

ERROR ANALYSIS ON THE STUDENTS' CONSTRUCTION OF ENGLISH IRREGULAR PLURAL NOUNS

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ABSTRACT

In English, the forms of singular nouns commonly different from those of the plural ones. Many students are confused with how to construct the irregular plural noun forms. The formation of irregular plural nouns has complex and unique patterns. This current study aims to get information about the types of errors commonly made by EFL learners in constructing irregular plural nouns and to know how the errors occurred. This study is descriptive qualitative applying error analysis theory. The data were collected by giving the respondents a test consisting of 28 questions on irregular plural construction. The result of analysis shows that the errors made by the respondents can be classified into three types: misformation, addition, and omission. Misformation was the kind of error most respondents made. The error specifically occurred with the nouns that had quite dissimilar plural forms from the singular ones (e.g., foot – feet, goose – geese).

Keywords: Error analysis, Irregular Plural Nouns, Type of Error.

INTRODUCTION

Grammar is an essential part of learning a language. Debata (2013) said that knowledge of grammar helps students correct mistakes and increases learners' writing or speaking skills. By learning grammar, students can know how to build and combine words into meaningful clauses and sentences.

Unfortunately, despite its importance in language learning, students often have difficulty learning foreign language grammars, including English grammar. In their opinion, learning grammar is very complicated. As a result, there are many errors made by EFL learners when they try to construct English phrases, clauses, or sentences. The errors may occur when they speak or write in English.

In learning English grammar, EFL learners study grammatical forms, including the regular and irregular forms of verbs or nouns. In English, verbs and nouns have regular and irregular forms. Many researchers have studied the English verb forms, such as Nurhayati (2017) and Amanda and Jurianto (2013). Generally they identified the forms of errors commonly made by EFL learners, especially for

the past forms of verbs as in Nurhayati's research (2017). However, only a few researchers have been interested in studying irregular plural noun forms, though, in fact, EFL learners commonly have difficulty forming them. Nofriani (2018), for example, found that irregular nouns have uniquely different forms of plural nouns than singular ones. Saugi (2014) explained in his research that many students often forget the correct structures of irregular plural nouns unless they keep using them constantly daily.

There are structural differences between singular and plural nouns forms, specifically on irregular plural nouns, which often confuse EFL learners. The problems become more complex because there are singular and plural forms that have the same forms. For example, the plural form of 'sheep' is 'sheep', instead of 'sheeps'. Another word is 'tuna', whose plural form does not change (tuna). Other singular nouns, such as 'woman', 'man', 'foot', and 'datum' also have irregular plural forms, which often make students confused.

Due to the fact above, this current research focused on identifying the common errors students are likely to make in constructing irregular plural nouns and how the errors occur. Ellis' error analysis theory (1997) was applied as the basis for identifying the types of errors that commonly occur.

It is hoped that the results of the analysis can be used as a reference by English teachers in teaching English plural nouns effectively. It is because by knowing and understanding the errors that the students commonly make, English teachers can prepare the best teaching materials, methods, and strategies to handle the problems.

Learning a second language is a process that involves making mistakes, even errors. In learning a new language, a learner will immediately encounter new vocabulary, new grammatical patterns, and foreign pronunciations that are different from learners' mother tongue. Many definitions of the error have been put forward by experts. Jabeen (2015) states that error is the result of incomplete learning and students' language inability. Errors cannot be corrected on their own. It means that someone does not know the problem and keeps making the same error and produces incorrect grammar.

The term 'error' is usually compared to the term 'mistake'. However, the term 'error' is not the same as 'mistake'; there is a difference between them. For EFL teachers or researchers, it is important to distinguish between the term 'error' and 'mistake'. Ellis (1997) explains that error is a gap in the knowledge of learners, it occurs because students do not know what is right and what is wrong. On the other hand, Brown D. H. (2007) defines mistakes as the result of errors in the language learning process. He classified mistakes as non-systematic errors (an error in performance). By mistakes, EFL learners actually understand that what he produced in L2 is actually wrong and he could correct it, because it is only a kind of 'performance lapse (Brown D. H., 2007). From this explanation, it can be concluded that students' errors occur because students do not understand the second language. They do not know which one is correct and which one is not, which is inevitable in the learning process.

