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An Analysis of Grammatical Mistakes in Written English Speeches of Eleventh Grade Students

Rizkadwi Septiyani, Laily Nur Affini, and Entika Fani Prastikawati

Universitas PGRI Semarang, Indonesia

septiyanirizkadwi25@gmail.com

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the grammatical mistakes found in the written English speech texts of 11th-grade students. The research focuses on identifying the types of grammatical mistakes, determining their possible causes, and interpreting their influence on meaning. A descriptive qualitative method was employed, using Harmer (2001) classification to categorize the mistakes into six types: tense mistakes, subject-verb agreement mistakes, article misuse, preposition mistakes, auxiliary verb misuse, and word order problems. The causes of the mistakes were examined using the framework of Yusuf et al. (2021) and Utami & Mahardika (2023), which distinguishes between interlingual and intralingual factors. The data were collected from five students' written English speech texts. The findings show that the most frequently observed mistakes were word order problems, followed by tense mistakes and article misuse. In contrast, no subject-verb agreement mistakes appeared in the dataset. The results further indicate that intralingual factors, such as overgeneralization and incomplete understanding of grammar rules, were the primary sources of mistakes. Meanwhile, several mistakes related to article and preposition use were influenced by interlingual interference from Bahasa Indonesia. Overall, the study concludes that the students' grammatical mistakes mainly stem from their developing knowledge of English rather than direct translation from their first language. It is therefore recommended that English teachers emphasize grammar instruction focusing on verb usage, word order, and article application to enhance students' writing accuracy.

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Introduction

English is one of the essential subjects taught at the senior high school level because it supports students in developing communication skills needed in a globalized world. Among the four language skills, writing is a crucial component, as it allows learners to organize ideas and express messages clearly. One type of writing commonly assigned in Indonesian senior high schools, particularly in Grade 11, is the composition of English speech texts. These texts are used in various academic activities such as classroom assessments, literacy programs, and weekly speech practices during flag ceremonies. The ability to produce well-structured speech texts requires students not only to express their ideas but also to construct grammatically accurate sentences.

However, many students still face difficulties in writing grammatically correct English texts. Common problems include inaccurate verb forms, inappropriate subject-verb agreement, article misuse, incorrect preposition choices, and confusing sentence structures. Previous studies also indicate that grammatical inaccuracies frequently appear in students' writing. Pasaribu (2021) and Bungsu et al. (2021) found that various types of grammar mistakes often occur in students' written products, particularly in structured texts such as speeches. Harmer (2001) explains that such mistakes generally occur because learners have not fully mastered the grammar rules or do not apply them consistently. Although these mistakes may seem minor, they can significantly influence the clarity, coherence, and communicative impact of the text.

Several scholars have emphasized that grammatical issues remain common even among advanced EFL learners. Başöz & Aydın (2011) reported that mistakes involving verb tenses, modifiers, and conjunctions appear frequently in student writing. Kaçani (2014) also observed that many grammatical problems arise due to first language interference or insufficient grammar instruction. These findings demonstrate that grammatical difficulties are persistent and require attention in instructional settings.

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Although previous research has explored grammatical issues in students' writing, most studies have focused on narrative, recount, or descriptive texts. Research examining grammatical mistakes specifically in written English speeches remains limited, even though speeches require formal language, organized rhetorical structure, and persuasive clarity. This creates a research gap concerning the types of grammatical mistakes students commonly produce when composing English speech texts and the factors contributing to these mistakes.

Based on this gap, the present study aims to analyze the grammatical mistakes found in the written English speech texts of Grade 11 students. The research focuses on identifying the most common types of grammatical mistakes and examining the possible causes underlying these inaccuracies. The findings are expected to provide insights that can support the improvement of English grammar instruction and enhance students' writing accuracy in producing English speech texts.

Literature Review

Grammatical Mistakes in EFL Writing

Grammatical accuracy plays a crucial role in second language learning, particularly in written production. In EFL contexts, learners often produce inaccurate grammatical forms despite having learned the relevant rules. Harmer (2001) defines grammatical mistakes as inaccuracies that occur due to performance-related factors rather than a complete lack of grammatical knowledge. These factors include lack of concentration, nervousness, memory lapses, or limited time for language processing. Unlike systematic errors, which reflect gaps in linguistic competence, grammatical mistakes are typically unsystematic and can be self-corrected once learners become aware of them.

