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## GRAMMATICAL ERROR ANALYSIS OF BUSINESS CORRESPONDENCE BY THE EMPLOYEES OF SABU ART SHOP

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyse the types of grammatical errors and their sources in English business correspondence sent via WhatsApp by employees of Sabu Art Shop. This study followed a five-stage error analysis: collecting samples, identifying errors, describing errors, explaining errors, and evaluating errors. The subjects of this study were five Sabu Art Shop employees selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected from English-language WhatsApp conversations conducted by the five research subjects with foreign customers. The collected data were analysed using an interactive analysis model consisting of three stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The results showed that 7 types of grammatical errors were found, with omission as the most dominant, followed by prepositional errors, misformation, addition, misordering, tense errors, and article errors. In addition, the analysis of error sources showed that grammatical errors were mainly influenced by interlingual and intralingual factors. Interlingual errors reflect the direct influence of Indonesian language structure and lexical choices on English, while intralingual errors stem from an inability to apply English grammar rules correctly, such as inappropriate vocabulary selection, incomplete sentence formation, and incorrect grammatical structures. Based on these findings, this study recommends improving employees' business English skills through grammar training and increasing awareness of the use of formal English in business correspondence to support more effective communication with international clients.

**Keywords:** *error analysis, business correspondence, WhatsApp, English grammar*

### INTRODUCTION

Grammatical competence, particularly in written communication, contributes significantly to message clarity, precision, and professionalism. Errors in grammar can lead to ambiguity, misinterpretation, and reduced credibility, which may, in

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turn, negatively affect business outcomes (Blott et al., 2020; Zhu, 2010). A well-structured and grammatically correct message conveys attention to detail and respect for the recipient, both of which are crucial in fostering positive business relationships (Bower, 2011; Holley, 2023; Nikolenko et al., 2019). Grammar serves as the structural foundation of any language, enabling the delivery of coherent and precise messages (Kerivan, 2015; Sharipova et al., 2020). When grammar is used correctly, the intended message is conveyed with clarity and professionalism. Conversely, grammatical errors can cause confusion, misinterpretation, and even damage the business's credibility. This is especially critical in business correspondence, where each message represents the company's brand and level of professionalism (Harwood, 2026; Jung, 2022; Parshutina & Popova, 2018).

For non-native speakers of English, achieving grammatical accuracy in professional correspondence presents a distinct challenge (Kojima & Popiel, 2023; Lenassi, 2021). This issue is particularly pertinent for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in non-English-speaking contexts, where employees often rely on English to engage with international customers or partners (Rogerson-Revell, 2007; Tenzer & Schuster, 2016). While communicative ability may suffice for basic interactions, a lack of grammatical precision in formal writing can compromise the effectiveness of communication and the company's image (Greavu, 2019; Nouala et al., 2018).

The importance of error-free business correspondence becomes more apparent in small- to SMEs, such as Sabu Art Shop. Sabu Art Shop, a local enterprise specialising in traditional arts and crafts, frequently engages in written correspondence with both domestic and international clients. As the shop seeks to expand its market and professionalise its operations, the ability of its employees to produce clear, correct, and professional English correspondence becomes increasingly essential. Preliminary observations suggest that grammatical errors are prevalent in the written communication produced by the shop's employees. These errors, if unaddressed, may hinder effective communication and affect the company's perception among its stakeholders. On top of that, a single misunderstanding caused by grammatical errors could lead to financial loss and customer dissatisfaction. Studies have shown that linguistic accuracy in business communication positively affects customer perception and trust (Greavu, 2019).

A detailed analysis of grammatical errors in employees' business correspondence can provide valuable insights into specific areas where communication skills may be lacking. Identifying common errors, such as subject-verb agreement, punctuation misuse, or incorrect tense usage, can help inform future training programs and professional development. Although grammatical error analysis has been widely investigated, most previous studies have been conducted in educational settings and have primarily focused on students' academic writing, such as descriptive, narrative, argumentative, or recount texts. As a result, limited attention has been given to grammatical errors occurring in authentic workplace communication, particularly in business correspondence involving interactions with international clients. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by



examining grammatical errors in real business communication conducted through WhatsApp at Sabu Art Shop. Unlike previous studies that analysed classroom-based writing tasks, this research focuses on naturally occurring language used in professional contexts. Specifically, this study aims to identify the classifications and the sources of grammatical errors in written business correspondence made by the employees of Sabu Art Shop. The findings are expected to contribute to the understanding of grammatical error patterns in workplace communication and provide practical recommendations for improving employees' English business writing skills.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

