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A morphological analysis of the expository essays written by postgraduate EFL students

Dr. Haytham Othman Hassan Abdalla

Assistant Professor, Department of Foreign Languages

Faculty of Arts & Humanities-Al-Baha University

hoabdullah@bu.edu.sa

Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the problems of EFL students with respect to the use of bound morphemes. To do this, students' expository essays were analyzed, particularly for problems in using the derivational and inflectional morphemes. As morphological errors affect sentence formation and overall paragraph quality, 46 essays written by male/female MA students at the Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Al-Baha University-KSA were qualitatively analyzed to look for evidence. The qualitative descriptive study found out that the salient errors of the postgraduate students in using the derivational morphemes were their inability to derive words of a different grammatical category, such as nouns, adjectives, and verbs, while errors regarding the use of the inflectional morphemes were ascribed to the students' inability to mark the third person singular, indicate the present participles as well as the past participle forms, and to assign the possessive case affiliating to the concerned words. These errors occurred as a result of inaccurate utilization of the bound morphemes.

Keywords: derivational morphemes; inflectional morphemes; bound morphemes; student errors; expository essays.

التحليل الصرفي للمقالات الايضاحية التي كتبها طلاب الدراسات العليا في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

د. هيثم عثمان حسن عبدالله

أستاذ مساعد، قسم اللغات الأجنبية

كلية الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية، جامعة الباحة

الملخص:

تهدفُ هذه الورقة إلى التحققِ من مشاكلِ الطلاب الذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، فيما يختصُ باستخدام الوحدات الصرفية المتصلة؛ ولتطبيق ذلك تم تحليل مقالات الطلاب لمعرفة مشاكل استخدام الوحدات الصرفية الاشتقاقية والإعرابية. نظرًا لأن الأخطاء الصرفية تؤثر على تكوين الجملة وجودة كتابة الفقرة بشكل عام، تم تحليل ست وأربعون (٤٦) مقالة كتبها طلاب وطالبات الماجستير في قسم اللغات الأجنبية بكلية الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية جامعة الباحة بالمملكة العربية السعودية، وللوصول إلى النتائج أُستخدِام المنهج الوصفي النوعي. توصلت الدراسة إلى أنَّ أبرز أخطاء طلاب الدراسات العليا في استخدام الوحدات الصرفية الاشتقاقية هي عدم قدرتهم على اشتقاق الكلمات التي تنتمي الي صنف نحوي واحد، كالأسماء والصفات والأفعال بالإضافة إلى أن معظم الأخطاء المتعلقة باستخدام الوحدات الصرفية الإعرابية تُعزى إلى عدم قدرة الطلاب على تحديد صيغة الغائب وبيان اسم الفاعل واسم المفعول وعدم قدرتهم في تعيين حالة الملكية التابعة للكلمات المعنية. حدثت هذه الأخطاء نتيجة للاستخدام غير الدقيق للوحدات الصرفية المتصلة بالكلمات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: لوحدات الصرفية الاشتقاقية، الوحدات الصرفية الإعرابية، الوحدات الصرفية المتصلة، أخطاء الطلاب، المقالات الايضاحية.

Introduction:

The focus of learning is on both the receptive (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing). Of these, the productive skills play a vital role in the EFL classroom. These receive much attention in the ESL/EFL academic arena. This is because speaking the target language takes the lead, whereas writing as a skill represents the tool via which written assignments get evaluated. Poor written performance indicates poor knowledge of grammar and mechanics of writing (Abdalla, 2023). Therefore, the mastery of both grammar and writing techniques is considered a good indicator of student academic success and the overall level of English proficiency. Gayo and Widodo (2018) claim that mastering of English grammar is a prerequisite for good writing. Otherwise, poor academic grades will be obtained by the end of the day.

The written academic discourse of EFL students is perplexing and problematic. Mammeri (2015) noted that the process of learning a second or foreign language is always subject to inaccurate outputs and structures. This indicates the difficulty and complexity of the written academic discourse in the EFL context (Haris & Sulhan, 2022). The complexity of writing skills makes it difficult to master as it brings about many different kinds of mistakes that can be observed (Gayo & Widodo, 2018).