Brown (2007) argues that mistakes frequently occur when learners attempt to use language beyond their current performance capacity. From this perspective, grammatical mistakes should be viewed as a natural and expected part of the language learning process rather than merely as failures. They provide insight into how learners process and apply grammatical rules in real communicative situations. In writing tasks, grammatical mistakes tend to occur more frequently

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than in controlled grammar exercises because learners must simultaneously manage multiple aspects of language, including vocabulary selection, sentence structure, coherence, and grammatical accuracy. When learners focus primarily on conveying meaning, grammatical accuracy may receive less attention, leading to the production of mistakes. This tendency is particularly evident in formal writing tasks such as speech writing, where learners often attempt to use more complex structures to achieve a formal or persuasive tone.

Students' written texts therefore constitute a valuable source of data for examining patterns of grammatical mistakes. Tono (2013) emphasizes that learner-written texts can be systematically analyzed to identify recurring grammatical features and weaknesses, providing insights into learners' interlanguage development. Nevertheless, Farrokhi and Mahmoudi (2012) note that writing assessment may be influenced by subjective factors such as rater bias. This highlights the importance of careful and systematic analysis when examining grammatical mistakes in students' written texts, particularly in research contexts.

Types of Grammatical Mistakes in EFL Writing

Various studies have identified recurring types of grammatical mistakes in EFL learners' writing. Based on Harmer (2001), grammatical mistakes can be categorized into several common types, including tense mistakes, subject–verb agreement mistakes, article misuse, preposition mistakes, auxiliary verb misuse, and word order problems. These categories are particularly relevant for analyzing students' written speech texts, as such texts require grammatical precision to maintain clarity and formality.

Tense mistakes occur when learners use incorrect verb forms to express time, often confusing past, present, and future tenses. Subject–verb agreement mistakes involve mismatches between the subject and the verb in number or person, such as omitting the third-person singular “-s” in present tense verbs. Article misuse includes both the omission of required articles and the incorrect use of definite or indefinite articles, which is a well-documented difficulty for learners whose first language lacks an article system.

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Preposition mistakes frequently arise due to cross-linguistic differences in expressing relationships of time, place, or direction. Learners may select incorrect prepositions or insert unnecessary ones based on literal translation from their first language. Auxiliary verb misuse involves the inappropriate addition or omission of helping verbs such as *be* or *do*. Word order problems reflect learners' difficulty in applying English syntactic rules and often result from direct transfer of first-language sentence patterns.

These grammatical mistakes do not occur randomly but instead reflect systematic patterns influenced by learners' linguistic background and learning experience. Identifying such patterns is essential for understanding students' grammatical difficulties and for designing effective instructional strategies. In the context of speech writing, these mistakes may weaken the effectiveness of the message and distract the audience, even when the overall meaning remains comprehensible.

Causes of Grammatical Mistakes: Interlingual and Intralingual Factors

Grammatical mistakes in EFL writing are not solely caused by a lack of grammatical knowledge. Harmer (2001) explains that learners may produce incorrect forms even when they know the rules due to performance-related factors such as nervousness, fatigue, or limited attention. These temporary lapses are particularly common in tasks that require complex language production, including formal speech writing.

More broadly, the causes of grammatical mistakes can be classified into interlingual and intralingual factors, a distinction originally proposed by Corder (1974) in Utami & Mahardika, (2023). Interlingual factors refer to the influence of learners' first language on their use of the target language. When learners transfer grammatical structures, word order, or expressions from their native language into English, the resulting sentences may be grammatically incorrect or unnatural. This process often occurs unconsciously, especially when learners encounter English structures that differ substantially from those of their first language.

In the Indonesian EFL context, interlingual interference is a common source of grammatical mistakes. Learners frequently translate expressions directly from Bahasa Indonesia

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into English, resulting in awkward or non-idiomatic constructions. Differences in word order also contribute to mistakes, as adjective placement in Indonesian differs from that in English. Utami & Mahardika (2023) found that interlingual interference is particularly evident in students' written speech texts. In an effort to sound formal, learners often rely on Indonesian rhetorical patterns that are translated literally into English, leading to unnatural phrasing, incorrect preposition use, and inappropriate collocations.

Intralingual factors, in contrast, arise from difficulties within the target language itself rather than from first-language influence. Yusuf et al. (2021) explain that intralingual mistakes commonly result from overgeneralization, incomplete rule application, and false conceptual understanding. Overgeneralization occurs when learners apply a grammatical rule too broadly, such as adding “-ed” to all past tense verbs, including irregular forms. Incomplete rule application reflects partial understanding of a rule, while false conceptual understanding involves misinterpreting the function or use of a grammatical form.

Harmer (2001) notes that intralingual mistakes are particularly common among intermediate learners who are actively experimenting with the language. Without timely and focused feedback, such mistakes may become fossilized and resistant to correction. In written speech texts, intralingual mistakes frequently appear in complex sentence structures, auxiliary verb use, and formal expressions, reflecting learners' attempts to use advanced grammar beyond their current level of mastery.

