islam.
Parts of Speech	Along the way, she opts for her tradition culture route in finding the spouse...	Along the way, she opts for her traditional cultural route in finding the spouse...

Table 4.3.1 Word Choice

Based on the table, wrong vocabulary can be referred to as a semantically similar word choice where the intended message is understandable. However, there are better options to make the sentences more concise. Next on the list is redundancy. Compared to previous studies, redundancy is not highlighted as one of the error classifications. The researcher created a new category of errors under word choice: redundancy. There are several circumstances where the exact words or phrases are used in the same sentence, which questions the choice of words used in writing. From the example, the word 'meaning' is repeated twice, and both usages are used to elaborate the same thing, which results in redundancy. Thus, the correction would be either replacing the word with other synonyms or omitting the first part of the sentence since it will not change the intended message that needs to be conveyed. Lastly, most errors involved confusion between noun and adjective word classes for parts of speech. From these three subcategories, the researcher found that wrong vocabulary is the highest committed error with 45 occurrences, and most errors involved the usage of synonyms that are not suitable based on the context of the sentences. Therefore, identifying which word or phrase that can accurately provide a concise meaning by understanding its specific definition and context is vital to enhancing writing skills and avoiding word choice errors.

4.3.2 Punctuation

Next on the list is punctuation. According to Richards & Schmidt, punctuations are graphic markers used to clarify meaning in written and spoken sentences.⁴⁸ Adding punctuation is essential to provide more clarity and precision to the writing since it allows the writer to pause, stop, and emphasise or elaborate on certain parts of the writing. From the samples, a total of 64 punctuation errors are found. The distribution for different punctuation subcategories has been listed in the table below.

No.	Subcategory	Frequency
1	Comma	26
2	Capitalization	24
3	Hyphen	3
4	Colon	3
5	Semicolon	3
6	Italicise	3
7	Quotation marks	1
8	Spacing	1

Table 4.3.2 Subsections of Punctuation Errors

⁴⁸ Richards and Schmidt, *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, 3rd ed.

Firstly, comma errors with 26 occurrences. Comma functions to separate ideas or elaborate the sentences to ensure the intended information is conveyed without misinterpretation. A comma can also be used to list items and provide examples. Some specific phrases or words require the addition of commas, especially when using adverbs to connect another independent clause, also known as a comma splice. Dismissing the usage of commas will lead to run-on sentences and make it difficult for readers to comprehend the writing.

No.	Errors	Corrections
1	This research aims to identify the issue of separating Islam from cultural practices in Shelina Zahra Janmohamed's masterpiece, <i>Love in a Headscarf</i> published in 2009.	This research aims to identify the issue of separating Islam from cultural practices in Shelina Zahra Janmohamed's masterpiece, <i>Love in a Headscarf</i> , published in 2009.
2	Thus it can be concluded that the issue of separating Islam from cultural practices is not wrong...	Thus, it can be concluded that the issue of separating Islam from cultural practices is not wrong...
3	These visual compositions cause the element of the sublime to be evoked among readers triggering their emotional response to the storyline and artworks of the manga.	These visual compositions cause the element of the sublime to be evoked among readers, triggering their emotional response to the storyline and artworks of the manga.

Table 4.3.3 Comma Errors

Second on the list is capitalization, with 24 errors. Capitalization is significant for the first word of a sentence and proper nouns that include the name of a specific person, place, group, or brand. The examples of the errors and their corrections are listed as follows:

No.	Errors	Corrections
1	The main character, Shelina, as depicted in the novel, is a young educated muslim...	The main character, Shelina, as depicted in the novel, is a young educated Muslim...
2	In order to come out with the best possible issues regarding identity, this paper discusses western superiority on the individuals' life in <i>Minaret</i> ...	In order to come out with the best possible issues regarding identity, this paper discusses Western superiority on the individuals' life in <i>Minaret</i> ...
3	For example, according to Aljazeera news, "CBS News senior correspondent in Kyiv Charlie D'Agata said on Friday..."	For example, according to Al Jazeera News, "CBS News senior correspondent in Kyiv Charlie D'Agata said on Friday..."