It is observed that, in the context of EFL, students find it difficult to supply the linguistic items in their correct positions. This is because the system of human communication necessitates knowledge of a structure and arrangement from morpheme to discourse (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). As forming correct sentences is important in writing good paragraphs, the current study investigates the EFL problems of postgraduate students in using the derivational and inflectional morphemes.

Literature Review:

a. Grammar and Morphology

Awareness of grammar and morphology is needed whenever an utterance is produced. These are unconsciously acquired for all L1s speakers, but in the context of second and foreign language learning, perfecting rules of these requires a great deal of time and effort. As relative variations concerning the rules of both L1 and L2 can be seen, the formation of sentences and words leads to different errors depending on the context of language learning and the amount of instruction a student receives.

To begin with, according to Radford (2009), grammar is concerned with the two separate but connected fields of study of syntax and morphology. The first looks at how words are formed from smaller units called morphemes, and the second looks at how words are combined to produce sentences and phrases (p. 1).This states that a word is an essential linguistic element in the formation of sentences. In another way, sentences are made of words. Therefore, for those who study English as a foreign language, understanding the nature of words and their internal structure should be given much care.

Language comprehension is also claimed to begin with grammar (see Sari et al., 2019). In addition to other structural elements, knowledge of grammar includes the usage of tenses, word order, modals, sentence types, and clauses. Accordingly, the creation of an appropriate written product depends on the standards and guidelines that specify what needs to be written. To substantiate this, Silfia and Riany (2021) pointed out that in the production of a paragraph or a text, the sentence is considered the focal point.

With reference to morphology, knowledge of morphemes is basic in structuring various words. Yule (2010) defined a morpheme as "a minimal unit of meaning or grammatical function" (p. 67).

Stageberg and Goodman (1965, p. 83) explained the three criteria that a morpheme has to satisfy:

1. It is a meaningful word or part of a meaningful word.

2. It cannot be broken down into more manageable components without losing its meaning or leaving behind meaningless pieces.

3. It reappears with a relatively consistent meaning in various verbal contexts.

Based on the kinds and combinations of morphemes they contain, Stageberg and Goodman (1965) added that words in the English language can be divided into three categories: *simple words* with only one free morpheme, like long and flea, *complex words* with two bound forms or a bound and a free form as immediate constituents, like exclude and telephone, and *compound words* with two or more free forms as immediate constituents, like greenhouse and happy-go-lucky (p. 116).

Similarly, Yule (2010) provided two broad classifications on morphemes. The first category of these is called *free morphemes*, such as open and tour, which are forms that are able to stand alone as single

words (p. 68). For Yule, the free morphemes are further categorized into *lexical morphemes* and *functional morphemes*. Lexical morphemes are those that carry the content of the message being conveyed, such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives. These are named open classes, as new lexical morphemes can be added to the language. The functional morphemes, on the other hand, represent the functional words of language. Examples for such categories encompass conjunctions, prepositions, articles, and pronouns. These are described as closed classes of words because new functional morphemes cannot be added to the language.

Yule's second category is *bound morphemes*. These include prefixes and suffixes that are frequently attached to another form and cannot normally be standalone. Examples of these forms are *re-,-ist, -ed,* and *-s*. Bound morphemes are also divided into *derivational morphemes* and *inflectional morphemes*. The derivational morphemes are used to make new words or to make words of a different grammatical category from the stem. To exemplify, the derivational morpheme *-ness* is added to the adjective *good* to form the noun *goodness*. Inflectional morphemes, on the other hand, are used to specify aspects of a word's grammatical function, such as whether a word is plural or singular, in the past tense or not, or whether it is a comparative or possessive form. As a result, they are not used to form new words or change the part of speech of the word. Eight inflectional morphemes are present. The possessive case (*-'s*), plural form (*-s*), third person singular (*-s*), present participle form (*-ing*), past tense (*-ed*), past participle (*-en*), comparative form (*-er*), and superlative form (*-est*) are all indicated by these morphemes. It should be noted that all inflectional morphemes in English are suffixes (Yule, 2010, p. 69).

a. Intralingual vs. interlingual errors:

An error, according to Richards and Schmidt (2010), is when a second or foreign language learner uses a linguistic item (a word, grammatical construction, speech act, etc.) in speech or writing in a way that a fluent or native speaker of the language would consider to be flawed or incomplete learning (p. 201).