Error analysis is an activity to reveal errors found in writing and speaking.

Keshavarz (2012) defines error analysis as the study of students' errors in order to understand the process of foreign language learning. Another concept of error analysis has been put forward by other experts. Brown (2007) defines error analysis as the process of observing, analysing, classifying the errors of the second language rule. Saugi (2014) said that error analysis is a technique for identifying, interpreting forms that are inappropriate grammatically, which is as a result of learning a foreign language.

Errors were divided into several types. The following are the types of errors according to James (2013):

1. Omission. James (2013) explains that such error occurs when students eliminate items that are in a word. For example: eliminating the third person singular morpheme –s, progressive forming, past tense verb inflection –ed.

Example: The teacher gave many *quizz* to students. (quizzes)

2. Addition. James (2013) explains addition error is marked by the presence of the item that should not be performing well greeting. Generally, it happens in learners' second language. Regularization, double marking, and simple addition are kind of addition error that has been examined in his second language.

Example: The *sheeps* are not the green meadow. (sheep)

3. Misformation. According to James (2013), misformation is an error in using the morpheme structure. This kind of error occurs when learners do not use the transformation rules for countable or uncountable verbs and nouns (e.g., falled, runned, womans, phenomenons, critorions, etc).

Example: I have two *knifes*. (kinves)

4. Misordering. James (2013) explain that misordering occurs when learners rely on 'word-for-word translations of native language surface structures. Misordering is an error in the placement of morphemes either in writing or speaking. For Example: She *needs really* the stuff. (really need); The *sky blue* overwhelms people. (blue sky)

Irregular plurals are more complex. The inflectional suffix is not as anticipated as in the case of the regular form. Irregular plurals may use some suffixes other than -es or -s, change internal stems, and sometimes do not indicate any suffix (Lieber, 2009). Goncalves et al., (2020) explains irregular plural nouns do not have definite rules and make students remember them. Goncalves et al., (2020) further said there are three ways to form irregular plural nouns in English. Based on Goncalves' explanation the form of the irregular plural noun is as follows:

Some nouns have the same singular and plural form:
Singular Plural

1) fish fish

- | | |
|-------|-------|
| sheep | sheep |
|-------|-------|
- 2) Irregular plural noun. Plural forms that do not end in –s.
- | | |
|-------|-------|
| man | men |
| woman | women |
- 3) Some nouns that English has borrowed from other languages have foreign plural.
- | | |
|------------|------------|
| curriculum | curricula |
| appendix | appendices |

RESEARCH METHOD

This current research applied descriptive qualitative method. Qualitative research is a term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and come to term with the meaning (Creswell, 2014). In this current study, 10 students of SMA Darul Ulum 1 Jombang, qualifying as beginner level students (those who have just started learning English and cannot write/speak very well yet), were chosen as the respondents. Besides qualifying as beginner level, they were chosen due to the fact that they were among the 10 students (out of 30 students) with the lowest English score. The instrument used in this study was a test which consisted of 28 questions concerning the irregular noun forms. The test instrument looks like the following:

Table 1: The test instrument used in the current research

Complete the plural noun forms of the singular noun forms presented in the left column

No	Singular forms	Plural forms
1	I bought a knife.	I bought two
2	There is a fish in the pond.	There are many in the pond.
3

The test was conducted once on January 20, 2020. The respondents were asked to fill out the correct forms of irregular plurals nouns. The results of the test (the irregular plural nouns forms constructed by the respondents) were then collected and analysed.

In analysing the data collected, the following steps were carried out: (1) identifying irregular plural nouns constructed by the respondents that contain errors. (2) classifying the errors according to the types of error. (3) explaining how the errors in the construction of irregular plural nouns can

occur. (4) concluding how the student made errors in the formation of an irregular plural noun

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of the data collected, there are three types of errors found. They are misformation, addition, and omission.

