Common Morphological Errors Committed among Tobruk University Fourth-Year ESL Students in Their Academic Writing

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Abstract

Utilizing Corder's (1967) Error Analysis framework, this study investigates frequently encountered morphological errors made by fourth-year university students in their academic papers. Concerning English as a second language, morphological errors influence not only how they write essays but also the grammatical structure and word meaning. The study uses a mix of methods integrating qualitative and quantitative analysis to determine, categorize, and fully comprehend the most often occurring morphological errors. The study engaged thirty students from the department of English at Tobruk University. We examined each student's essay closely applying error classification following collection. The majority of the morphological errors were in misformation (53.13%), addition/omission (26.98%), misordering (9.13%), overuse (7.46%), misselection (2.48%), and substitution (0.82%). These spelling, grammar, and word structure mistakes demonstrated how much the students need to concentrate on language training to enhance their essay writing skills.

Keywords: academic papers, mixed methods, department of English, Tobruk University

الأخطاء الصرفية الشائعة التي يواجهها طلاب السنة الرابعة في جامعة طبرق بشكل متكرر في كتاباتهم الأكاديمية

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الملخص

باستخدام إطار تحليل الأخطاء لكوردر (1967)، تبحث هذه الدراسة في الأخطاء الصرفية التي يرتكبها طلاب السنة الرابعة بالجامعة بشكل متكرر في مقالاتهم الأكاديمية. فيما يتعلق باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية، تؤثر الأخطاء الصرفية ليس فقط على كيفية كتابة المقالات ولكن أيضًا على البنية النحوية ومعنى الكلمة. تستخدم الدراسة مزيجًا من الأساليب التي تدمج التحليل النوعي والكمي لتحديد وتصنيف وفهم الأخطاء الصرفية الأكثر شيوعًا. شاركت في الدراسة ثلاثون طالبًا من قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة طبرق. قمنا بفحص كل مقال عن كثب مع تطبيق تصنيف الأخطاء بعد التجميع. كانت غالبية الأخطاء الصرفية في التشكيل الخاطئ (53.13٪) والإضافة / الحذف (26.98٪) والترتيب الخاطئ (9.13٪) والإفراط في الاستخدام (7.46٪) والاختيار الخاطئ (2.48٪) والاستبدال (0.82٪). أظهرت هذه الأخطاء الإملائية والنحوية وتركيب الكلمات مدى حاجة الطلاب إلى التركيز على التدريب اللغوي لتعزيز مهاراتهم في كتابة المقالات.

الكلمات الرئيسية: المقالات الأكاديمية، الأساليب المختلطة، قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، جامعة طبرق

1. Introduction

Highly competent in morphology, the study of word structure and development is essential for fluent language use. Aronoff and Fudeman (2011) showed that students of a language who take the time to study morphology are better able to express themselves in written and spoken forms. When writing, students of second or foreign languages often make mistakes due to a lack of

morphological accuracy, which makes their work less coherent and precise (Ellis, 1997). Because correct morphology is essential to effective communication, errors in morphology appear out more in academic writing. This study focuses at the most frequently morphological mistakes made by college seniors in their pieces of writing. In order to categorize morphological writing errors and comprehend their causes and patterns, the presented study adopts Corder's (1967) EA theory.

2. Statement of the problem

Students in the fourth year studying English as a foreign language usually have problems with morphological errors, which could influence both their language growth and the precision of their writing. A study by Brown (2007) and Ellis (1997), these types of errors are inevitable when one is learning a new language, but they necessitate careful analysis therefore, students can go forward. This study examines morphological mistakes made by fourth-years at Tobruk University and determines where these mistakes stem from in attempts to make students more morphologically aware and to give insight into techniques that could enhance methods of teaching foreign languages.

3. Research questions

1. What are the most common morphological mistakes made by fourth-year university students in their academic writing?

2. What types of morphological errors (e.g., inflectional, derivational, subject-verb agreement) are most frequently observed in students' writing?