Furthermore, Corder (1975) claimed that when learning a second language, students frequently make utterances in writing and speech that are deemed incorrect or poorly constructed according to the rules of the target language. This explains that making errors is a natural phenomenon in the context where language is taught or learned. Hence, second/foreign language errors are classified differently.

According to Richards and Schmidt (2010), errors are of two types, intralingual and interlingual. Intraligual errors include *overgeneralizations*, which result from applying target language rules to inappropriate contexts; *simplifications*, which come from learners producing simpler linguistic rules than those found in the target language; *developmental errors*, which represent natural stages of development; *communication-based errors*, which result from communication strategies; *induced errors*, which result from training transfer; *errors of avoidance*, which result from failing to use specific target language structures because they are deemed too difficult; and *errors of overproduction*, which result from using structures too frequently. An intralingual error arises from incorrect or incomplete acquisition of the target language (p. 201). Interlingual errors, in contrast, are brought on by the learner's mother tongue, or ones that arise via language transfer (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 294).

To correct or reduce errors, Corder (1975) suggested that second language learners' errors should be addressed by more thorough practicing of the language's sound patterns and sentence structure rather than by an additional explanation of the rules of the target language. Therefore, students are in need of more exercises and opportunities to practice learning the new taught language elements.

b. EFL students' errors:

The various problems of the EFL students seem to be in choosing the correct morpheme. Since a change in a word category causes a problem in understating the meaning of a single sentence, Mammeri's (2015) research concluded that word forms such as nouns, adjectives, and adverbs cause a problem for EFL students. He, in addition, stated that EFL students' academic writing reveals eight morphosyntactic errors. Students' errors include word order, subject-verb agreement, verb structure, noun/adjective/adverb structure, word/morpheme addition, word/morpheme omission, short forms/abbreviations, and informal conversational words. This explains that absence or poorly formed words lead to sentence construction problems, which result in problems in grasping the meaning of a sentence.

Likewise, research found EFL/ESL students commit morphological and syntactic errors. Their qualitative descriptive study came out with types of morphological and syntactic errors. Students' morphological errors include omission, addition, and distortion of prepositions, articles, copula, determiners, auxiliary words, and personal pronouns. Students' syntactical errors include the omission,

addition, misformation, and disorder with respect to the use of passive voice, tense, noun phrase, auxiliary, subject-verb agreement, and determiner, the morphological errors due to overgeneralization, which is said to be the biggest source of errors followed by strategies in second language learning and finally language transfer (Gayo & Widodo, 2018; Rachmat Faisyal et al., 2015).

Similarly, the descriptive procedure, which is used by Haris and Sulhan (2022), to investigate the descriptive writing of EFL Indonesian students showed types of morphological and syntactical errors. The morphological errors include the use of inflection, derivation, noun, adjective, verb, adverb, preposition, article, copula (be), auxiliary, conjunction, and pronouns, whereas the most syntactic ones include the use of passive voice, tense, noun phrase, prepositional phrase, subject/predicate, subject-verb agreement, demonstrative determiner, and paired adjective. Errors in both categories are generally attributed to omission, addition, misformation, and misordering of the linguistic features.

So far, previous studies have focused, mainly, on analysing the morphsyntactic errors of undergraduate students who are still under second/foreign language instruction (Mammeri, 2015; Gayo & Widodo, 2018; Haris & Sulhan, 2022), just to mention a few. As there is a need for further investigation regarding errors in morphology and syntax (as suggested by Mammeri, 2015) as well as understanding the nature of vocabulary errors (Richards & Schmidt, 2010), the years spent teaching many undergraduate students pinpoint areas of linguistic weaknesses (see Puspita, 2019). However, the current study exclusively deals with the problems of MA students in using bound morphemes. Since the research deals with EFL students who have spent several years learning and receiving instruction in both linguistics and literature, the research primarily aims to find out:
1. The errors committed by the MA students in using the derivational morphemes
2. The errors committed by the MA students in using the inflectional morphemes

Methodology of the Study:

Some selected students' written sentences that contain incorrect forms were analyzed using a qualitative descriptive approach as the main tool following a procedure used by Mammeri (2015). The procedure is to classify the error, identify the error, and then to correct the error. This has made it easier to explain in detail the errors that occurred as a result of incorrect application of the bound morphemes. To arrive at the results of the research, the procedure given below was followed.