Table 2: Errors made by the respondents: misformation

Singular Nouns	Respondents' incorrect forms	Standardized correct forms	Errors
Cactus, fish, tooth, appendix, ox, foot, man, louse, goose, mouse, woman, apex, curriculum, focus, index	Cactuses, fishes, tooths, appendixs, oxs, foots, mans, louses, geoses, mouses, womens, apexs, curriculums, focus, indexs.	Cacti, fish, teeth, appendices, oxen, feet, men, lice, geese, mice, woman, apices, curricula, foci, indices	Adding 's' / 'es' at the end of the nouns
Diagnosis, Knife, Leaf, Crisis, Curriculum, Analysis	Diagnosis, knives, leafes, crisis, curriculum, analysis	Diagnoses, knives, leaves, crises, curricula, analyses	Incorrect letter changing
Child	Child	Children	Unchanging the plural form

In table 2, it can be seen that the respondents had problems when they had to change the singular forms into plural forms. Most of the errors are adding 's' or 'es' at the end of the nouns, resulting in misformation errors. Such kind of error occurs with the nouns: 'louse', 'appendix', 'ox', 'analysis', 'apex', 'curriculum', 'focus', 'index', 'medium', 'cactus', 'mouse', 'tooth', 'foot', 'goose', 'man', 'fish', and 'woman'. For the plural forms, most of the respondents added the letter 's' at the end of the nouns. There were seven words that underwent misformation error. The nouns were 'louse', 'appendix', 'ox', 'apex', 'curriculum', 'focus', 'index', 'cactus', 'mouse', 'tooth', 'foot', 'goose', 'man', 'woman'. In forming the plural forms some

respondents added the letter 's' at the end of the nouns, resulting in errors ('appendixs', 'oxes', 'apexes', 'curriculumus', 'focuses', 'indexs', 'çactuses', 'tooths', 'foots', 'gooses', 'louses', 'mans', and 'womans'). The correct plural forms of the nouns should be 'appendices', 'oxen', 'apices', 'curricula', 'foci', 'indices', 'çacti', 'mice', 'teeth', 'feet', 'geese', 'men', 'fish', and 'women'.

Some respondents also had problem with changing certain letters in some irregular plural nouns. For example, they had problem with the words 'knife' and 'leaf'. The error occurred when they did not change 'f' into 'v', resulting in errors 'knifes' and 'leafs'. The correct plural forms of the nouns should be 'knives' and 'leaves', with 'v' instead of 'f'. The same also occurred with the words 'analysis', 'crisis', and 'diagnosis'. Some respondents did not change 'i' into 'e' for the plural form of the nouns, resulting in errors ('analysis', 'crisis' and 'diagnosis'), while the correct plural form for the noun is 'analyses', 'crises' and 'diagnoses'.

Another error occurred when some respondents completely made the wrong forms of the irregular noun forms. It occurred with the nouns 'child'. In this case, some respondents did not change the noun 'child' into 'children' as the correct plural form of the noun. Instead, they remained using the word 'child' as the plural form.

Table 3: Errors made by the respondents: Omission

Singular Nouns	Respondents' Incorrect Form	Standardized correct forms	Error
Child	Childen	Children	Omitting 'r' at the middle of the nouns
Diagnosis	Diagnos, diagnose	Diagnoses	Omitting 's' / 'es' at the end of the nouns
Quiz	Quizzes	Quizzes	Omitting 'z' at the middle of the nouns

In table 3, it can be seen that the respondents had problems when they had to change the singular forms into plural forms, especially by omitting some of the elements (letter) in the plural forms. For example, some respondents omitted 'r' in the middle of the noun 'children', resulting in error ('childen'). The same error occurred for the word 'diagnosis'. Several respondents omitted 's' and 'es' in the plural forms, resulting in errors ('diagnos' and 'diagnose'). Likewise, some respondents had

difficulty changing the noun ‘quiz’ into irregular plural nouns. They omitted the letter ‘z’ in the plural form, resulting in error (‘quizes’).