### Error Analysis

In second language acquisition (SLA), the concept of “error” plays a central role in understanding how learners process and produce language. An error refers to a deviation from the norms of the target language, often caused by a lack of knowledge or incorrect internalisation of linguistic rules. Unlike simple mistakes, which are performance-related and usually self-correctable, errors are systematic and reflect a learner's interlanguage competence (Matwangsang et al., 2025; Rizvić-Eminović et al., 2025). Error is a deviation from a speaker's or writer's underlying knowledge of the language, which reveals the current stage of language development. Surface Strategy Taxonomy classifies errors into four major types: *omission*, *addition*, *misformation*, and *misordering* (Corder, 1967; Watcharapunyawong & Usaha, 2013).

Error analysis is the process of determining the incidence, nature, causes, and consequences of unsuccessful language (Huong et al., 2024; James, 2013; Parameswari et al., 2024). Error analysis aims to study errors made by second and foreign language learners. Specifically, error analysis may be carried out in order to (a) find out how well someone knows a language, (b) find out how a person learns a language, and (c) obtain information on common difficulties in language learning, as an aid in teaching or in the preparation of teaching materials (Almashy et al., 2024; Bett, 2010; Khansir, 2012; Matiso, 2023; McDowell, 2023). Another concept of error analysis is given by Brown (1980), as he defined error analysis as the process of observing, analysing, and classifying the deviations from the rules of the second language and then revealing the systems operated by the learner. It seems this concept is the same as the one proposed by Crystal (2008), who stated that error analysis is a technique for identifying, classifying, and systematically interpreting the unacceptable forms produced by someone learning a foreign language, using any of the principles and procedures provided by linguistics. The three definitions above clarify that error analysis is an activity that identifies, classifies, and interprets or describes the errors made by someone in speaking or writing, and is carried out to obtain information on common difficulties faced by someone in



speaking or writing English sentences. Another thing to note is the procedure for error analysis.

### Classification of Grammatical Errors

Grammatical errors in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing have been extensively discussed by Dulay et al. (1982) and James (2013). Each framework classifies grammatical errors from a different perspective. Dulay et al. (1982) focus on the surface structure of errors, and James (2013) categorises errors according to the grammatical elements involved. Based on these three frameworks, this study adopts 17 categories of grammatical errors to analyse employees' business correspondence. Dulay et al.'s (1982) taxonomy identifies the structural form of errors, and James' (2013) framework specifies the grammatical components affected. Together, these classifications provide a comprehensive analytical framework for examining grammatical accuracy in business correspondence. Table 1 summarises the grammatical error classifications adopted in this study.

**Table 1.** Classification of Grammatical Errors

| Framework           | Error Type             | Brief Description                                                                      |
|---------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Dulay et al. (1982) | Omission               | Required grammatical elements are missing (e.g., articles, auxiliaries, prepositions). |
|                     | Addition               | Unnecessary grammatical elements are added.                                            |
|                     | Misformation           | Incorrect grammatical forms replace the correct ones.                                  |
|                     | Misordering            | Words or phrases are arranged in the wrong order.                                      |
| James (2013)        | Subject–Verb Agreement | Subject and verb do not agree in number or person.                                     |
|                     | Tense                  | Incorrect verb tense is used.                                                          |
|                     | Article                | Incorrect use or omission of articles ( <i>a</i> , <i>an</i> , <i>the</i> ).           |
|                     | Preposition            | Incorrect, missing, or unnecessary prepositions.                                       |
|                     | Pronoun                | Incorrect pronoun form or unclear pronoun reference.                                   |
|                     | Punctuation            | Incorrect or missing punctuation marks affecting clarity.                              |

### Sources of Grammatical Errors

Richards (1975) defines sources of errors as the underlying causes of learners' language errors during second language acquisition. He broadly classifies learner errors into interlingual and intralingual errors. Interlingual errors arise from the influence of the learner's first language (L1), whereas intralingual errors result from incomplete mastery or incorrect application of the target language (L2) rules. This distinction enables researchers to determine whether grammatical errors originate from language transfer or from learners' developmental processes. Among these classifications, interlingual and intralingual errors proposed by Richards (1975) provide the fundamental distinction between language transfer and developmental learning errors. Richards' (1975) extended framework complements this distinction by explaining more specific mechanisms underlying learner errors, including interference, overgeneralization, performance limitations, developmental stages, communication strategies, and instructional factors. Together, these frameworks



offer a comprehensive basis for identifying the sources of grammatical errors in business correspondence.