Participants of the Study:

46 male and female Saudi students, enrolled full-time in the MA program, Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Al-Baha University, KSA, were the subjects of the study. The registered students held BA degrees from different universities and will aspire to become MA holders.

Source of data:

Written essays were collected from students between 2021 and 2022. Each student had to write two essays as part of the exam sections. A total of 46 expository essays were thoroughly examined to provide a deeper understanding of the subject under discussion. Considering that a period of two hours was given as time to complete the exam.

Procedures of data analysis:

The use of derivational and inflectional morphemes was identified and described by a qualitative analysis of the students' written essays (see Alzamil, 2020; Abdalla, 2023). To illustrate how these morphemes are used, some chosen words within single sentences were selected as examples. The tables were then used to show the use of wrong forms (given in *italics*) and the correct forms (given in **bold**) following Mammeri's procedure to describe students' errors. To be more specific, the researcher explained only the challenges that the research subjects usually face in using the derivational and inflectional suffixes, particularly errors in the use of the bound suffixes pertaining to the given word, which were corrected. Therefore, the other grammatical and writing challenges within these sentences were excluded.

Analysis and discussion of data:

To reiterate, the focus of the paper is on analyzing the students' essays to identify errors in the use of bound suffixes. As these affect the inner structure of a sentence, repetition of such errors throughout their sentences generally reduces the quality of writing. One aim of this paper is to examine the derivational errors in the sentences composed by the students. Therefore, in the section below errors in the use of derivational morphemes will be discussed.

a. Some derivational errors:

To be more descriptive, this section is devoted to errors that occur in formation of a different word category. Accordingly, problems of forming nouns, adjectives, and verbs are discussed. To explain these, the following table explains errors of the students in forming nouns:

Table (1): Sample of students' problems in forming nouns

Error Classification	Error identification	Error correction
Forming of nouns	1-They took their *inspirational* from the France Revolution in 1987…	1-They took their **inspiration** from the France Revolution in 1987… St.1
	2-… one of this reason to get thier religious *free...*	2-… one of this reason to get thier religious **freedom**...St.12
	3-Yeats was highly defend about his cantry against the British *govern*.	3-Yeats was highly defend about his cantry against the British **government**. St. 33
	4-Americans did not had *represented* in Britan barlmint.	4-Americans did not had **representation** in Britan barlmint. St.5
	5-…he recruited people from different *religious* in 1681.	5-…he recruited people from different **religions** in 1681.St.5
	6-…in 1683 the first *Germany* community established.	6-…in 1683 the first **German** community established. St.5
	7-The early *settlements* faced some difficulties…	7-The early **settlers** faced some difficulties…St.6

An important issue in the formation of sentences has to do with the use of nouns. Table 1 above explains the learners' problems in forming and using suffixes. Although there are different suffixes that can be used to derive nouns, many students had trouble selecting the suitable morpheme to do so. To exemplify, the morphemes *–al, -ed, -y, and -ous,* in the words *inspirational, represented, religious*, and *Germany,* are used to form adjectives and not nouns as stated in the table. The sentences given above explain that some students did not understand the function of each morpheme. This finding aligns with Mammeri's (2015) study, who claimed that his Algerian EFL students confuse between nouns, adjectives, and adverbs.

The examples of the students also showed that a noun is necessary in this particular context, but unfortunately they chose a false one. This is evident in their erroneous selection of the words free and govern, as these show omission of the required morphemes. The cases in which noun-forming morphemes are not added were many. In this regard, Gayo and Widodo (2018) contended that EFL errors occur as a result of omitting English language elements from a sentence.