3. What are the possible causes of these morphological errors among fourth-year students?

4. Objectives of the study

1. To identify and analyze the most frequently occurring morphological mistakes in the academic writing of fourth-year university students.

2. In order to comprehend and analyze the different categories of morphological errors, this research will also consider inflectional, derivational, and subject-verb agreement errors.

3. To explore the possible linguistic, cognitive, and pedagogical aspects that underlies morphological errors in the writings of students.

5. Significance of the study

This study is highly important for various reasons especially in improving language skills and academic writing. It provides insight into areas of difficulty for fourth year university students and claims to offer assistance in achieving coherence and clarity in writing with correct grammar usage. The outcomes of this research can assist educators in identifying problem areas and developing specific strategies that can enhance the overall writing skills of students.

6. Limitation of the study

This study offers useful perceptions about the general morphological errors that fourth-year tertiary students commit, but there are aspects to consider. First, the sample cohort consists only of selected students of one particular institution and consequently does not represent the entire fourth year population of university students. In addition, the findings may not be applicable to people from different cultures or educational systems.

7. Literature review

Morphological errors are a major issue for ESL learners during the process of second language acquisition (SLA) and academic writing (Ellis, 1997; James, 1998). Morphology, defined as the development and structure of words, is important in the formation of meanings and grammatical accuracy of utterances (Aronoff & Fudeman, 2011). If students have difficulties with the rules of morphology, they are likely to produce writing that lacks clarity and coherence. Different researchers have tried to study the nature and causes of morphological errors and provide taxonomy of such nomenclature based on linguistic theories (Corder, 1974; Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982).

Corder (1967) proposed a construct that has been used extensively to detect and classify mistakes committed by learners of a second language. In this construct, morphological errors comprise a major cross-linguistic feature and have different types of ramifications such as misformation, omission, addition, misordering, overuse, and misselection (Ellis, 1997). These errors resulted from linguistic and cognitive sources, including first language (L1) interference, grammatical rule overgeneralization,

and inadequate knowledge of morphological constructions (Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982).

Studies show that ESL learners experience and attend to a range of linguistic challenges with the English language, some of which are morphological aliasing errors most common. Ariffin et al. (2021) the study emphasized morphological errors in academic writing through a surface structure taxonomy. The findings showed that misformation were the most common, followed by omission and addition errors. In a relevant study, Zaid et al (2017) investigated at young ESL learners and the factors that contributed to their morphological errors and identified L1 interference as the most significant factor. The study highlighted the need for well designed linguistic teaching to solve this particular problem.

Other studies such as the one conducted by Darus and Subramanian (2009) focused on ESL students' writing skills and analyzed the students' writing for syntactical and morphological errors. It was found that morphological errors among the students were the most harmful and included errors in word construction and grammar. These findings were consistent with all prior studies, which assert that insufficient knowledge of rules of morphemes and lack of corrective measures are the reasons for frequent errors in academic writing.

8. Theoretical Framework

Error analysis (EA) by (Corder, 1967) is one of the concepts that were used in the beginning of second language acquisition (SLA) as it deals with an analysis of the mistakes of a language learner. In his study, Corder (1967) stated that learners' errors tend to be a step in the overall learning process, and more importantly, they are helpful in deciphering the cognitive steps of a language being acquired. This method outlines the value of classifying errors into categories such as omissions, additions, misformation, misordering, and synthesis, and examining their causative factors. This helps in identifying the patterns of errors made in morphology, especially inflectional and derivational morphemes, agreement tagging and other word forming aspects. This study seeks to classify and analyze the morphological errors of the fourth year university students using Corder's Error Analysis framework

in order to shed light on many problem areas and discuss how they might be improved.

9. Classification and Interpretation of Morphological Errors in University Students' Writing

Morphological errors have always been a concern in second language acquisition (SLA) research. Errors such as these are common in academic work, particularly because of the high level of detail and accuracy that is expected. This focus on linguistic quality confirms that the particular form of phrase or word used impacts inflectional and derivational morphemes, tense, number, agreement and other structural facets of language. To define these mistakes, much like every other analysis form, this study uses Error Analysis or Corder 1967. Hence, this framework provides aid in understanding these errors by constructing a classification system that incorporates the errors, cognition behind them, and factors that influenced the errors. Thus, it is possible to understand and explain morphological errors on the writing of fourth year university students in a more comprehensive way.