Table 4: Errors made by students: Addition

Singular Nouns	Respondents' Incorrect Form	Standardized correct forms	Error
Children, Sheep, fish, trout, bison, tuna, aircraft, crisis, series	Childrens, sheeps, fishs, trouts, bisones, tunas, aircrafts, criseses, serieses.	Children, sheep, fish, trout, bison, tuna, aircraft, crises, series	Adding ‘s’ / ‘es’ at the end of the nouns
Diagnosis, woman	Diagnoses’, women’	Diagnoses, women.	. Adding ‘coma’ at the end of the nouns

In table 4, it can be seen that some respondents made errors by adding certain letters in the plural forms. Most of the errors occurred when the students added ‘s’ or ‘es’ at the end of the nouns, resulting in error of addition. Such kind of error occurred with the nouns ‘children’, ‘sheep’, ‘fish’, ‘trout’, ‘bison’, ‘tuna’, ‘aircraft’, ‘crisis’, ‘series’, in which the respondents added the letter ‘s’ at the end of the plural forms (e.g., ‘childrens’, ‘sheeps’, ‘fishs’, ‘trouts’, ‘tunas’, ‘aircrafts’). The correct plural forms of the nouns should be ‘Children’, ‘sheep’, ‘fish’, ‘trout’, ‘tuna’, ‘aircraft’.

Some respondents added (es) at the end of some nouns, resulting in error of plural forms: ‘bisones’, ‘criseses’, and ‘serieses’ while the correct plural forms should be ‘bison’, ‘crises’, ‘series’. One respondent also had a problem by adding apostrophe in the irregular plural nouns. For example, the respondents had a problem with the words ‘diagnosis’ and ‘women’. The respondent added ‘apostrophe’ at the end of a plural noun, resulting errors (‘diagnoses’ and woman’), while the correct forms are ‘diagnoses’ and ‘women’.

The results above indicated that there were several types of errors in the formation of irregular plural nouns made by the respondents, namely misformation, omission, and addition. Dulay et al., (1982) explains that misformation is characterized by the use of the wrong form of morpheme or structure. James (2013) and Anjarsari (2020), in different words, said that addition is characterized by the presence of an item that must not appear in a well-formed utterance. Omission errors are characterized by the absence of an item that must appear in a well-formed utterance (James, 2013).

Based on the findings above, errors of misformation made by the respondents commonly followed the general rule of constructing English plural formation, namely adding ‘s’/‘es’ at the end of a noun. In addition, some of the respondents used the letter ‘f’ instead of ‘v’ in constructing the irregular plural noun (e.g., ‘knife’ becomes ‘knifes’). This result is in line with the Ozkayran’s research (2020) which showed that most errors made by students were in the form of misformation (68.05%).

The results also indicated that the misformation error made by the students commonly occurred due to the factor of overgeneralization. Matiini (2016) says that overgeneralization is often defined as the learner's way of constructing second language rules because of their limited knowledge of L2 rules. In this study, most respondents experience overgeneralization errors as in 'louse' and 'appendix' by adding 's' at the end of the words for the plural nouns ('louses' and 'appendixes'). The error was caused by the respondents' limited knowledge of the formation of irregular plural nouns. In research conducted by Abbood (2020) found out that most students experience grammatical errors due to overgeneralization. When a particular form is overgeneralized, errors in language learning take place.

Akhmad (2020) argues that overgeneralization is the phenomenon when one overextends one rule to cover instances. Overgeneralization is not only in misformation error but also occurs in addition errors. For example, overgeneralization occurred when some of the respondents construct the plural form of 'sheep'. Most respondents followed the general rule of plural formation by adding the letter(s) at the end of the noun, resulting in error (sheeps).

Considering that the respondents mostly had problems with the irregular plural nouns, especially having the wrong form of the nouns (misformation), English teachers must give more drills on the nouns students will likely make errors. From a behaviorism point of view, drilling is one of the methods that can be applied to form the 'expected behavior' of the students (Muhajirah, 2020). By giving more drills it is expected that the students would be more skilled in forming irregular plural nouns

CONCLUSION

Based on the data analysis, it can be inferred that forming plural noun forms, especially irregular plural nouns, is one of the problematic things EFL learners would likely face. Based on the data analysis misformation (e.g., Cactuses, Quizes, fishes), addition (e.g., Childen), omission (e.g., sheeps) are the kinds of errors students would potentially make when constructing irregular plural nouns. Misformation was a common error that the respondents frequently made. More specifically, it would likely to occur with the nouns that had quite dissimilar plural forms from the singular ones (e.g., foot – feet, goose – geese). The errors made by the respondents were commonly due to overgeneralization. They generally followed their limited knowledge in L2 when constructing the irregular plural forms.

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