**Table 2.** Sources of Grammatical Errors

| Source of Error    | Description                                                                                                                                     |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Interlingual Error | Errors caused by the transfer of grammatical patterns, vocabulary, or sentence structures from the learner's first language (L1) to English.    |
| Intralingual Error | Errors resulting from incomplete knowledge or incorrect application of English grammatical rules, such as overgeneralization or rule confusion. |

## METHOD

This research was conducted in accordance with the stages of error analysis. According to Coder (1981), the stages of error analysis research include collecting samples, identifying errors, describing errors, explaining errors, and evaluating errors. In the sample collection stage, the researcher collected and re-transcribed data from WhatsApp chats conducted by Sabu Art Shop employees. In the identifying errors stage, the researcher averaged all grammatical errors found in the collected WhatsApp chats of Sabu Art Shop employees. Next, during the error-description stage, the researcher grouped the marked errors into the 10 grammatical error categories used in this study. The groupings were displayed in tabular form to facilitate the researcher's review of the data needed for the next stage. In the explaining errors stage, the researcher analyzed the grouped data based on the error source theory explained by Richard (2015). Finally, the researcher conducted an evaluation to determine the most frequent errors, which were then used as recommendations for improving the English skills of employees at Sabu Art Shop.

This research was conducted at Sabu Art Shop, located in Sanur, Bali. The study involved five Sabu Art Shop employees. The five employees were selected using a purposive sampling technique. They were selected based on their familiarity with communicating in English with Sabu Art Shop customers via WhatsApp. The object of this study was grammatical errors that occurred in the WhatsApp conversations of the five employees at Sabu Art Shop.

Data collection was conducted using documentation techniques across several stages to ensure the data was free from ethical research issues and breaches of Sabu Art Shop's business privacy. First, the researcher requested permission from the owner of Sabu Art Shop to conduct the research at the shop. Second, the researcher explained to the owner of Sabu Art Shop and the five research subjects the purpose of the study, the type of data required, the anonymity of the research subjects, and requested their willingness to participate. Third, the researcher requested permission to access and store all WhatsApp conversations of the five



subjects, specifically regarding their communications with Art Shop customers. The researcher always ensured that the data collected had been confirmed by the owner of Sabu Art Shop and the five employees.

The data collected by the researcher was analyzed using interactive data analysis techniques, which consist of the stages of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles et al., 2014). This data analysis technique was chosen because it aligns with the stages of research analysis, error analysis, as described by Coder (1981). In the data condensation stage, the researcher codes and selects data relevant to this study, namely grammatical errors that occur in the research subjects' conversations. In the data display stage, the researcher collects data on the types of grammatical errors in tabular form. In the conclusion-drawing stage, the researcher identifies the source of the grammatical errors that appear. To ensure the data were valid and reliable, this study used time triangulation. Therefore, data collection was carried out several times until the researcher was certain that the data, grammatical errors made by the research subjects, were consistent and no new data emerged.

## FINDINGS

### Types of Grammatical Errors

Based on an analysis of WhatsApp business correspondence conducted by Sabu Art Shop employees, this study identified seven types of grammatical errors, following the classification proposed by Dulay et al. (1982) and James (2013). These seven types of errors are omission, addition, misformation, misordering, tense, article, and prepositional. The most common error found was omission, indicating that employees tend to omit important grammatical elements in English business communication.

#### *Omission Errors*

Omission errors occur when mandatory grammatical elements in English, such as auxiliary verbs, articles, or main verbs, are omitted from a sentence. These errors are often found in short sentences used in business communications via WhatsApp. This finding suggests that employees prioritise communication efficiency over grammatical correctness when communicating with international customers.

**Table 3.** Omission Errors

| <b>Incorrect Sentence</b> | <b>Correct Sentence</b>      |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| What name?                | What is the name?            |
| Price 400.000             | The price is 400,000.        |
| You take photo is all?    | Can you take all the photos? |



### ***Addition Errors***

Addition errors occur when unnecessary grammatical elements are added to a sentence. These additions are generally caused by incorrect application of English language rules. Addition errors indicate that employees are still having difficulty identifying necessary elements in English sentence structure.