Like the same, the morphemic errors encompass the formation of adjectives. Table 2 below explains the students' problems in distinguishing between a noun and an adjective. Students' examples contain many instances of these:

Table (2): Sample of students' problems in forming adjectives

Error Classification	Error identification	Error correction
Forming of adjectives	1. …they decided to tax the *America*…	1-…they decided to tax the **Americans**…St.2
	2. The *revolution* war was end in 1781…	2-The **revolutionary** war was end in 1781… St.1
	3-Finally in 1776 American became *independence* and free…	3-Finally in 1776 American became **independent** and free…St.1
	4-Americans did not had represented in *Britan* barlmint.	4-Americans did not had represented in **British** barlmint. St.5

5-The early colonies had people from England, France, *German*, dutch not just from Britain.	5-The early colonies had people from England, France, **Germany**, dutch not just from Britain. St.5
6-The first *colony established* was Virgirna Colony…	6-The first **established** colony was Virgirna Colony… St.6

The errors in forming adjectives are serious, as shown in Table 2. The inability to differentiate between *America* as a name of a country and *American* as a nationality of a person appears to be an initial obstacle for many students. The same can be seen in the words *Britain* and *British*, *German* and *Germany*. Not only this but also the organization of a noun and an adjective, as in *colony established* given in the last example, is what some students suffer from (see Gayo & Widodo, 2018). The usual norm is that an attributive adjective comes before a noun it modifies. This example explained that not only the formation of adjectives but also the use of adjectives is problematic for many students. So, awareness of what morpheme to choose is urgently required in the context of the study. For the adjectives that end in the *-ed* morpheme, the ability to distinguish between an adjective and a regular past form is problematic. Such errors are attributed to overgeneralization errors (Richards & Schmidt, 2010), which can be rectified by giving more intensified exercises (Corder, 1975).

Verb formation is another problem that many students face. It has been noted that some students were unable to derive verbs, as observed in their failure to use the bound morphemes to assign the intended tense. Table 3 below gives some explanation of the errors committed by MA students.

Table (3): Sample of students' problems in forming verbs

Error Classification	Error identification	Error correction
Forming of verbs	1-Americans *did not had* represented in Britan barlmint.	1-Americans **did not have** represented in britan barlmint. St.5
	2-…he make all the decisions…while the mother *caring* for children…	2-…he make(s) all the decisions…while the mother **cares** for children… St.6
	3-…the war *continue* and America *success* every war it was into it…	3-…the war **continued** and America **succeeded** every war it was into it… St.9
	4-…the boys imitate their fathers and the girls *doing* what their mothers *doing*…	4-…the boys imitate their fathers and the girls **do** what their mothers **do**… St.9
	5-They wanted to *established* new republic which they can live without Britian.	5-They wanted to **establish** new republic which they can live without Britian. St.16
	6-France and Roman republic *were inspire* the Americans to revolt against Britian.	6-France and Roman republic **inspired** the Americans to revolt against Britian. St.16

Many students had problems in the formation of verbs. The ability to use suitable derivational morphemes appears to be cumbersome. The examples in Table (3) above show that some students had problems in forming irregular verbs; for example, the negation of the past simple form requires the use of the auxiliary *did* + (*have*) the infinitive form of the verb, but the incorrect form, *had,* was used instead. Other students' problems included the addition of unnecessary morphemes, for example, *-ing* and *-ed* in the words *caring, doing,* and *established,* respectively. The last observation regarding the students' examples was the omission of some required morphemes, such as the *-ed* form in the word *inspire* in the last example. Consequently, misuse of derivational morphemes to form different verbs detracts from the weight of the sentences.

To recap, problems of using the derivational morphemes are reflected in sentence formation. As sentences depend on a set of words in which they are composed, if a single word is wrongly formed or chosen due to misformation, sentential problems can be anticipated. Therefore, sentence formation

problems have been attributed to the improper usage of acceptable language components (Gayo & Widodo, 2018). Instances of the same can also be seen in the use of inflectional morphemes.

b. Some Inflectional errors:

The in-depth analysis of the essays has also revealed problems in using inflectional morphemes. According to Gayo & Widodo (2018), problems of such category include omitting, adding, and misforming an inflectional morpheme (also see Haris & Sulhan, 2022). Such problems will be explained in the following tables. To begin with, Table 4 below illustrates errors in forming plural nouns.