9.1 Classification of Morphological Errors

Morphological errors can be divided into several subclasses. One primary classification method provides a set of error types based on difference between the target and native languages according to (Corder, 1967) Error Analysis model. This is divided into four specific categories:

9.1.1 Omission errors

If the morpheme is missing or part of the word is missing leading to an incorrect form. For instance, dropping plural morphemes "examinations" → "examination" or verb endings in forms of the past tense "asked" → "ask". These errors may be results of the rules not being completely learned or too much generalized.

9.1.2 Addition Errors

Unnecessary morphemes or components might result in redundant or inaccurate forms. For example, using a superfluous verb tense marker ("He could studies") or an unneeded plural marker "gooses" instead of "geese".

9.1.3 Misformation Errors

Incorrect morpheme forms occur when a student utilizes the incorrect word's morphological variation. Examples include applying an improper derivational morpheme (for example,

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"strength" instead of "strongness" in another context) or using a verb form in the incorrect tense ("She travelling" instead of "She'll travel").

9.1.4 Misordering Errors

Morphemes positioned incorrectly within a sentence structure. As an illustration, consider instances of subject-verb agreement problems, in which the subject and verb do not match in person or number, here is an example, "it allowes people to share ideas" instead "It allows people to share ideas". This study can investigate the effect of interference in fourth-year students' recurrent morphological errors and offer instructional solutions for resolving these issues by taking L1 factors into account.

10. Research Design

Using a mixed-methods approach, this study looked at the prevalent morphological errors with fourth-year university students' academic writing by combining quantitative and qualitative research approach. This study aimed to give a thorough view of the types and prevalence of morphological errors as well as a better understanding of their underlying causes by utilizing a mixed-methods approach (Creswell, 2014).

10.1 Participants

The sample consisted of 30 fourth-year students from Tobruk University for the academic year 2024-2025 to guarantee that the participants are representative of the population of interest. Purposive sampling was used in their selection. These participants are good for studying advanced morphological faults as it is expected to exhibit a more sophisticated academic writing style.

10.2 Data Collection

This study gathered data through academic essays because they reflect the typical students writing style in school, where using correct word forms is crucial for clear communication. This makes essays a suitable choice for collecting data (Smith, 2019).

10.3 Data Analysis

We applied a mixed-methods approach, blending frequency analysis with error classification. Errors were identified and sorted into categories like possessive forms, pluralization, subject-verb agreement, and word inflections. This analysis revealed the most common errors among students by employing straightforward statistics, such as counts and percentages (Johnson & Christensen, 2017).

11. Results and Discussion

The data have been analyzed by using Corder's categorization framework, identifying and classifying morphological errors such as misformation, addition, omission,
misordering, misselection, substitution, and overuse. A total of 241 errors were found. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution morphological errors.
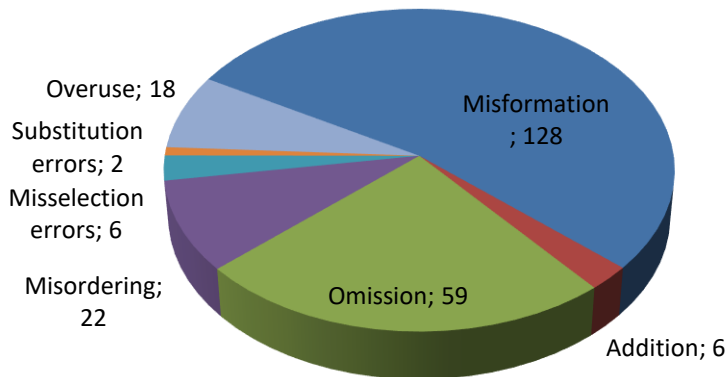