Grammar in Written Speech Texts

Speech texts occupy a distinctive position in language learning, as they are written compositions intended for oral delivery. Although speeches are ultimately spoken, they are typically prepared in written form and therefore require grammatical accuracy to ensure clarity, coherence, and formality. In Indonesian senior high schools, writing speech texts is a common classroom activity, particularly for Grade 11 students who are often required to deliver speeches during formal school events. Harmer (2001) emphasizes that writing speech texts involves balancing fluency and accuracy. Learners must express ideas smoothly while simultaneously applying appropriate

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grammatical forms. This dual demand increases the likelihood of grammatical mistakes, especially when learners prioritize content and delivery over linguistic accuracy.

Utami & Mahardika (2023) explain that English speech texts generally consist of structured components, including an opening, introduction, body, and conclusion. Each component requires appropriate grammatical forms to convey meaning effectively. Grammatical mistakes in any part of the speech text may weaken the message and reduce its effectiveness when delivered orally. Consequently, analyzing grammatical mistakes in written speech texts provides valuable insight into learners' grammatical competence and performance.

In summary, grammatical mistakes in students' written speech texts reflect the interaction between learners' grammatical knowledge and their writing performance. Although learners may understand grammatical rules, performance constraints such as time pressure, anxiety, and the demand for formal language can hinder accurate application. Moreover, both interlingual interference and intralingual difficulties contribute to recurring grammatical mistakes. Understanding these factors is essential for teachers and researchers in developing effective grammar instruction and feedback strategies in EFL classrooms.

Research Methodology

A descriptive qualitative approach was employed in this study, with students' written English speech texts serving as the primary data source. The data were obtained from five Grade 11 students who voluntarily permitted their speech texts to be analyzed as part of a school literacy activity. These speech texts were written for weekly flag ceremony programs and reflected students' authentic writing performance. The analysis focused on identifying the types of grammatical mistakes found in the texts, as well as the factors contributing to their occurrence. All grammatical mistakes were classified into categories such as tense, subject-verb agreement, article use, prepositions, auxiliary verbs, and word order. The findings were then described qualitatively to reveal recurring patterns of grammatical mistakes and their underlying causes in students' written speech texts.

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Findings

This section presents the findings of the study regarding the types of grammatical mistakes and their possible causes in the written English speech texts of Grade 11 students.

Table 1. Frequency of Grammatical Mistakes

Type of Mistakes	Student 1	Student 2	Student 3	Student 4	Student 5
Tense Mistakes	0	0	1	0	3
Subject-Verb Agreement Mistakes	0	0	0	0	0
Article Misuse	2	0	0	1	0
Preposition Mistakes	0	1	0	0	0
Auxiliary Verb Misuse	1	0	1	0	0
Word Order Problems	2	0	2	1	0
Total	5	1	4	2	3

The results indicate that word order problems were the most commonly occurring mistakes (5 cases), followed by tense mistakes (4 cases) and article misuse (3 cases). No subject-verb agreement mistakes were found in any of the students' texts. These findings suggest that sentence structure and tense formation remain the most challenging aspects of grammar for the students.

Table 2. Causes of Grammatical Mistakes

Causes	Student 1	Student 2	Student 3	Student 4	Student 5
Interlingual Causes	1	1	0	2	0
Intralingual Causes	4	0	4	0	3
Total	5	1	4	2	3

The analysis shows that intralingual causes were dominant, accounting for 11 out of 15 mistakes. These mistakes stemmed from overgeneralization, incomplete understanding of

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grammar rules, and confusion between similar structures. Meanwhile, four mistakes were categorized as interlingual, mostly influenced by Indonesian sentence patterns, particularly in article use and word order.

Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that grammatical mistakes in the written English speech texts of 11th-grade students are predominantly characterized by word order problems, followed by tense mistakes and article misuse, while auxiliary verb misuse and preposition mistakes occur less frequently, and subject-verb agreement mistakes are absent. These results indicate that although students demonstrate adequate control of basic grammatical agreement, they continue to experience difficulties with sentence structure, tense accuracy, and article usage. Most grammatical mistakes are attributed to intralingual factors, such as incomplete understanding and overgeneralization of English grammar rules, with interlingual influence from Bahasa Indonesia evident in certain cases, particularly in article and preposition use. These findings suggest the need for focused grammar instruction, targeted feedback, and writing-centered activities to improve grammatical accuracy, and they contribute valuable insights into common learner difficulties in Indonesian EFL contexts while offering directions for future research involving broader samples.

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