Table (4): Sample of students' problems of forming plural nouns

Error Classification	Error identification	Error correction
Forming of plurals	1-…they faced a lot of *hardship* as pilgrims…	1-…they faced a lot of **hardships** as pilgrims …St.1
	2-The early *settler* did not now how to live in wilderness…	2-The early **settlers** did not now how to live in wilderness… St.3
	3-Many of *American* believed that king George III failed to do so…	3-Many of **Americans** believed that king George III failed to do so… St.5
	4-But the *Americans* colonists believed the king of Great Britain…had failed to do so…	4-But the **American** colonists believed the king of Great Britain…had failed to do so… St.6
	5-…Girls expected to be a *wife* when they reach the age of 16…	5-…Girls expected to be **wives** when they reach the age of 16… St.11

Since the ability to form regular plurals is not a big deal for many advanced students, in the current analysis, many errors of utilizing the plural morpheme were identified (see Table (4)). Two issues were observed, missing the use of the -*s* plural morpheme as well as the incorrect use of an irregular noun (see Gayo & Widodo, 2018; Mammeri, 2015; Al-Badawi, 2012; Haris & Sulhan, 2022). The first issue was identified in the first sentence; for instance, a *lot of* as a quantifier is followed by an accountable word *hardship* that requires the addition of plural morpheme -*s*. The omission of the same morpheme can also be seen in the words *settler*, *American*, and *country*. The second issue was the incorrect use of an irregular plural. For instance, in the last example, the word *wife* was used as a singular noun, although the given context requires the use of a plural noun, for example, *wives.*

The issue of forming regular plurals necessitates understanding of the adjacent specifiers and quantifiers, as well as understanding the various divisions of nouns. Although the words given as examples were regular nouns, knowledge of using the inflectional morphemes remains a linguistic issue that needs much attention in the EFL context.

Under problems of inflectional morphemes, assigning possessive cases is an issue to be discussed. The formation of possessives can be done by the use of possessive pronouns such as *his*, *hers*, *theirs*, etc. or employing an inflectional morpheme such as -*'s* or -*s'*. Table 5 below presents some examples of these:

Table (5): Sample of students' problems in forming possessive cases

Error Classification	Error identification	Error correction
Forming of possessives	1-…they expected to hold their *fathers trade*…	1-…they expected to hold their **fathers' trade**…St. 10
	2-…they were phases…that touched the *reader hearts*.	2-…they were phases…that touched the **readers' hearts**.St.34
	3-The way *Yeats treatment* tense subject matter…	3- The way **Yeats' treatment** tense subject matter…St.34
	4-…during the first years of *Yeat's life*…	4-…during the first years of **Yeats's life**… St.35
	5-…*Yeats love* and passion toward his country is clear.	5-…**Yeats's love** and passion toward his country is clear…St.36

The examples given above deal exclusively with the use of the possessive morpheme. Table (5) shows cases of wrong use of the possessive case. To exemplify, first, the wrong use of the possessive morpheme

with regular plural nouns ending in the -*s* morpheme was observed, as in *fathers trade,* rather than the correct possessive form as in *fathers' trade.* Second, in such analysis, errors also occur when the students did not assign the possessive case due to inadequate knowledge in using the apostrophe (') with proper nouns that originally end in an (s). This was typically witnessed in *Yeats treatment*, *Yeat's life*, and *Yeats love*. While in the noun phrase, *the reader hearts*, the required possessive morpheme was not added.

Misuse and omission of the possessive morpheme have dire effect on the treatment of nouns. The errors show students' low level of English proficiency because the use of nouns requires awareness of when and where to mark possessive cases. Therefore, rules of applying and marking possessive markers should be learned in accordance with various examples (see Corder, 1975) so as to distinguish between the possessive morpheme and the plural one.

Based on the above discussion, the -*s* morpheme has become a problem for most students. There is a different case dealing with missing to add the third person singular -*s* morpheme. The following table views the errors in using such a morpheme.