Figure 1: Distribution of Morphological Errors Based on Corder's Categorization

11.1 Misformation

Misformation errors represented one of the most common categories of morphological errors found in students writing. In the study, we identified 128 misformation errors, which comprised 53.13% of the total errors. These errors occurred when words formed incorrectly through the misuse of affixes, incorrect derivations, or simple spelling mistakes that altered the intending word form. Misformation can affect verbs, nouns, adjectives, and other parts of speech, ultimately leading to grammatically incorrect sentences (Richards, 1974). Figure 2 shows the percentage of misformation errors among the total morphological errors.
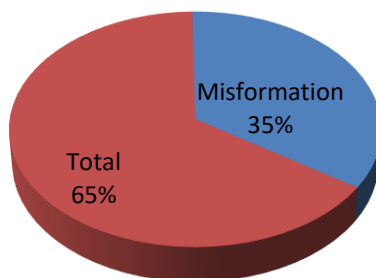
Figure 2: Misformation Errors among Total Morphological Errors

Here are some examples from the participants' argumentative essays which show the impact of these mistakes on overall clarity and communication. One frequent category of misformation involves incorrect verb forms. For example, in one sentence, a student wrote, "I have many dreams I want to check the first I 'll marry and I traveling to countries..." The error here is twofold: the verb "traveling" is incorrectly used after "will" (or its contracted form "I'll"), and the word "check" is used in place of "achieve." The correct sentence should read, "I have many dreams I want to achieve. First, I'll get married and travel to countries..." This example showed how an incorrect morphological formation did not only affect the verb but also resulted in an awkward choice of vocabulary. Similar mistakes appear in noun and adjective usage as well. For instance, the sentence, "I will open the biggest teacher at Tobruk," demonstrates that the noun "teacher" was used incorrectly instead of "school." The error rose from misformation where the intended noun "school" is replaced by a related but contextually wrong term "teacher". The corrected version is, "I will open the biggest school in Tobruk."

Pronoun and preposition errors were also common in misformation. The sentence, "I will make her name on my father's name." This example showed a misformation in both pronoun usage and preposition selection. The intended meaning is to name something after one's father; therefore, a more typical phrasing is, "I will name it after my father." In this case, the pronoun "her" is misformed and it should be "it" when referring to the item being named and the preposition "on" was incorrectly used instead of "after." Several examples involve the misuse of adjectives and

nouns that result from faulty derivation or spelling mistakes. For instance, a misformation error was evident in the phrase, "Additionally technology into the learning process..." Here, the word "technology" is presented without a necessary article or preposition, and the overall structure was awkward. A correct version might be, "Additionally, integrating technology into the learning process..." or "Additionally, the use of technology in the learning process..." depends on the intended meaning.

11.2 The Addition and Omission of Some Words

In the analysis of the morphological errors, they constituted 65 morphological errors identified which represent 26.98% of the total errors related to the addition and omission of letters. These errors, though sometimes subtle, had a significant effect on clarity and grammatical correctness. The errors can be categorized into two main types: those where unnecessary letters or words (addition errors) are inserted into the text and those where essential letters or words (omission errors) are dropped (Corder, 1981). Figure 3 below specifically illustrates errors related to additions and omissions.
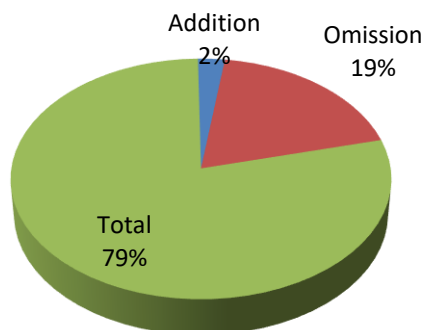
Figure 3: Addition and Omission Errors in Morphological Analysis

11.2.1 Addition Errors

Errors in addition occurred when extra words or morphemes were mistakenly included in a sentence, leading to redundancy or incorrect phrasing. For example, consider the sentence:"and gives you the ability to contact with people of other countries" Here, the preposition "with" is unnecessary after the verb "contact." The correct version is:"and gives you the ability to contact people of other countries"

Another example involved redundancy and double negatives:" Because life now is based on money on money without no life." This sentence is not only redundant with the phrase "on money on money" but also uses the double negative "without no life." A revised sentence is:"Because life now is based on money; without money, there is no life."