Table 4.3.4 Capitalization Errors

Most errors in this category involved decapitalising proper nouns, as shown in the table above. Based on the examples, proper nouns such as Muslim, Western, and Al Jazeera News were not capitalised. However, capitalisation should be distinct from directions such as the west, east, south, and north since they are not proper nouns. Specific geographic names must be capitalised if they refer to specific regions or sections of a country, such as the Middle East. Thus, capitalisation might

seem trivial, but paying attention to its significance, especially for proper nouns, will lead to better writing quality and judgments from readers.

The list continues with the other six errors: hyphen, colon, semicolon, italicise, quotation marks and spacing. Nonetheless, this paper will not discuss these errors further as they are less frequent than in comma and capitalisation subsections. The error analysis, corrections, and reasonings for these errors are compiled in the table as follows:

Subcategories	Errors	Corrections	Justifications
Hyphen	Due to the fact that she was wearing hijab, she found it difficult to find a suitable husband when living in a non-Muslim community.	Due to the fact that she was wearing hijab, she found it difficult to find a suitable husband when living in a non-Muslim community.	Although some words do not require adding a hyphen (-), this specific non-Muslim phrase requires a punctuation mark that is a hyphen or dash.
Colon	Thus, the five objects of love, brotherly love, motherly love, self-love, erotic love, and love of God are needed for one to love properly thus, successfully overcoming the problem of loneliness.	Thus, the five objects of love, brotherly love, motherly love, self-love, erotic love, and love of God, are needed for one to love properly thus, successfully overcoming the problem of loneliness.	A colon functions to put a list of items in a sentence. Utilising a colon makes it easier for readers to see the listing.

Semicolon	The previous chapter was provided and demonstrated the result of the questionnaire which can help to justify and explain more the text analysis of Warsan Shire's poem; <i>Conversations About Home (at the Deportation Centre).</i>	The previous chapter was provided and demonstrated the result of the questionnaire which can help to justify and explain more the text analysis of Warsan Shire's poem, <i>Conversations About Home (at the Deportation Centre).</i>	Replacing the semicolon with a comma works best in this sentence since the author wants to introduce the poem's title.
Italicise	This change might be represented through the manifestation of the sublime in the Shingeki no Kyojin manga.	This change might be represented through the manifestation of the sublime in the <i>Shingeki no Kyojin</i> manga.	Titles should be italicised or put with quotation marks in academic writing.
Quotation marks	For example, in line 19 the poet wrote, <i>I hear them say, go home, I hear them say, fucking immigrants, fucking refugees. Are they really this arrogant?</i>	For example, in line 19 the poet wrote, "I hear them say, go home, I hear them say, fucking immigrants, fucking refugees. Are they really this	Quotation marks should be included when students use the exact excerpt or line. Italicization of the sentence is

	(line 19).	arrogant?" (line 19).	optional.
Spacing	Because religion is so crucial in determining a person's cultural identity, the topic discussed in the book <i>Love in a Headscarf</i> is still relevant and needs to be discussed in modern culture.	Because religion is so crucial in determining a person's cultural identity, the topic discussed in the book <i>Love in a Headscarf</i> is still relevant and needs to be discussed in modern culture.	This subcategory of punctuation errors might be a mistake, but students should focus more on spacing since it affects the quality of the writing.

Table 4.3.5 Subsections on Punctuation Errors

4.3.3 Verbs

Third on the list with 53 errors is the verbs. This research derived three subcategories of verbs: auxiliary verbs, to-be verbs and tenses. Although to-be verbs are similar to auxiliary verbs, separating them makes a more apparent distinction on their different usages. The examples for three subcategories of verb errors are listed in the table as follows.

Subcategories	Errors	Corrections
Auxiliary Verbs	... existing scholarly research that had concentrated on one specific element and genre	... existing scholarly research that have concentrated on one specific element and

	to narrow the scope.	genre to narrow the scope.
To Be Verbs	Sometimes Muslim women are often being associated with cynical values although they have done nothing wrong in their lives.	Sometimes Muslim women are often associated with cynical values although they have done nothing wrong in their lives.
Tenses	In conclusion, this study has been focusing on finding and identifying the manifestation and sublime...	In conclusion, this study focused on finding and identifying the manifestation and sublime...