Table (6): Sample of students' problems in forming the 3ʳᵈ person singular

Error Classification	Error identification	Error correction
Forming of 3ʳᵈ person singular	1-The architecture of building *reflect* their knowledge.	1-The architecture of building **reflects** their knowledge. St. 12
	2-The dead man in This Poem *talk* about the horror of The war.	2-The dead man in This Poem **talks** about the horror of The war. St.28
	3-…He *consider* himself as an Irish man…	3-…He **considers** himself as an Irish man…St.34
	4-…it *consist* of four stanzas.	4-…it **consists** of four stanzas. St.31
	5-…when he *describe* the solider…	5-…when he **describes** the solider…St. 32

The cases of not being able to use the -*s* morpheme are many. This comes as a result of students' low knowledge of basic grammar, particularly the use of the simple present tense. The examples given in Table (6) above reveal only one issue which is missing to use the 3ʳᵈ person singular. In this study, the EFL learners did not add the -*s* morpheme to the singular verbs. Accordingly, as shown in the table above, the italicized words, e.g., *reflect*, *talk*, *consider*, *consist*, and *describe*, were used in their infinitive forms. With this in mind, Mammeri (2015), in his research, mentioned that EFL learners had problems structuring verbs.

Consequently, it is observed that the most prevalent element that appears in the students' written sentences was missing to use the third-person morpheme. Many students continue to create sentences with verbs in which the third person singular morpheme is missing even after mastering grammar rules. These occurred as a result of incomplete application of the rules (Mammeri, 2015; Haris & Sulhan, 2022).

The formation of the past simple tense also added to the problems that many EFL students suffer from. Although it is not a big issue to narrate or describe past events, the analysis enumerated some cases where the students faced some challenges in adding the required morpheme. Table 7 below portrays such cases:

Table (7): Sample of students' problems in forming the past tense

Error Classification	Error identification	Error correction
Forming of past simple tense	1-…by the age of 14 the kids *consider* adult…	1-…by the age of 14 the kids **considered** adult…St.19.
	2-The girl will get *marry* befor she 20…	2-The girl will get **married** befor she 20… St.20
	3-The revolution war was *end* in 1781…	3-The revolution war was **ended** in 1781…St.1
	4-…they never went to school instead they *learn* about the adult life…	4-…they never went to school instead they **learned** about the adult life…St.3

	5-…he was born in dublin, ireland and *grow* in a middle lower class family…	5-… he was born in dublin, ireland and **grew** in a middle lower class family… St.45

The examples shown in Table (7) provide sentences that narrate past events. The usual procedure in describing past events is by using the *-ed* morpheme or other morphological ways to mark the past forms. Based on what is seen, no one succeeded in forming the verbs correctly (see Al-Badawi, 2012). The regular and irregular verbs were used in their infinitive forms, taking into account that the given sentences describe events that happened in the past. Students' errors in this respect are serious because the MA students have learned when to use the past forms, and some of them may be teachers. So, repetition of these errors throughout their sentences affects not only individual sentences but also the overall quality of their written paragraphs.

In addition to the above, errors in the use of inflectional morphemes encompass the *-ing* morpheme. Such a problem is expected in the EFL context because the *-ing* morpheme is used to form the present and past participle as well as the gerundive forms. To clarify, some examples are given in Table 8 below:

Table (8): Sample of students' problems in forming the present participle

Error Classification	Error identification	Error correction
Forming of present participle	1-…most of them were *work, worship, learn* at home…	1-…most of them were **working, worshiping, learning** at home… St.19
	2-…when they first arrived they were not *have* anything…	2-…when they first arrived they were not **having** anything…St.23
	3-…the colonies of New England were *faced* difficulties…	3-…the colonies of New England were **facing** difficulties…St.6
	4-…they were *sought* of opportunity and better life.	4-…they were **seeking** of opportunity and better life.St.12
	5-…France and Roman republic were *inspire* the Americans…	5-…France and Roman republic were **inspiring** the Americans…St.16

Based on Table (8) above, the use of the *-ing* morpheme seems to be difficult for some EFL students (see Al-Badawi, 2012). As has been noted previously, the *-ing* morpheme is used to show that actions are in progress. Therefore, using the progressive tense is mandatory. The analysis portrayed cases in which some students neglected to use the *-ing* form. Also, it is a grammatical mistake to use basic verbs such as *were* and *work* together in a single sentence. To rectify such errors, the use of the auxiliaries *be* and *have* with lexical verbs such as *work*, *learn*, etc. in a single sentence requires either the addition of the *-ing* morpheme or the omission of the auxiliary verb. These errors can be ascribed to the students' moderate proficiency level in the basic grammar.