**Table 4.** Addition Errors

| <b>Incorrect Sentence</b>              | <b>Correct Sentence</b>             |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Let's go start new order.              | Let's start a new order.            |
| We will go prepare your pots tomorrow. | We will prepare your pots tomorrow. |
| Please come check the finished pots.   | Please check the finished pots.     |

### ***Misformation Errors***

Misformation errors occur when the word form or grammatical structure used does not conform to English rules. This finding indicates that employees still experience difficulties in using verb tenses, noun forms, and subject-verb agreement.

**Table 5.** Misformation Errors

| <b>Incorrect Sentence</b>          | <b>Correct Sentence</b>             |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| The goods was delivered.           | The goods were delivered.           |
| She buyed the materials yesterday. | She bought the materials yesterday. |
| Please send me the informations.   | Please send me the information.     |

### ***Misordering Errors***

Misordering errors occur when the word order in a sentence doesn't conform to English structure, resulting in a sentence that sounds unnatural or difficult to understand. These findings suggest that some employees are still influenced by Indonesian phrase-building patterns when constructing English sentences.

**Table 6.** Misordering Errors

| <b>Incorrect Sentence</b>           | <b>Correct Sentence</b>                 |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| We make outdoor large pots.         | We make large outdoor pots.             |
| Please choose colour natural glaze. | Please choose the natural glaze colour. |
| What do you like finishing?         | What finishing do you like?             |

### ***Tense Errors***

Tense errors are found when employees use verb forms that don't match the intended time. This error demonstrates that verb tense use remains a challenge in English business communication.

**Table 7.** Tense Errors

| <b>Incorrect Sentence</b> | <b>Correct Sentence</b> |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
|---------------------------|-------------------------|



|                                    |                                      |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| I make the sample yesterday.       | I made the sample yesterday.         |
| The customer pay yesterday.        | The customer paid yesterday.         |
| We pack all the pots this morning. | We packed all the pots this morning. |

### ***Article Errors***

Article errors are among the most common, particularly involving the use of a, an, and the. Misuse of articles indicates that employees have not fully mastered the rules for using articles in English, which are absent from Indonesian grammar.

**Table 8.** Article Errors

| <b>Incorrect Sentence</b>       | <b>Correct Sentence</b>           |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| I have different size.          | I have a different size.          |
| We can make custom pot for you. | We can make a custom pot for you. |
| I will send invoice by email.   | I will send the invoice by email. |

### ***Prepositional Errors***

Prepositional errors occur when employees use prepositions incorrectly or add unnecessary prepositions. These findings indicate that using English prepositions remains challenging for employees, particularly when expressing time and place.

**Table 9.** Prepositional Errors

| <b>Incorrect Sentence</b>               | <b>Correct Sentence</b>              |
|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| You can check on my workshop.           | You can check it at my workshop.     |
| I will contact you on tomorrow.         | I will contact you tomorrow.         |
| We will finish your order on next week. | We will finish your order next week. |

### **Sources of Grammatical Errors**

Analysis of error sources shows that the grammatical errors found in this study originated from two main sources: interlingual and intralingual errors, as stated by Richards (1975). Interlingual errors arise from the influence of the first language (Indonesian) on English use, while intralingual errors stem from employees' limited mastery of English grammar.

### ***Interlingual Errors***

Interlingual errors are evident in the direct translation of Indonesian expressions into English, resulting in less natural or inappropriate expressions for the business communication context. These findings indicate that employees still rely heavily on Indonesian language patterns when communicating with international customers.

**Table 10.** Interlingual Errors

| <b>Incorrect Sentence</b> | <b>Correct Sentence</b> |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
|---------------------------|-------------------------|



|                              |                                       |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Please revision the design.  | Please revise the design.             |
| The pot is still raw.        | The pot is still unfinished.          |
| We already input your order. | We have already processed your order. |

### ***Intralingual Errors***

Intralingual errors arise from incomplete mastery of English grammar and vocabulary. Errors found include incomplete sentence structure, inappropriate vocabulary choice, and errors in applying grammatical rules. These findings indicate that limited mastery of English grammar and vocabulary remains a major factor contributing to errors in business communication via WhatsApp.

