

# CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background of the Study

English is a language used by many people around the world and it has been referred to as a global lingua franca. In the case of Malaysia, *Bahasa Malaysia* is the national language that is designed to unite Malaysians who are culturally multilingual. English, on the other hand is used as a second language that has a functional role for Malaysians to remain globally competitive as it is used internationally and plays an important role in the new knowledge-based economy and in international trading, in the era of globalization. Even though *Bahasa Malaysia* is the first language, the importance of English cannot be denied in order to achieve international stature.

The Malaysian education system has gone through many changes and transformation. The reformation of the Malaysian education system can be divided into two eras, which are pre-independence and post-independence. Malaysia gained its independence in 1957 and before independence, in the eighteenth century, the British came to Malaya and established English medium primary and secondary schools. As a result, many Malaysians who were educated during the British colonization, who are now over 50 years of age are very fluent and competent when communicating in English.

Besides the English medium schools, there were also vernacular schools established based on ethnic groups for example Malay-medium, Chinese-medium and Tamil-medium schools. Basically, the education system was a fragmented education system. In 1956, in order to reform the Malayan education system, the Razak Report was proposed to unite all races and Bahasa Melayu was made as the principle language for

national integration. In 1970, the National Education Policy was implemented and gradually the English medium schools were converted to national schools and English was phased out as the medium of instruction. According to Darmi and Albion (2013), “the switch between the languages saw a decline in the amount of English language exposure for Malaysian learners at schools” (p.3). Selvaraj (2010) stated that the deterioration in the standard of English has affected the country’s ability to compete with other economies and “the New Education Policy in 1970 is to be blamed for this phenomenon”(p.57).

In 1989, the National Philosophy of Education was implemented as a move towards achieving Malaysia’s Vision 2020 which was to gain the status of a fully developed country. To move towards Vision 2020, the Ministry of Education had to restructure the higher education system. According to Selvaraj (2010) “Malaysia made a switch from an agriculture/commodity export-based economy to an industrialized nation in the early 1980’s. This created a need for an educated and skilled workforce in a knowledge-based economy. The need for skills like languages, mathematical reasoning, scientific logic and programming has emerged as the front runners of a nation’s development and English is the language of globalization, internet, trade and science”(p.57, as cited in Carnoy, 1999).

The school education system in Malaysia is divided into 3 levels: primary, secondary and tertiary. Primary school consists of six years from primary one to primary 6 whereby from primary 1 to 3, English is taught for 240 minutes per week, and from primary 4 to 6, English is taught for 210 minutes per week (Rethinasamy and Chuah, 2011). Secondary school consists of two levels which are lower secondary from

form 1 to 3 and upper secondary from form 4 to 5; English is taught for 200 minutes per week across both levels. At the end of form 5, students sit for the Malaysian Certificate of Education, also known as *Sijil Pelajaran Tinggi* (SPM), which is equivalent to General Certificate of Education (GCSE) O- Levels examination.

The pre-university level consists of Lower Form 6 and Upper Form 6 or an equivalent programme which is the Matriculation programme. The Malaysian matriculation programme can be a one year or a two year programme and it prepares students for entry into Malaysian public universities. All in all, English is taught in school as a subject for eleven years and students may continue to learn the language as a subject at tertiary level. According to Darmi and Albion (2013), even with eleven years of learning the English language “the deficiency in English competence among Malaysian learners is still the major concern among educators, in particular those in the tertiary institutions” (p.2). In the present study, the focus is to analyze the grammatical errors that matriculation students in a public university make in their spoken English as grammatical competence constitutes an important part of one’s language competence.

## **1.2 Grammar and its importance**

Grammar is part of language and language is powered by grammatical energy (Halliday, 2002). Halliday (2002) defined grammar by looking at the theoretical foundation of Lemke (1993) who characterized “human communities as eco-social systems that persist in time through ongoing exchange with their environment, with a constant dynamic interplay between the two” (p.387). The social practices include both material and semiotic, and semiotic has to do with meaning not signs.

Thus, the important feature of the material-semiotic concept is they are strongly coupled whereby “ there is a high degree of redundancy between them”(p.387, cited in Halliday, 2002). From this concept, it is important to note the importance of grammar in making meaning. Gaining a strong understanding of how language works can help people to put words into sentences to make meaning in interactions. Crystal (2004) defined grammar as

“...the structural foundation of our ability to express ourselves. The more we are aware of how it works, the more we can monitor the meaning and effectiveness of the way we and others use language. It can help foster precision, detect ambiguity, and exploit the richness of expression available in English. And it can help everyone--not only teachers of English, but teachers of anything, for all teaching is ultimately a matter of getting to grips with meaning.”

(Crystal, 2004, p.26)

Cowan (2008) defined grammar as the set of rules that describes how words can be arranged to form sentences in a particular language while Purpura (2004) stated that grammar, “the structural glue, the “code” of language, is arguably at the heart of language use, whether it involves speaking, listening, reading or writing”(p.ix). Every language has its own set of rules and it is important to make meaning in both the spoken and written forms. Grammar in spoken language is equally important as in written language. Being linguistically competent in a language requires a person to use the language accurately in both the written and spoken forms. However, making errors is part and parcel of learning.

In the Malaysian context, throughout students’ schooling years from primary to secondary and tertiary level education, they have been exposed to the English language as it is learnt as a second language. Yet, despite so many years of exposure, students are struggling to master the language. One of the areas of difficulty for most students is

grammar. Nor Hashimah Jalaludin et.al (2008) for example noted that the most problematic area for Form two students in a selected public school is grammar, particularly in the aspect of morphology and syntax and the attributing factor is the differences in grammatical structures between the Malay language and English (p. 106).