Table 4.3.6 Subcategories of Verbs Errors

Overall, the researcher noted that the most committed error under the verb category is tenses, compared to auxiliary verbs, with 22 occurrences, and most of it involved inconsistent usage of tenses.

4.3.4 Preposition

The following most common error is a preposition with 41 occurrences. A preposition is a word commonly preceding a noun or pronoun phrase that connects to another word in the clause (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries). From the data analysis of the seven samples, the researcher found that most errors for prepositions involved words such as 'toward', 'with', 'in', and 'on'. These examples can be seen in the table below.

No.	Errors	Corrections
1	This scenario echoes the hidden hatred and brings	This scenario echoes the hidden hatred and brings the

	the unwelcome conflicts toward Najwa and her faith toward Islam	unwelcome conflicts to Najwa and her faith in Islam
2	What are the contradictions in the ideas of love in the novel with the theory of love from the book Art of Loving?	What are the contradictions between the ideas of love in the novel and the theory of love from the book Art of Loving?
3	In order to come out with the best possible issues regarding identity, this paper discusses western superiority on the individuals' life in <i>Minaret</i> and how the main character, Najwa, deals with other cultures in order to find her true self.	In order to come out with the best possible issues regarding identity, this paper discusses western superiority in the individuals' life in <i>Minaret</i> and how the main character, Najwa, deals with other cultures in order to find her true self.

Table 4.3.7 Preposition Errors

Based on the table, the first sentence used 'toward' twice, and both usages are incorrect. 'Toward' is applicable to indicate movement, location, and purpose to achieve a specific goal. Additionally, the verb in this sentence is 'bring', which is usually complemented with the preposition 'to'. Another 'toward' is also wrong because faith is usually placed inside something or some notions rather than having a motion that moves forward. Hence, the correction should be 'to' and 'in'. Regardless, since the usage of toward is frequent and incorrect, it can be deduced that students overgeneralized the usage of toward in most contexts.

4.3.5 Plurality and Singularity

Out of the seven samples of this study, six papers contain plurality or singularity errors with a total of 39 occurrences. The table for a few samples of the errors and their corrections is provided as follows:

No.	Errors	Corrections
1	Despite the limitation of this study which is the insufficiency of previous researches conducted on Naima Robert, this study succeeds in contributing to the feminist literary theory...	Despite the limitation of this study which is the insufficiency of previous research conducted on Naima Robert, this study succeeds in contributing to the feminist literary theory...
2	The overlapping culture makes her rebellious against the need to comply with the dogmas enforced in the conservative household.	The overlapping cultures makes her rebellious against the need to comply with the dogmas enforced in the conservative household.
3	Others also think that crimes, local safety, stereotype and education can be the reason immigrants were treated differently.	Others also think that crimes, local safety, stereotypes and education can be the reason immigrants were treated differently.

Table 4.3.8 Plurality and Singularity Errors

From these 39 occurrences, the researcher found that most errors are committed when plural subjects lack plural verbs. Consequently,

most corrections involved adding the suffix -s and -es. This kind of error may be due to the confusion of countable and uncountable nouns, as students assumed certain nouns do not require the addition of suffixes in the English grammatical rules.

4.3.6 Other Common Errors

The data analysis continues with another five common errors that are identified from the samples, which are article (36), pronoun (22), ambiguity (19), adverb (14), and subject-verb agreement (9). This section briefly discusses the five categories since they are the least frequent on the list.