**Table 11.** Intralingual Errors

| <b>Incorrect Sentence</b>       | <b>Correct Sentence</b>              |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| What port?                      | Which port is it being sent to?      |
| We needs more clay.             | We need more clay.                   |
| We will make your order fastly. | We will complete your order quickly. |

## **DISCUSSION**

The result of this study has some relevance to the description of classification of error as described by these experts, although the study findings are not exactly the same number of classifications of error by the two experts, Dulay et al. (1982), James (2013), and Richards (1975). First, according to Dulay et al. (1982), omission occurs when learners fail to include required grammatical elements in a sentence, such as subjects, auxiliary verbs, articles, or prepositions. Moreover, James (2013) explains that grammatical errors involving tenses, articles, and prepositions generally reflect learners' incomplete mastery of English grammatical rules. This explanation is consistent with the findings of the present study, in which employees frequently experienced difficulties selecting appropriate verb forms, using articles correctly, and choosing suitable prepositions.

This study is consistent with the result of previous studies, which also found that omission, addition, misformation, and misordering were the major grammatical errors produced by first-semester EFL students (Bi et al., 2024; Ting et al., 2010). Both studies indicate that learners have difficulty applying English grammar rules accurately. However, the present study differs in that it also identified prepositional, tense, and article errors as separate grammatical classifications. This difference may be attributed to the research context. Meylinda analyzed descriptive essays written in an academic setting, whereas the present study examined authentic WhatsApp business correspondence in a workplace. Consequently, the employees' writing reflected practical communication needs and contained a wider range of grammatical problems commonly found in professional interactions. Moreover, the study by Aziz et al. (2020), Bi et al. (2024), and De La Cruz, (2019) also found omission to be the most frequent grammatical error, they found that learners tend



to omit grammatical elements such as auxiliary verbs and articles, because they do not have that grammatical rules in their first language.

In terms of source of error, the findings of this study reveal that the grammatical errors were influenced by both interlingual and intralingual factors. Interlingual errors occurred when the employees transferred grammatical patterns and expressions from their first language (Indonesian) into English, resulting in inappropriate sentence structures or word choices. This kind of error, generalisation of L1 rules to L2, is a common error made by non-native English speakers who learn English as a second or foreign language (Alsoweed et al., 2025; Benyo, 2025). Meanwhile, intralingual errors were associated with employees' incomplete understanding of English grammar, including misuse of grammatical forms, incorrect sentence construction, and overgeneralization of language rules. These findings are consistent with Richards' (1975) theory, which explains that second language learners commonly produce errors due to first-language interference and limited mastery of the target language.

Overall, the present study confirms that the theoretical frameworks employed in this research remain relevant to the analysis of grammatical errors in professional communication. The findings not only support previous grammatical error studies conducted in educational contexts but also extend their application to authentic workplace communication. Therefore, the frameworks proposed by Dulay et al. (1982), James (2013), and Richards (1975) may continue to serve as reliable references for future researchers investigating grammatical errors in business correspondence, workplace communication, or other professional English contexts. Furthermore, the two research questions formulated in this study proved effective in providing a comprehensive understanding of both the classifications and the underlying sources of grammatical errors, offering a useful foundation for future research in error analysis.

## CONCLUSION

This study identified seven categories of grammatical errors: omission, addition, misformation, misordering, tense errors, article errors, and prepositional errors. Among the seven classifications, omission was the most common error, followed by prepositional errors, misformation, addition, misordering, tense errors, and article errors. These findings indicate that employees frequently experienced difficulties applying English grammar rules, particularly in producing complete sentences, selecting appropriate grammatical forms, using correct prepositions, and maintaining accurate sentence patterns in business communication.

Furthermore, the analysis of the sources of errors revealed that the grammatical errors were influenced by both interlingual and intralingual factors. A total of fifteen interlingual and intralingual errors were identified, indicating that first-language interference was the dominant source of grammatical errors. Many employees directly transferred Indonesian lexical expressions and sentence structures into English, resulting in unnatural or grammatically inaccurate



expressions. In addition, several errors stemmed from incomplete mastery of English grammar, including inappropriate lexical choices, incomplete sentence formation, and incorrect grammatical structures.

Future studies are suggested to expand the scope of research by involving more companies or examining grammatical errors in other forms of business communication, such as emails, product catalogs, or social media content. Further research may also investigate the effectiveness of business English training programs in reducing grammatical errors in workplace communication, and this study is expected to raise awareness about the importance of using proper English in professional communication, especially in businesses that interact with international customers. In the era of globalization and digital communication, the ability to write clear and grammatically accurate English messages can help improve professionalism, build trust, and avoid misunderstandings in cross-cultural interactions.

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