Understanding how grammar rules work and using it in everyday life is a problem for students. As a result, students display frequent errors in their writing and in their speech and these errors need to be analyzed and addressed. Students who have successfully internalized the rules of a language and their constraints are said to possess grammatical competence or in other words they are able to use the rules of the language automatically to produce grammatical sentences. Possessing this kind of competence is one of the important goals in learning a second language for effective communication (Cowan, 2008). Besides linguistic competence, in order for a successful communication to take place, communicative competence is also required. Hymes (1972) defined communicative competence as “the ability to use grammatical competence in a variety of communicative situations” (p. 95, as cited in Bagarić, 2007).

### **1.3 Learners’ errors**

According to Dulay, Burt and Krashen(1982), the two major purposes of studying learners’ errors are that “it provides data from which inferences about the nature of the language learning process can be made and it indicates to teachers and curriculum developers which part of the target language students have the most difficulty producing correctly and which error types detract most from a learner’s ability to communicate effectively”(p.18).

Corder (1981) believes that learners’ errors are important because it tells teachers the progress of the learner and what needs to be learned in order to achieve the goal, while it provides researchers with important insights on how language is learned or

acquired and finally making errors is an important device used by learners in order to learn a second language.

There has been a great amount of research interest in analyzing the errors that learners make when learning a second language, both in written and spoken forms and previous studies have found that errors are inevitable and should be identified, categorized and analyzed. Therefore, the present study attempts to identify and categorize the errors that learners make when they speak so that these errors can be addressed in the teaching and learning process.

#### **1.4 Statement of the problem**

In the learning process, students are bound to make errors in both the spoken and written forms. One of the major difficulties that students face when speaking in English lies in the grammar of the language. There are times when students know the rules of grammar but when it comes to using them, they misuse or do not apply them at all. Besides that, according to Carter and McCarthy (1995), there are different characteristics between the grammar of spoken language and the grammar of the written form.

One example of the difference between spoken and written grammar involves voice (the choice between active and passive). According to Carter and McCarthy (2006) “voice is more subtle and varied in the grammar of everyday conversation than is indicated in grammar books that focus only on written examples.”(p.10).

Carter and McCarthy (2006) also explained that naturally there is the focus on the core *be*-passive but after analyzing a larger amount of conversational data, the *get*-passive form is much more frequent in spoken data than in comparable amounts of

written data (p.10). This shows that when it comes to teaching grammar, teachers must not take for granted the differences between the two forms. Furthermore, when analyzing the errors made by students, teachers should not generalize that the errors made in writing are similar to those made when speaking.

There are many studies that have been done which involve an error analysis of the written form however, there is little on the spoken form especially looking across different levels of proficiency. Ali Nezami and Mousa Sadraie Najafi (2012) believe that most error- type studies do not consider errors that are peculiar to different proficiency levels.

Ting et al (2010) studied the grammatical accuracy in spoken English and the study was based on less proficient students. Ting et al (2010) stressed that “future research involving error analysis of spoken language used by proficient speakers would provide baseline data on acceptable limits of grammatical accuracy...”(p.66). Therefore, there is a need for the present study to be conducted so that, it can contribute to the body of knowledge of spoken grammar across proficiency levels.

Grammar plays an important role in speaking; hence it is significant for teachers to be provided with insights into the types of errors students make across proficiency levels when they speak in order that they may consider how to address these errors.

## **1.5 Aims of the study**

The present study examines the grammatical errors made by matriculation students in their oral examination. It is a known fact that students face a lot of problems in mastering the grammar of the English language and this is often reflected in their oral production as can be seen in research that have been done by Ting et al (2010) and Ainon et al (2013). The overall purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the errors made by this particular group of learners. Specifically, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the types of grammatical errors made in the spoken English of matriculation ESL learners of different proficiency levels?
2. What is the frequency of occurrence of error types in each level of proficiency?

## **1.6 Significance of the study**

The present researcher's interest in this field is due to the interest in wanting to know why students encounter difficulties in learning English despite the fact that they have learnt English for almost 11 years. Students make errors in certain areas and that is why the present researcher embarked on the journey of doing this present research to study students' grammatical errors.

Errors provide important insights into the processes of second language acquisition and instruction (Herron, 1981, p.6). Saadiyah Darus and Subramaniam (2009) pointed out that studying language problems that students have "is useful to teachers because it provides information on common trouble-spots in language learning which can be used in the preparation of effective teaching materials" and also "teachers



can be well-equipped to help students minimize or overcome their learning problems” (p.493). Besides that, it can be used as a guide towards effective teaching and learning.

By studying the grammatical errors made across proficiency levels, it will help teachers and curriculum developers to identify the types of errors made by students from different levels of proficiency in a specific manner. Moreover, by identifying the types of errors, teachers can design their lessons to cater to the specific needs of each proficiency level and it will provide the means to help Malaysian teachers to recognize the importance of errors as one of the challenging areas in teaching English.

This study will also provide insights into the usage of grammar in the spoken form and how students internalize the rules of English in the spoken form. Teachers and curriculum developers can identify parts of grammar that students find difficulty in mastering especially in the spoken form and improve their teaching skills, materials and the instructional process.

## **1.7 Scope and limitation of the study**

The present study is focused on errors made by students across proficiency levels based on a small set of data. For each proficiency level, only 10 group discussions were analyzed. Therefore, in total, there are 40 group discussions. Moreover, the present study is focused on a particular group of Malaysian students, so the findings from this research may not be applicable to other groups of students. The present study also will not be looking at the different errors made based on gender.

There are many errors that students make not only in terms of grammar. Students may make errors connected to semantics, lexis etc. However, the current research only looked into grammatical errors, which are verb form, preposition, article, plurality, tense, pronoun, word form, question and subject verb agreement. There are a lot of grammatical aspects that can be analyzed but only those mentioned above are analyzed in the present study.

Due to the limitations mentioned above, more studies need to be carried out in order to make generalization of the findings for a broader population of students.