Categories	Errors	Corrections
Article	Through the lens of Islamic feminist theory, this thesis unravels the underlying meanings of the true meaning of Islam.	Through the lens of the Islamic feminist theory, this thesis unravels the underlying meanings of the true meaning of Islam.
Pronoun	This can be seen with how the Shingeki no Kyojin manga illustrates their representation of horror which is the titans by combining the element of the uncanny to it.	This can be seen with how the Shingeki no Kyojin manga illustrates its representation of horror which is the titans by combining the element of the uncanny to it.
Ambiguity	One of the most significant findings that can be analyzed by this study is that the role of the people around her	*Requires alteration of the whole sentence.

	towards their own religion becomes complicated in developing her own identity.	
Adverb	... it can be seen how culture affect hugely on individuals' identity...	... it can be seen how culture greatly affects individuals' identity...
Subject-Verb Agreement	The scope of this study is limited to only the conquest of finding one's identity, be it in the apparent or vice versa which mainly focus on spiritual belief of an individual, neglecting other variables.	The scope of this study is limited to only the conquest of finding one's identity, be it in the apparent or vice versa which mainly focuses on spiritual belief of an individual, neglecting other variables.

Table 4.3.9 Other Common Errors

The last classification of error is a subject-verb agreement (SVA). Unlike previous studies, SVA usually topped the list for common errors, but this research only identified nine. Specifically, the sentence depicts an error in the verb 'focus' that does not agree with the singular subject, 'the conquest of finding one's identity'. As a correction, the verb should be added with the suffix -es to agree with the singular subject.

Discussion and Conclusion

Research Questions

Two research questions guided the researcher in achieving the objectives of this study. A qualitative methodology for Error Analysis was employed to provide findings that can answer the research questions. The discussion of each question is elaborated in the following subsections.

RQ1: In undergraduate theses from the English Language and Literature department, what are the most common errors committed by students and how can these errors be classified?

Based on the first research question, the Error Analysis (EA), adapted by Gass and Selinker,⁴⁹ is replicated to collect, identify, classify, and quantify the errors in undergraduate theses. The first four stages in the EA procedure are utilised to find the most common errors that students commit in writing their theses. 364 errors are identified and placed into their respective categories that are based on the synthesis of previous studies on EA and the interview sessions, as shown in Table 4.1 in the previous chapter. The discussion for research question one, based on the list in the table, is as follows.

The most common error category in the list is word choice, with 67 occurrences. Specifically, the subcategory wrong vocabulary has the most occurrences (45), followed by redundancy (16) and parts of speech (6). These errors could stem from an inability or uncertainty to choose the correct word from a group of synonyms in a given context. For instance, 'circulates' has several synonyms such as 'get around', 'spread', 'flow', and 'revolves'. However, the usage of 'circulates' is unsuitable for the context when discussing a person's life. Instead, the word 'revolve' that defines a move around a central point is more concise. Therefore, more practice in writing is needed to overcome this type of error, especially among those who acquired English as their second language (L2).

The second most common error category is punctuation. Most errors were committed in the use of commas and capitalization. One possible reason behind these occurrences could be a lack of practice in using punctuation marks, especially commas and capitalization. This could be considered a problematic finding as most writing applications nowadays provide automatic checks and automatic corrections for such errors. It is possible that more practice is needed in proofreading to overcome this type of error.

To continue with the list, verbs are the third most common error category. This category is divided into three parts: auxiliary verbs, to-be

⁴⁹ Gass and Selinker, *Second Language Acquisition: An Introductory Course*, 3rd ed.

verbs, and tenses. Out of all three subcategories, tenses have the highest number of errors. This might be due to the English language having 12 tenses that are confusing for language learners to remember since each tense is specific to a particular time when an action occurs.⁵⁰ Additionally, certain tenses can be irregular, as certain verbs do not follow the regular rules for forming tenses. Hence, this error category can be challenging for students because they need to ensure that verbs and tenses are consistent when writing their theses.

The fourth most common error category is prepositions. Prepositions can be used in various ways, but choosing the correct preposition depends on the context to avoid confusion. Since the English language has a load of prepositions, mastering the use of prepositions will be difficult in forming concise and grammatically correct sentences, especially for L2 learners.⁵¹ Another possibility for committing preposition errors might be due to informal writing that overlooks the correct preposition in sentences. Thus, errors in prepositions can be tricky as they have many words, and each can be similar with another in giving directions or location but it might be unsuitable in certain contexts.