In an additional instance, a student wrote:"I will put the best teachers in the school and my dad he will the manager." Here, an additional and misplaced subject "he" caused an error in word order. The corrected version is:"I will hire the best teachers for the school, and my dad will be the manager."

Additional errors were observed in cases where extra morphemes were inserted by mistake. For instance, using an extra article or an incorrect linking verb can disrupt the natural flow of a sentence. One such error involved in the phrase: "regardless of their background is also priority."
The insertion of "is" between "background" and "priority" was incorrect. A more appropriate phrasing would be: regardless of their background, priority is also important.

11.2.2 Omission Errors

Some Errors in omission, on the other hand, involve dropping of main letters or words, leading to incomplete or confusing sentences. A common type of omission error was the missing article. For example, a student wrote: "can help you in your future career because many Jobs require English to give you the Job. "The sentence omitted the article "a" before the word "job" and also improperly capitalizes "Jobs." The corrected sentence is :"...can help you in your future career because many jobs require English to give you the job." Another instance of omission occurs when key words are dropped, as in the sentence:"English is important as Arabic..."Here, the comparative structure is incomplete due to the missing word "as" before "important." The corrected sentence is:"English is as important as Arabic..."Omission errors also affect proper spelling and word formation. For example, errors like dropping the letter "r" in "concerns" (which should be "concerns") or omitting the "e" in "Tim and effort" (which should be "time and effort") can cause confusion and detract from the overall quality of the writing. Moreover, some errors involve omitted morphological elements that disrupt parallel structures. In lists or compound phrases,

missing conjunctions or articles can render the text less coherent. For example, the sentence described challenges, "difficulty with pronunciation and learning grammar and syntax rules and remembering new vocabulary and adapting to a foreign culture" required careful parallel structure to ensure clarity.

11.3 Misordering as morphological errors

Out of the total morphological errors analyzed, misordering errors accounted for a significant portion, with a total of 22 errors, representing approximately 9.13% of all errors. The chart illustrates these blunders by showing actual cases of phrase or word errors that led to a misordering of the sentence structures. This chart makes clear the types of misordering mistakes that are common among students as well as their potential weaknesses in sentence construction and word order that need further teaching. Figure 4 shows the proportion of misordering errors diagnosed within the students' essays.
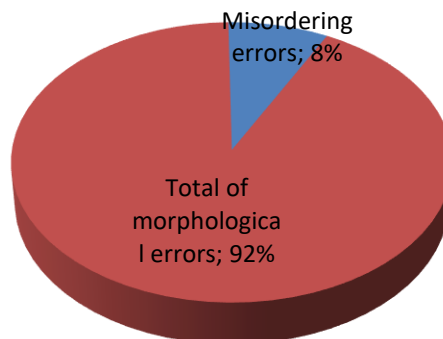

Figure 4: Distribution of Misordering Errors in Students' Essays

Misordering mistakes are committed when the order of elements in a sentence differs from the intended arrangement which disrupts the meaning of the sentence, making it difficult to understand. While assessing students' compositions, it was found that there were 22 misordering errors which formed 9.13% of the total morphological errors captured. These types of mistakes usually stem from the inappropriate positioning of words and phrases, resulting in lack of clarity, parallelism, or grammatical agreement.

An example of a paragraph that is misordered in a common way is this one as given, "to understand the words in air plane. In this instance, the term "air plane" was improperly spaced and the

phrase lacked the necessary punctuation. The corrected version, "to understand the words in an airplane, for example, instructions" not only fixed the compound noun but also improved readability through proper comma placement. Such errors may change the intended meaning.