Likewise, forming of the past-participle form is another problem that comes under the use of inflectional morphemes. Samples of these problems are given in Table 9:

Table (9): Sample of students' problems in forming the past participle

Error Classification	Error identification	Error correction
Forming of past participle	1-…as they were not *seeing* in the school…	1-…as they were not **seen** in the school…st.15
	2-… George III had not *do* so.	2-… George III had not **done** so. St.17
	3..he started the stanzas with…a Rhetorical Question that accepted *to be answer* in negative way	3..he started the stanzas with…a Rhetorical Question that accepted **to be answer**ed in negative way St.42
	4-First colloies *hat so* much difficulties…	4-First colloies **had seen** much difficulties…St.23
	5-…so they *learned* how to use the powe of water…	5-…so they **had learned** how to use the powe of water…St.10

Marking of past participle forms, as indicated in Table (9), is an important issue in the context of grammar. Some EFL students had problems with the use of past and participle forms due to errors in utilizing the inflectional morphemes. Such errors explain the inadequate grasp of learning the bound morphemes that are used for this purpose. Since the past participle morpheme is needed in stating the past perfect tense and passive sentences, many students failed to do so. Compare the italicized words *were seeing*, *hat(d) do*, etc. with those given in bold *were seen* and *had done*, etc. so as to note some students' confusion in forming the past participle of many words. These errors usually occur in the EFL context because of ignorance of strengthening what has been learned previously.

Conclusion of the study:

The analysis of postgraduate students' papers revealed morphological errors at both the derivational morpheme level and the inflectional morpheme level. On the first level, most of the errors of the EFL students occurred as a result of their inability to derive the required word categories, such as nouns, adjectives, and verbs, because they confused between the derivational morphemes that form these. On the second level, the MA students were unable to apply the correct inflectional morphemes to mark the 3rd person singular, indicate the present participle and past participle forms, and to assign the possessive case affiliating to the concerned words. Such problems arise as a result of inaccurate utilization of the bound morphemes due to the omission as well as the addition of a required morpheme.

Generally speaking, the students did not understand the function and usage of the various bound morphemes, and if they did, an incorrect bound form would be chosen. As these represent the most prevalent errors in the student's written essays (also see Varnosfadrani & Ansari, 2011), previous research has ensured that EFL/ESL students' problems in using morphemes are mostly attributed to errors of overgeneralization and incomplete application of the rules (Mammeri, 2015; Gayo & Widodo, 2018). In this study, students' errors were described as intralingual (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). Due to lack of knowledge, many students did not succeed in using the morphological forms correctly, which in turn affects the way sentences are formed.

Pedagogical implication:

The study's findings indicate a lack of awareness or insufficient understanding of this specific language feature. Therefore, the findings will help educators, applied linguists, and EFL teachers think about the challenges of word formation. In order to identify other language elements that could be troublesome for many EFL students, applied linguists should first reexamine the undergraduate curriculum. This occurs because language teachers use rubrics to assess students' written essays and fail to consider the little linguistic details that influence the readability and comprehensibility of sentences.

In addition to that, educators and language instructors should concentrate on providing sufficient instruction, supported by lots of classroom practice, to teach the bound morphemes and their function within the sentence, primarily at the undergraduate level. To ensure that the newly taught item is ingrained, word formation rules should be widely exercised. This is so because the foundation of sentence structure is the proper placement of words to convey meaning. In order to increase the quality of paragraphs and at least decrease morphemic errors at the sentence level, it is generally accepted that instruction in the confusing morphological features is beneficial.

Limitations

This paper was done in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and tackled only the derivational and inflectional morphemes used by the postgraduate EFL students. For the results to be more generalizable, it would be fruitful to collect essays across different universities where English is taught as a foreign language. By so doing, an in-depth understanding of the way morphemes are used by EFL students to form words and the areas of difficulty can be arrived at. Therefore, further research is required to amalgamate a wider sample from different EFL settings so as to have a comprehensive understanding on the use of morphemes in forming sentences.

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المجلد الحادي عشر العدد الثاني والأربعون... يناير–مارس ٢٠٢٥   ردمد: ٧١٨٩ - ١٦٥٢   ردمد (النشر الإلكتروني): ٧٤٧٢ - ١٦٥٢

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