## **CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter begins with the definition of the term “error” before proceeding to a discussion of grammar in language teaching and learning. This is followed by a description of the framework used in the present study. Finally, the chapter concludes with an examination of previous studies conducted on grammatical errors in second language learning.

### **2.1 Definition of “error”**

Learning a second language involves learners making errors in the process of learning. These mistake or errors that learners make is inevitable. According to Khansir (2012), “studies of second language acquisition have tended to focus on learners’ errors since they allow for prediction of the difficulties involved in acquiring a second language”(p.1029). Studying learners’ errors can benefit teachers, syllabus designers and textbook writers in identifying the problematic areas that learners encounter in learning a second language in order to allow more effective teaching and learning to take place.

Besides that, studying learners’ errors can also provide a deeper understanding of errors that learners make. Richards et al (1992) stated that the study of errors are used in order to identify the strategies that learners use in language learning, identify the causes of learners’ errors and obtain information on common difficulties in language learning as an aid to teaching or in the development of teaching materials (cited in Khansir 2012).

Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) described errors as “the flawed side of learner speech or writing. They are those parts of conversation or composition that deviate from

some selected norm of mature language performance” (p.138). In order to learn, students will systematically make errors.

Corder (1981) classified errors into two types, which are systematic and non-systematic. Systematic errors are also known as errors of competence, which are errors that are made due to the lack of knowledge of the language and it cannot be self corrected. On the other hand, non-systematic errors, also known as errors of performance or mistakes, occur due to a slip of the tongue, memory failure etc. These types of errors “do not reflect the knowledge of the language” and people who make this type of error will realize their error and they will correct it (Corder, 1981, p.10).

Ellis (1997) differentiated errors and mistakes by explaining that errors “reflect gaps in learner’s knowledge; they occur because the learner does not know what is correct” whereas mistakes “reflect occasional lapses in performance; they occur because, in a particular instance, the learner is unable to perform what he or she knows”(p.17). Due to the objectives and nature of this study, the researcher did not classify the errors identified into systematic and non-systematic.

Another key concept in this study is the term “grammatical errors”. Grammar is a level of structural organization generally divided into the branches of syntax and morphology (Crystal, 1992). It is the study of the way in which words are combined to form phrases, clauses, and sentences. A sentence that conforms to the rules defined by a specific grammar of a language is said to be grammatical. Hewings and Hewings (2005) stated that, “ A description of the grammar of a language gives an account of the sentence structures that are possible in that language. In essence, it will identify certain grammatical units smaller than the sentence and give rules to explain how these are combined to make sentences” (p.5).

The diagram below presents the hierarchy of units in the form of a tree diagram:

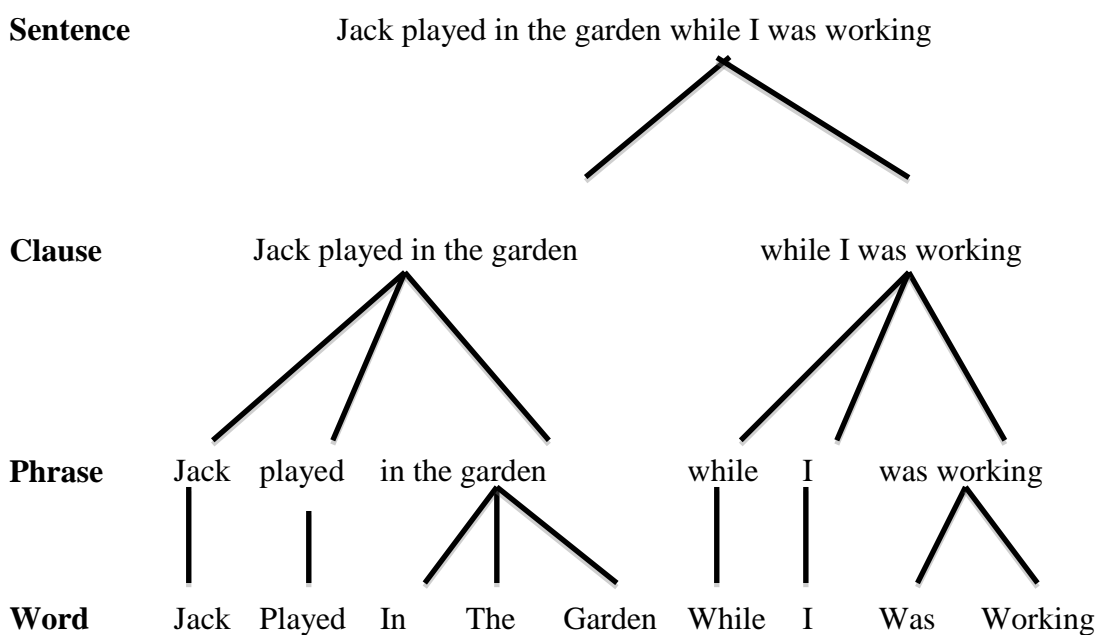


Figure 2.1: Tree diagram

(Hewings & Hewings, 2005, p.5)

Words are grouped using word class labels such as noun, verb, adjective, adverb, preposition, determiner and conjunction. For this present study, the analysis of the transcribed text is basically at word level.

## 2.2 Error analysis

According to Khansir (2012), error analysis “ is a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors learners make. It consists of a comparison between the errors made in the target language and that target language itself” (p.1029). Error analysis has played an important role in second language research and one of it’s major contribution is in the discovery that “the majority of the grammatical errors second language learners make do not reflect the learner’s mother tongue but are very much like those young children make as they learn a first language” (Dulay, Burt and Krashen,1982, p.138). It is important to note that not all errors are caused by learner’s mother tongue as there are other contributing reasons and this will be discussed in the next section.