Another issue arises with parallelism and consistency within the sentence structure. For example, the sentence *"it helps friends and families stay connected and allowes people to share ideas and information"* demonstrates a misordering error where the verb forms do not align. The error is corrected by ensuring parallel structure: *"it helps friends and families stay connected and allows people to share ideas and information."*

Word order and subject verb agreement misordering errors are also some examples of additional erroneous ordering mistakes. An example is, "*The electronic which helps them facilitate and success*." *"which"* here is problematic because it misorders the descriptive phrase. An example of this would be," the electronic devices which help them achieve success," ensuring that the noun with its correlating modifiers agree. Similarly, the sentence "*some people find the impact of technology it is a good idea,*" requires reordering to become, "some people find the impact of technology to be a good idea," and "some people find that the impact of technology is a good idea." Yet another of, "*There are some people think that the using of technology*," should instead say, "There are some people who think that the use of technology…" to get the relative pronoun in the right place while keeping the original intention.

11.4 Misselection Errors

Misselection errors take place when an incorrect morpheme or word form is chosen, therefore results into eloquent and impactful conflicts of structures. Following the chart, a grand total of 6 misselection errors were pinpointed, which accounts for 2.48% of all morphological errors. This graphic illustrates that a small body of the errors, in this case, misselection errors amount to 2.48% of the total overall errors. Figure 5 depicts how the students have recorded the misselection errors in their essays.
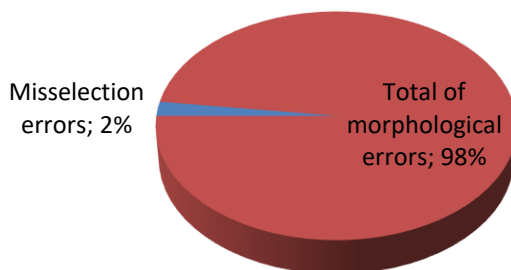
Figure 5: Distribution of Misselection Errors in Students' Essays

A word or a part of a word being selected wrong results in what is known as a misselection error. The incorrect selection can greatly depart standard language usage. These errors usually include skipping or incorrect application of capitals, punctuation, and word endings which affects the coherence and readability of the writing. As an example, "Higher Earning potential" is capitalized incorrectly in "Earning" as "Higher earning potential" would be the recommended format.

Alongside omission of punctuation, inconsistent sentence construction also brings about problems which are evident in the phrase "overcoming Accent," whereby "Accent" is used inappropriately. The appropriate version reads as "Overcoming accent" because it is free from and cluttering. Even more damaging, but, in some cases, disabling is lack of period in "Fear of making mistakes" which effectively ruins the fluency of reading.

Altering or misordering initially drafted phrases cuts short the meaning of a sentence. "Stengthens" is a misspelled attempt of "strengthens" and is an example where vowel corrections subtract from one's previously defined understanding. "Repidly" is also a miscalculation, but this time, it is a miscalculation in a broad sense where the new vowel completely contours the original word way too much. Instead, it should be "rapidly."

Word formation errors like using "maxizing" instead of "maximizing," demonstrated a poor application of standard rules. Whether they were related to capitalization, vowels, or word construction, these misselection errors could have a substantial

impact on the quality and professionalism of writing, and fixing them is crucial for effective communication in both academic and professional contexts.

11.5 Substitution Errors

Two errors accounted 0.82% of all morphological errors. Substitution occurred when one word was incorrectly replaced by another, either due to confusion or improper word choice. Despite constituting a small percentage of the total mistakes, these missteps could lead to misinterpretations of the intended meaning. By examining these mistakes, the chart emphasized the impact of precise word choice in written communication, highlighting a critical area for improvement in grammar and writing skills. Figure 6 illustrates substitution errors found in the students' essays.
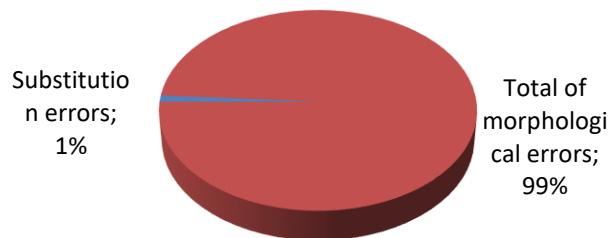