Next on the list is plurality and singularity. In one of the examples given, the error committed was on the usage of the word 'researches' where the word research is an uncountable noun, hence why there is no need for additional suffixes. This occurrence is caused by overgeneralization, where the rule for forming plurals is commonly made by adding suffixes -s or -es. Nonetheless, this does not apply to uncountable nouns. As a result, it is difficult for language learners to distinguish countable and uncountable nouns if they want to master the use of plurality and singularity.

The most common error category in the list is followed by the use of articles. Articles in English are often misused since the rule for using them is not always clear-cut. Although the definite article 'the' is used to refer to nouns that have been identified, this article can also be used to

⁵⁰ Ahmad et al., "Investigation into Common Errors in English Writing Among Non-Academic Staff at a Malaysian Public University," 458.

⁵¹ Manik et al., "Investigating Linguistic Errors in English Composition: A Case Study of Non-English Department EFL Undergraduate Students."

refer to general concepts or ideas.⁵² Thus, it is difficult to discern which nouns require adding definite or indefinite articles.

The seventh most common error category is pronoun usage. There are seven categories in the use of pronouns in the English language that include personal, demonstrative, interrogative, relative, indefinite, reflexive, and intensive pronouns.⁵³ Additionally, some of these categories are further divided into three parts, and there are different terms for gender. Due to these specific subcategories in pronouns, identifying which pronoun suits the context will be challenging.

The following most common error category is ambiguity. As mentioned in Chapter Four, ambiguity involves sentence errors that lead to incomprehensible reading. Several instances cannot be fixed by restructuring the sentence since the meaning is unclear and ambiguous. This could be due to one of the grammatical rules of English, which is the compound-complex sentence structure. This sentence structure enables language learners to connect two or more independent clauses with one or more dependent clauses. As a result, it is difficult for students to construct sentences as they need to learn more about independent and dependent clauses in order for them to generate clearer and more concise sentences.

Adverbs are placed in the ninth most common error category on the list. The rules for using adverbs can be complex and misplaced, as they have six different types.⁵⁴ Additionally, adverbs should match with the verbs to provide clarity and construct concise sentences. Therefore, using adverbs that provide elaboration by modifying the verbs or adjectives is difficult for language learners to master.

The last common error is subject-verb agreement. In English, the rule for subject-verb agreement is simple since the verb should agree with the number of subjects. If the sentence contains compound subjects, a plural verb must be applied. However, writing sentences in English can

⁵² "A/an and the," Cambridge Dictionary, Accessed November 23, 2022, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/grammar/british-grammar/a-an-and-the>.

⁵³ Karolina Assi, "English Pronouns: An Easy Grammar Guide to All 7 Types," Berlitz, March 7, 2023, <https://www.berlitz.com/blog/english-pronouns-grammar>.

⁵⁴ "Types of Adverbs - Meaning and Examples," BYJU'S, December 12, 2022, <https://byjus.com/english/types-of-adverbs/>.

be confusing, especially in compound and complex sentence structures, as it will create confusion on the focus of the subject.⁵⁵ Hence, applying the correct verb for the subject in sentences can be confusing, especially in academic writing that requires complex sentences.

Certain types of errors might have relations with L1 interference since the theses were written by bilingual students with Bahasa Malaysia as their first acquired language (L1). For instance, the grammatical rules for verbs, especially tenses, is simpler than English because there are only three categories for tenses in the Malay language, also known as *Kata Bantu Aspek*,⁵⁶ which are similar to past, present, and future tenses. Thus, distinguishing which English tenses to use in a sentence or a group of sentences might prove tricky for some students.

This is also true for the categories of plurality and singularity. Rather than adding suffixes as plural markers for countable nouns, Malay language uses *Kata Ganda*, where the noun will be doubled with an additional hyphen in the middle.⁵⁷ The variety of singular pronouns and the use of articles are limited in Malay,⁵⁸ and this might be a source of errors for learners of English. In short, there are several classifications of errors that may have influences from the Malay language as the L1. A possible way to reduce the frequency of these errors is for writers to be more vigilant of such potential L1-L2 pitfalls.

In summary, the EA procedure, especially in identifying, classifying, and quantifying the errors, allowed the researcher to answer the second research question. The most common error category is word choice and there are several categories of errors that can be potentially linked with L1 interference.