### **2.2.1 Purpose of doing error analysis**

According to Sharma (1980) error analysis can offer “a strong support to remedial teaching” (cited in Khansir, 2012, p. 1029). Studying learner’s errors can shed light on the types of errors that learners make, thus allowing teachers and curriculum developers to design suitable teaching and learning methods and materials. Corder (1974) stated that error analysis provides insights into “the linguistic development of a learner and may give us indications as to the learning process” (p.125). Richard et al (1992) stated that the study of errors is used in order to:

- i. identify strategies which learners use in language learning
- ii. identify the causes of learners’ errors
- iii. obtain information on common difficulties in language learning as an aid to teaching or in development of teaching materials

(cited in Khansir 2012, p.1029).

For the present study, the aim is not intended to determine the sources of errors however, rather it is to determine the predominant types of errors that occur across proficiency levels using the surface structure taxonomy by Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982).

### **2.2.2 Method of error analysis**

Ellis (1997) explained that the first step in analyzing learners’ errors is to identify the errors, then to describe the errors and classify them into types, followed by explaining why they occur and finally error evaluation. Corder (1975) suggested two procedures to carry out an error analysis. The first step is to identify all the errors in a sample of learner language and the second step is to explain the errors by distinguishing between error and mistake. However, in the present study, a distinction will not be made

between error and mistake. As mentioned in the previous section, the present study will focus on identifying, describing and classifying the errors using the surface strategy taxonomy put forward by Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) which will be explained in further detail in section 2.5.

### **2.2.3 Limitations of error analysis**

Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) identified three major conceptual weaknesses of error analysis which are:

- i. confusion of explanatory and descriptive (process and product) aspects of error analysis.
- ii. lack of sufficient precision and specificity in the definition of error categories
- iii. the inappropriate use of simplistic classification to explain learners' errors

Despite these limitations, the insights gained through error analysis have made significant contribution to second language research and second language pedagogy.

## **2.3 Causes of grammatical errors**

There are several factors that cause students to commit errors in their production of a second language. Cowan (2008) points out four sources of grammatical errors made by L2 learners.

### **I. Performance errors**

Performance errors are errors made not due to the speaker's ignorance of the grammatical rules but rather "it is a processing mistake that occurs while a language learner or native speaker is in the act of speaking or writing" (p.43). One example is the lack of subject verb agreement in a sentence.

## II. Imperfect learning

There are times when an English learner simply makes an error because he/she has not internalized a rule and/or the restriction that applies to that rule. For example in constructing a yes/no question. A learner who has not mastered the rule in constructing a yes/no question would probably make an error as shown below:

\*Did he went to school yesterday?

Cowan (2008) stated that “a large number of the recorded errors made by learners with elementary and intermediate proficiency are a reflection of imperfect learning”(p.43).

## III. Overgeneralization

Overgeneralization occurs when a learner applies a grammar rule to forms that do not take it (Cowan, 2008). For example:

Subject	Verb
Mom	{ advised, ordered, forced, persuaded, got, caused }
Object	Infinitive Complement
Bill	[to go to the party]

The example above shows the list of verbs that are called *influence* or *manipulative* verbs because they all describe a state of affairs where the object (Bill) is influenced by the subject of the sentence (Mom) to carry out the action expressed in the complement (go to the party). Learners would overgeneralize by using the verb *make* as it has the same manipulative meaning as the verbs mentioned in the sentence.

Mom *made* Bill to go to the party



The sentence above is grammatically wrong because the verb *make* must be followed by a complement in the bare infinitive form as in:

Mom *made* Bill go to the party

#### IV. Influence of the native language

As previously stated in section 2.2, it was mentioned that according to Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) not all errors that learners make can be attributed to their L1 however, there are times when interference of L1 is a contributing factor. Cowan (2008) stated that many of the grammatical errors that learners make is a result from transferring their native language grammar to English. For example in Spanish, verbs that have meaning equivalent to English modal verbs such as *can* and *should* are always followed by the infinitive.

*Podemos ir en taxi*

We can to go in taxi

“we can go by taxi”

Because of this pattern, Spanish speakers especially the beginners, put the verb that follows an English modal verb in the infinitive as in “We can *to go* by taxi”.

Brown (1980) identified four sources of errors which are interlingual transfer, intralingual transfer, context of learning and communication strategies. Interlingual transfer happens when errors can be traced to the learners’ mother tongue, for example learners applying their L1 grammar structure to the target language. Intralingual transfer happens from L2 learners’ development of a new linguistic system. When learners have

acquired parts of the target language, they tend to make incorrect generalization of the rules within the target language.

Context of learning is the overlap of both types of transfers mentioned above and it involves the classroom with the teacher and its materials in the case of school learning or the social situation in the case of untutored second language learning. According to Heydari and Bagheri (2012), errors due to context of learning happens when “in the classroom context, the teacher and the textbook can lead the learner to make wrong generalization about the language” (p.1584). Finally, the last source of error classified by Brown (1980 cited in Heydari and Bagheri, 2012) is communication strategies, which is “the conscious employment of verbal mechanisms for communicating an idea when linguistic forms are not available to the learners for some reasons”(p.1584). Communication strategies can lead to errors when learners apply the strategies to get the message across.

In this section, the findings of two researchers on the sources of learners’ errors have been reviewed and it can be seen that there are some variations across researchers.

#### **2.4 Grammar in teaching and learning English**

Carter and McCarthy (1995) argue that “language teaching which aims to foster speaking skills and natural spoken interaction should be based upon the grammar of spoken language and not on grammars which mainly reflect written norms” (p.141). Carter and McCarthy (1995) also argue that “it is important to recognize that grammar of speech has many characteristics different from those found in writing” (p.141). Therefore it is fundamental for the present study to look at some of the errors students make in the spoken form so that teachers and material developers can help in making students become efficient users of the language.