Figure 6: Substitution Errors in Comparison with Other Morphological Errors

Substitution occurred when a learner replaced a correct word or form with an incorrect one. The mistakes often arise due to misapplication of linguistic rules, influenced from the learner's first language, or a misunderstanding of English word structures. One common example is the substitution of "curricule" of "curriculum." In this case, the learner may have mistakenly attempted to create a plural or altered form based on false assumptions about English morphology. Since "curriculum" is a Latin-derived word with a specific plural form ("curricula"), incorrect substitutions like "curricule" can result from unfamiliarity with these patterns.

Another typical example of substitution error has to do with the confusion of count nouns versus uncounted nouns. The statement uses the term curricule which cannot be further divided, thus breaking the statement to teachers can customize curricule and

assessments. The portion of the statement that states, 'assessments' is appropriate as it correctly states more than one assessment. Hence 'curriculum' should rather serve as the uncounted version. A much better way of expressing the statement is saying, 'teachers can customize curriculum and assessments.' This example shows how learners misapplying rules on pluralizing words, primarily abstract and academic ones.

It is not just nouns that are susceptible to these errors, as stems of verbs, pronouns, and other grammatical categories can be affected. For instance, learners may say "She speak" instead of saying "She speaks" due to difficulty in subject-verb agreement. Such mistakes stem from overgeneralizing where learners attempt to use already existing language form on rules that are linguistically different. Sometimes, students try to reduce overly sophisticated form into simpler ones only to find themselves producing nonsensical sentences. Such mistakes are so crucial that they require an intervention to ensure precision.

11.6 Overuse

There were 18 mistakes, which account for 7.46% of total errors. This means that specific overuse errors in the language probably do not rank high, but they surely have some significant impact on a person's overall accuracy in the language. These errors occur when a specific grammatical construction, word, or even affix is used with a lot of excess due to incompetence or over correction. The 7.46% figure also shows that there are people who cannot make use of a single element of a language without constantly repeating it in verbal or written forms of communication. These errors can be corrected more easily, as the teacher does not need to work separately with the students, but can do so as they attempt to build proper communication. Figure 7 shows the overuse mistakes made by learners.
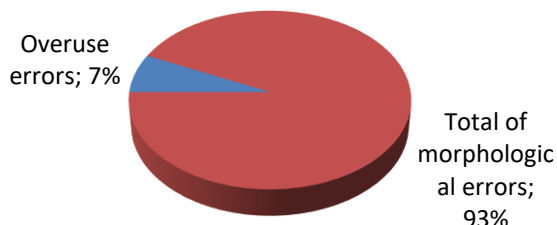

Figure 7: The overuse of errors among the other morphological errors

Overuse errors refers to mistakes which add unnecessary information making their writing unclear and wordy in the most ineffective manner. This as a result impairs effective communication. For instance, in the phrase, "depend very much on it a lot," it can either be said as, "depend on it a lot," or "depend very much on it." As another example, "a very important and big part," where big in itself does not serve a purpose at all. A more concise version would be *"an important part."* These errors are common among learners who try to strengthen their statements but instead create unnecessary repetition.

12. Conclusion

The results indicated that the predominant morphological errors in the academic writing of fourth-year ESL students are misformation (53.13%), addition/omission errors (26.98%), and misordering (9.13%). The misformation errors primarily consisted of incorrect verb forms, nouns, and adjectives, whereas addition and omission underscored the difficulties students encounter in organizing word order and utilizing articles. Inflectional errors, including verb tense misuse and subject-verb agreement, were the most frequently observed types of morphology. The research indicates that these mistakes may arise from insufficient mastery of morphological rules, overgeneralizing, and interference from the first language. The findings highlighted the necessity of targeted instruction to rectify these common errors and enhance students' proficiency in academic writing. Focusing on error correction and structured practice enables educators to enhance students' language skills, leading to clearer and more accurate writing.

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