⁵⁵ Singh et al., "Grammar Errors Made by ESL Tertiary Students in Writing," 21.

⁵⁶ Izzuddin, "Kata Bantu: Maksud, Jenis & Contoh Penggunaannya," *Student Portal*, November 18, 2021, <https://studentportal.my/kata-bantu/>.

⁵⁷ Izzuddin, "Kata Ganda: Maksud, Jenis, & Contoh Penggunaannya," *Student Portal*, June 16, 2023, <https://studentportal.my/kata-ganda/>.

⁵⁸ Zulkifley Hamid and Naidatul Zamrizam Abu, "Memupuk perpaduan di Malaysia-Santun bahasa dalam kalangan murid pelbagai etnik dari aspek penggunaan kata ganti nama diri (The making of Malaysian solidarity-Pronouns usage in courteous language among multi-ethnic pupils)," *Geografia* 9, no. 4 (2013): 86-98.

RQ2: How do the findings of this research compare with previous relevant studies?

In the third chapter, the researcher highlighted other studies that included Lunsford and Connors, five Malaysia-based studies on EA, and interview sessions with five lecturers from the English department. Lunsford and Connors listed the 20 errors with “wrong words” in the first rank, followed by missing commas after the introductory element, possessive apostrophe errors, etcetera.⁵⁹ Errors in prepositions and subject-verb agreement placed in the 8th and 11th ranks, respectively. In the five Malaysia-based studies on EA, most studies focused on errors related to verbs, subject-verb agreement, prepositions, adjectives, wrong choice of words, articles and pronouns. In the aforementioned interview sessions, the five lecturers agreed on several classifications of errors that are frequently committed by students, which are subject-verb agreement, tenses, wrong choice of words, literal translation, punctuation, preposition, and article. Hence, it can be seen that these relevant previous studies and interview sessions acknowledge word choice and subject-verb agreement as two of the most common error categories.

In comparison, this study also found that word choice is the most common error category. On the other hand, subject-verb agreement, which used to be one of the most highlighted errors in previous studies and was also highlighted in the interviews, turned out to be the most minor common error in this study. The researcher concluded one possibility behind this shift, which is the technological advancement in writing applications that automatically check SVA errors and suggest corrections and in online services such as Grammarly or Quillbot that effortlessly detect and correct SVA errors. Such applications and services can lead to a noticeable reduction in categories such as articles, and plurality and singularity.

The researcher suggests the use of two classifications of errors that are not singled out in previous studies, namely, redundancy and ambiguity. This is because there are many instances of these errors in the study. Numerous sentences are laden with errors that their meaning

⁵⁹ Lunsford and Connors, “Frequency of Formal Errors in Current College Writing, or Ma and Pa Kettle Do Research.”

becomes nearly impossible to decode. Other sentences contain pointless repetition that does not add, but rather negatively affects, the meaning. The frequent occurrences of redundancy and ambiguity errors in this study, and not in the previous research, could be due to the level of English writing proficiency in the chosen theses. In summary, the study showed certain similarities and contrasts with the interviews and previous studies.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a qualitative study was employed to conduct an Error Analysis on undergraduate theses in IIUM. The objectives of this paper are to identify the most common errors committed by the students in their theses, and the findings were compared with several relevant previous studies on EA. The researcher concluded 10 error classifications that compiled 364 occurrences by going through the seven theses as the samples. The findings disclosed word choice as the most common error, followed by punctuation, verbs, prepositions, plurality and singularity, articles, pronoun, ambiguity, adverbs, and subject-verb agreement. Furthermore, the comparative analysis with previous studies demonstrated the relevance of word choice for having the most errors. However, this paper has proven that subject-verb agreement is not prevalent, and the cause might be the rise of technology in writing applications that provide automatic correction. Therefore, this EA research benefits the most for language proficiency assessment and pedagogical implication since the classifications of errors are modified with labels that are familiar and easier to understand by students. By identifying the recurring errors, students and teachers can pay more attention to specific categories of errors through instructional approaches and interventions that will improve academic writing skills.

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