Teaching grammar can be a challenging task. Ellis (2006) defined grammar teaching as an enterprise that “ involves any instructional technique that draws learners’ attention to some specific grammatical form in such a way that it helps them either to understand it metalinguistically and/or process it in comprehension and/or production so that they can internalize it” (p.84). The phenomenon that we see today in some students is that they know the rules of grammar but then make frequent errors in natural speech. On the other hand, there are also students who speak English using near perfect utterances but do not know the rules explicitly. So the question that Noonan (2004) asked was “can explicit grammar knowledge become implicit knowledge?” (n.p).

The example given above about students who know the rule but make frequent errors is an example of explicit grammar knowledge while the second example given about students who can produce near perfect utterances but do not know the rules is an example of implicit grammar knowledge. Ellis (2002) found that students who have explicit grammar instruction as part of their study achieve a higher level of accuracy than those who do not (cited in Noonan,2004).

In the grammar learning process, Purpura (2004) explained that explicit grammatical knowledge refers to a conscious knowledge of grammatical forms and their meanings. In other words, students are explicitly exposed to the grammar rules. DeKeyser (1995) characterizes grammatical instruction as ‘explicit’ when it involves the explanation of a rule or the request to focus on a grammatical feature (cited in Purpura, 2004).

Implicit grammatical knowledge refers to ‘the knowledge of a language that is typically manifest in some form of naturally occurring language behavior such as conversation’ (Ellis, 2001,p 252, cited in Purpura,2004). The acquisition of implicit grammatical knowledge happens unconsciously. DeKeyser (1995) classifies

grammatical instruction as implicit when it does not involve rule presentation or a request to focus on form in the input; rather, implicit grammatical instruction involves semantic processing of the input in any degree of awareness of grammatical form (cited in Purpura, 2004). Purpura (2004) stated that the majority of studies surveyed showed “a clear advantage for learners receiving explicit grammar instruction” (p.44). The diagram below shows a comparison of the effects of the different types of grammatical instruction in SLA.

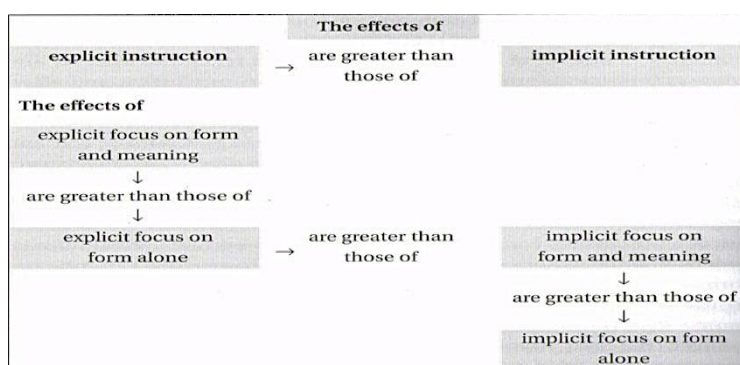


Figure 2.2: A comparison of the effects of different types of grammatical instruction on SLA

(Purpura, 2004, p.44)

## 2.5 Ten criteria for spoken grammar

Discourse analysis reveals that spoken and written grammars are considerably at variance. Understanding the differences and acknowledging the criteria of a spoken grammar helps to address the present study. Mc Carthy and Carter (2001) have developed ten criteria for a spoken grammar based on a five-million CANCODE spoken corpus.

Firstly, Mc Carthy and Carter (2001) established the core units of a spoken grammar. In a conversational transcript, there are occurrences of units that do not

conform to the notion of ‘well-formed’ sentences with main and subordinate clauses (p.2). Certain grammatical forms that are used in spoken form may not be grammatically correct in the written form. For example “conversational turns often consist just of phrases, or of incomplete clauses, or of clauses with subordinate clause characteristics but which are apparently not attached to any main clause...” (p.2). The example below shows some of the kinds of units frequently encountered in a spoken corpus and problematic areas for a traditional grammar are highlighted:

### Example 1

[Speakers are sitting at the dinner table talking about a car accident that happened to the father of one of the speakers]

- <Speaker 1> I'll just take that off. **Take that off.**  
 <Speaker 2> **All looks great.**  
 <Speaker 3> [laughs]  
 <Speaker 2> Mm.  
 <Speaker 3> Mm.  
 <Speaker 2> I think your dad was amazed wasn't he at the damage.  
 <Speaker 4> Mm.  
 <Speaker 2> It's not so much the parts. It's the labour charges for  
 <Speaker 4> ~□ **Ohthat. Foracar.**  
 <Speaker 2> Have you got hold of it?  
 <Speaker 1> Yeah.  
 <Speaker 2> **It was a bit erm.**  
 <Speaker 1> Mm.  
 <Speaker 3> Mm.  
 <Speaker 2> **A bit.**  
 <Speaker 3> That's right.  
 <Speaker 2> I mean they said they'd have to take his car in for two days. And he says  
 All it is is s= straightening a panel. **And they're like**, Oh no. It's all new  
 panel. You can't do this.  
 <Speaker 3> **Any erm problem.**  
 <Speaker 2> **As soon as they hear insurance claim.** Oh. Let's get it right.  
 <Speaker 3> Yeah. Yeah. **Anything to do with+**  
 <Speaker 1> **Yow.**  
 <Speaker 3> +**coach work is er+**  
 <Speaker 1> Right.  
 <Speaker 3> +**fatal isn't it.**  
 <Speaker 1> **Now.**

(McCarthy & Carter, 2001, p.2)

McCarthy and Carter (2001) observed the following phenomena based on the example above:

- (a) Indeterminate structures (is the second *Take that off* an ellipted form of *I'll just take that off*? Is it an imperative? Is *All looks great* well-formed? What is the status of *And they're like?*).
- (b) Phrasal utterances, communicatively complete in themselves, but not sentences (*Oh that. For a car. Any problem.*)
- (c) Aborted or incomplete structures (*It was a bit erm ... A bit.*)
- (d) 'Subordinate' clauses not obviously connected to any particular main clause (*As soon as they hear insurance claim*)
- (e) Interrupted structures with other speaker contributions intervening (*Anything to do with ... coach work is er ... fatal isn't it*)
- (f) Words whose grammatical class is unclear (*Yow. Now.*)

Another core unit of the spoken form pointed out by Mc Carthy and Carter (1998) is *joint-production* grammatical units whereby "... a grammatical unit is only complete when a second participant adds his/her contribution" (p.2). For example:

#### Example 2

[Customer and waiter in restaurant]

<Customer> Yeah. **Let's just have er**

<Waiter> . . . **Some rice?**

<Customer> yeah

(Mc Carthy and Carter, 2001, p.4)

The examples above are normal in everyday talk, however the question whether they are grammatically correct or not is a problematic area. There is no simple answer to this problem but certain criteria of the spoken form need to be acknowledged and considered.

The second criterion that was pointed out by McCarthy and Carter (2001) has to do with phrasal complexity. This criteria deals with phrasal and other types of complexity and the different distribution of potential elements in actual discourse. For

example, the noun phrase is usually used with adjectives and noun modifier before the head noun, however this rarely happens in everyday conversational data. For example

<speaker 1>Yeah it's **a big house**, six bedrooms

<speaker 2>It's **a large house**, lovely, just right

(McCarthy and Carter, 2001, p. 5)

The point of the examples is to show “not what *can* be said but what is routinely said”(McCarthy and Carter, 2001). McCarthy and Carter (2001) pointed out that “a pedagogical issue of some importance arises here: if we label structures as said and not said, we run the risk of returning to the bad old days of behaviourism, describing behavior rather than the system of language that users make use of”(n.p). So to solve this McCarthy and Carter (2001) suggested that defining grammar by distinguishing deterministic grammar and probabilistic grammar might help. Deterministic grammar addresses structural prescription (e.g that the past tense morpheme in English is *-ed* rather than *-ing*, or that *the* precedes the noun rather than follows it). On the other hand, probabilistic grammar considers what forms are *most likely* to be used in particular contexts, and the probabilities may be strong or weak. Probabilistic grammar is extremely useful in certain areas where “creative freedom and potential variation is possible in order to avoid the grammar becoming overly-behaviouristic”(McCarthy and Carter, 2001, p.6).

The third criterion concerns tense, voice, aspect and interpersonal and textual meaning. In spoken grammar, communication is face to face so it affects the grammatical choices. In terms of tense and aspect, there is a wide usage of the progressive tense that is rare in written form. According to McCarthy and Carter (2001), “voice is also more subtle and varied in the grammar of everyday conversation than

most teaching materials would have learners think”(n.p). There is a focus on *be*-passive and the *get*-passive.

The fourth criterion is the position of clause elements. Ordering of clauses in spoken form may differ from written form because “of the real time constraints of unrehearsed spoken language and the need for clear acts of topicalisation and such like to appropriately orientate the listener” (McCarthy and Carter, 2001). For example, fronted objects are more frequent in spoken form than written form.

The fifth criterion pertains to clause-complexes. In spoken language, clause complexes need re-assessment in terms of what is to be considered ‘main’ and what is ‘subordinate’. Which-clauses and because/’cos are some of the popular clause-complexes in spoken form. For example:

<speaker 1> well actually one person has applied

<speaker 2> Mmm

<speaker 1>**which is great**

In the example above, the *which*- clause is more like a second main clause and this is a criterion of the spoken form.

The sixth relates to unpleasing anomalies which refer to ‘irregularities’ and anomalies that may go against the grammarian’s instinct concerning correctness. When such patterns become so recurrent they cannot just be ignored but have to be assimilated into the grammar.

The seventh criterion deals with larger sequences. McCarthy looked at how sequential patterns of verb tense and aspect varied between spoken and written text. There are some cases where the patterns were the same for spoken and written text. For



example *used to* plus *would* sequence whereby initial *used to* provides a contextual frame for the interpretation of subsequent uses of *would* as ‘past habitual’.

[Speakers 1 and 2 are describing how they partook in a consumer survey which involved a remote computer automatically ringing their home telephone to collect data in the middle of the night]

<Speaker 1> They **used to** you know ring up early hours of the morning, well you **would**, the phone **wouldn't** ring, they'**d** ring that computer.

<Speaker 2> And they'**d** read it.

<Speaker 3> Y eah.

<Speaker 2> And it'**d** go through the phone.

(McCarthy and Carter, 2001, p.14)

McCarthy and Carter (1998) claim that the example above has exactly the same sequence in literary text.

The eighth is the comparative criterion which stresses that there are differences between written and spoken grammar and there are also similarities. There is a need to examine spoken corpus side by side with a good, balanced written corpus. For example:

### **Linking in written and spoken English**

Some conjunctions are particularly associated with written or spoken registers and particular positions in those registers. For example **on the contrary** is very rare in informal conversation. In written English it is more common and usually occurs in front (or much less frequently in mid-) position:

*He had no private understanding with Mr X. **On the contrary** he knew very little of him.*

**On the other hand** occurs frequently in both spoken and written. But the concessive adverbial **then again** (always in front position) is much more frequent in spoken than in written:

*If it had been at the bottom of a councillor's street then I don't think it would ever have been built. **But then again** that goes on all the time.* Other conjunctions more common in written than spoken include **accordingly, moreover, furthermore, duly, therefore, as a consequence, in the event**. Other conjunctions more common in spoken than written include **what's more, as I say, because of that, in the end**.

(McCarthy and Carter, 2001, p.16)

The ninth criterion concerns quite complex metalanguage which will not be elaborated on much for the purpose of this review. Metalanguage is inherited from written based grammars and it brings its own metaphors and assumptions which can often create dissonance when applied to spoken data. Therefore there must be special care when using metalanguage in the spoken form.

Finally the last criterion is about native and non-native users. It relates to the authority in grammatical description. The issue here is who is to be the voice of authority with regard to a spoken grammar? And should the spoken grammar of a language be that of the speakers of the original, colonizing language or should it be that of its present-day user? (McCarthy and Carter, 2001). There are many answers to these questions from the extreme to the less extreme. McCarthy and Carter (2001) came up with a realistic solution for the present day which could then be to have a variety of spoken corpora which would be cross-compared to establish a core set of grammatical features in wide international usage.

These ten criteria are important to the present study because the study is concerned with the spoken form. These criteria give insights into the nature of spoken grammar that differs from the written grammar. There are certain structures that are grammatical in the spoken form but not grammatical in written form. According to McCarthy and Carter (2001) there are differences between written and spoken language and language teachers tend to use the rules based on the written language, whereby the clause and sentence structure are clearly defined. However, the spoken language has a different form and would be considered ungrammatical in writing (p.143). Besides that, McCarthy and Carter (2001) also stated that “learners should be aware that anomalies are licensed and perfectly normal in the target language”(p.63).

## 2.6 Surface structure framework

In the present study, the framework that is used is the surface structure taxonomy by Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) that emphasizes the ways surface structures are altered. Learners may *omit* necessary items or *add* unnecessary ones; they may *misform* items or *misorder* them (Dulay, Burt & Krashen,1982). There are four ways in which learners alter a language:

### 1. Omission

Omission errors are characterized by the absence of an item that must appear in a well-formed utterance (1982:154). Language learners are said to omit grammatical morphemes much more frequently than content words (1982:155).

### 2. Addition

Addition errors are characterized by the presence of an item which must not appear in a well-formed utterance. It is the opposite of omission.

There are three types of addition: double marking, regularization and simple addition.

### 3. Misformation

Misformation errors are characterized by the use of the wrong form of morpheme or structure. In other words, learners supply something but it is incorrect in form. There are three types of misformations: regularization, archi form and alternating forms.

### 4. Misordering

Misordering errors are characterized by the incorrect placement of a

morpheme or group of morphemes in an utterance. Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) stated that “these creative misordering errors are word-for-word translations of native language surface structure” (p.162 &163).

The framework is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, section 3.4.2.

There have been a few local researchers who have used this taxonomy in their research. Ting et al (2010) and Ainon et al (2013) used this taxonomy to study the grammatical errors that students make in their spoken English. Ahmad Taufik Hidayah (2013) used this taxonomy to study the errors made by TESL college students in the use of the simple tense and the simple past tense. These studies are reviewed in more detail below.

## **2.7 Previous studies on grammatical errors**

There have been many studies on the subject of grammatical errors and some of these studies will be reviewed in the following sub sections. The grammatical errors in the spoken form will be reviewed separately from those in the written form.

### **2.7.1 Grammatical errors caused by L1 interference**

Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) emphasized that not all errors that L2 learners make is because of L1 interference (p.138). Nonetheless, one would ask what is the cause of the small number of interlingual errors that do occur? One of the causes that Dulay,Burt and Krashen (1982) pointed out is that interlingual errors are caused by environmental conditions. They further explained that L2 learners would fall back to

their L1 when they are forced to use the L2 when they are not prepared to use do so or when students are given timed translation tasks to produce the target language. There are many studies that have looked into the issue of L1 interference in the production of erroneous English structure and most of the studies have dealt with the written form.

Khazriyati Salehuddin, Tan and Maros (2006) investigated the interference of the Malay language in the production of erroneous English structures among Malaysian secondary English learners using Contrastive Analysis. They found that Malay learners of English have problems with determiners and a large number of errors occurred due to interference of the Malay grammar although not all errors are due to mother tongue interference.

Nor Hasimah Jalaluddin, Norsimah Mat Awal and Kesumawati Abu Bakar (2008) conducted a study on 315 Form Two students in Malaysia looking at the reasons for the inability of students to be proficient in English after 11 years of learning the language. The study found that students have problems in the area of grammar, particularly in the aspects of morphology and syntax. The attributing factor is the different grammatical structures between Malay and English whereby Malay does not have morphological markers for adverbs (i.e. -ly), plurality (i.e. -s, -es) and the superlative form for adjectives (i.e. -er,-est).

### **2.7.2 Grammatical errors in the spoken form**

There have been some researches that have looked into the issue of grammatical errors made in the spoken form. Ting , Mahanita Mahadhir and Chang (2010) studied the grammatical errors in the spoken English of university students who are less proficient in English. In their paper they found that based on Dulay, Burt and Krashen's (1982) surface structure taxonomy, the major ways by which students modify the target forms are misformation and omission with 38.18% and 34.02% respectively whereas

addition of elements or misordering are less frequent with 17.57% and 3.47% respectively. Based on the linguistic description of errors, the most frequent errors made by less proficient students involve prepositions and question forms with 20.67% and 14.89% respectively. This is followed by word form, article and verb form errors.

Ainon et al. (2013) used the same framework as Ting *et al* (2010) but Ainon et al's (2013) research focused on the errors produced by English for Academic Purposes (EAP) students in their oral presentation. There was no mention of the subjects' level of proficiency in Ainon et al's study and even though Ting et al's (2010) research involved less proficient students, their findings are quite similar to those of Ainon *et al* (2013) as both concluded that the most obvious errors involved misformation. Ainon et al (2013) had a total of 50.24% errors for misformation. However, this is followed by omission with 24.21%, addition with 23.96% and finally misordering with 1.59%. Ting et al (2010) and Ainon et al (2013) results differ in the positioning of omission and addition as Ainon et al (2013) has a higher percentage of omission errors.

Ting *et al*'s study found that most students had problems involving prepositions and question forms whereas Ainon *et al* (2013) found that most students had problems with verb forms, word forms and articles. The present study will to some extent replicate the research of Ting *et al* (2010) and Ainon *et al* (2013) especially in terms of the framework used; however the present study will look at students' errors across different levels of proficiency.

Dulay *et al* (1982) pointed out that during the early stages of L2 acquisition, learners will make a lot of omission errors (p.155). They further added that "in intermediate stages when learners have been exposed to more of the language, misformation,

misordering, or overuse of grammatical morphemes are likely to occur” (Dulay *et al*, 1982). Ting *et al* (2010) supports the findings of Dulay *et al* (1982) in that lower level students make a lot of omission errors even though the percentage is lower than misformation as the difference is not big which is about a 4% difference.

Hojati (2013) investigated the oral performance of advanced-level Iranian EFL students. The oral presentations of the participants were recorded and then grammatical, lexical and pronunciation errors featuring in them were identified, categorized and analyzed. The results indicated that even advanced learners commit numerous errors in all the foregoing categories which are grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Most errors were made especially in pronunciation and grammar. In terms of grammatical errors, Hojati (2013) found that the use of articles had the highest frequency with a total of 12 errors, and errors in the use of clauses and prepositions had the second and third highest frequencies with 11 and 8 number of errors respectively.

### **2.7.3 Grammatical errors in the written form**

In view of the dearth of research on grammatical errors in the area of spoken English, studies done on written work using the same framework as the current study could also inform the current study. Lee (2002) found that the ranking of errors in terms of frequency among undergraduates in The People’s Republic of China, Hong Kong and Taiwan was in the following order: misformation, omission, addition and misordering. Lee’s (2002) study was based on the written work of undergraduates and the researcher used a combination of two methods, namely, Contrastive Analysis and the surface strategy taxonomy. Lee (2002) concluded that “grammatical differences

between Chinese and English lead to errors during the process of writing English. A majority of errors made by the learners from the three regions are the result of interference and learners at an advanced level do not inevitably produce more intralingual errors”(p.5).

Alhaysony (2012) used the Surface Structure Taxonomy to study the errors produced by Saudi female students in their use of articles (the, an and a). The researcher revealed that from 100 written samples, omission errors were the most frequent whereas substitutions were the least. Out of all the omission errors identified, omission of the article ‘a’ was the most frequent (54.7%) and the least frequent error involved the indefinite article ‘an’(4.4%). Alhaysony (2012) also added that in terms of addition errors, the definite article ‘the’ was the most frequent(72.7%) because “it correlates with the fact that the definite article is used widely in the Arabic language than in English” (p.64). Alhaysony (2012) concluded that students make interlingual errors because they are learning a second language and they are not familiar with the target language and the only language that they are familiar with is their own language, so they transfer their grammatical rules into the target language and make errors.

Wee *et al* (2010) conducted a study on the written verb-form errors found in the EAP writing of 39 second year learners pursuing a three- year diploma in a Malaysian public university using Dulay *et al*'s (1982) framework. Their study revealed that the highest number of errors was in the omission of verb-forms in the area of the third person singular verb (-s/-es/-ies) while the frequency of error of addition and misformation were almost the same whereas ordering had the least number of errors. Interestingly with regard to addition errors, the addition of the suffix (-s/-es/-ies) was



the highest error followed by addition errors of the “be” verb. Wee et al (2010) concluded that “the third person singular present tense and the “be” verb were extremely difficult for the subjects to master” and this may be due to the absence of the –s/-es/-ies inflection and “be” in the Malay language (p.21).

Similar to Wee’s (2010) findings, Saadiyah Darus and Subramaniam (2009) also found that some of the secondary school students in their study did not know how to use the suffix ‘s’ and concluded that it is because the Malay language does not have plural markers. Saadiyah Darus and Subramaniam (2009) analyzed 72 essays written by 72 form four students at a secondary school in Malaysia. They discovered that the six most common errors committed by the participants concerned the singular/plural form, verb tense, word choice, preposition, subject verb agreement and word order. They concluded that the participants have problems in acquiring standard grammatical rules in English.

Rosli Talif and Edwin (1989) discovered that students in rural schools have difficulties with the verb form compared to other grammar items. On the other hand, urban students did not have similar problems with the verb form but they had problems in other areas especially in subject verb agreement.

Ali Nezami and Mousa Sadraie Najafi (2011) studied error types in the writing of Iranian EFL learners across different levels of proficiency. They aimed to see whether there was significant difference between the participants’ language proficiency level and error types in writing. From the study, they revealed that there were statistically significant differences among proficiency groups on overall error types that students made in their composition. The statistical analyses also revealed that the frequency of occurrence of error types in each group was different.

This section has looked into issues of error types in terms of the spoken and written form. Overall, it can be concluded that the studies above showed that mastering the grammar of a language in both spoken and written forms is a problematic area for students regardless of which level they are at.

## **2.8 Summary**

The present chapter has looked into a considerable number of studies that have investigated grammatical errors in the spoken and written forms using various methods and different results were obtained. A focal point, worth mentioning, is that most of the studies that have been reviewed have not paid due attention to the grammatical errors in the spoken form across different proficiency levels even though there are some studies like Ting et al (2010) and Aion et al (2013) which only focused on a particular group of students while there have been many studies done on the written form as well. The present study, thus, aims to fill this gap.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

This study is designed to look at the grammatical errors matriculation students at a public university make in their spoken English across proficiency levels. This study aims to look into the types of errors students make based on Dulay, Burt and Krashen's (1982) surface structure taxonomy and the frequency of these errors.

#### 3.2 Setting

The study was conducted at a matriculation centre, also known as a centre for foundation studies, at a public university in Kuala Lumpur. The centre is one of the highly sought after places especially for SPM (*Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia*) holders who are seeking to pursue their studies at institutions of higher learning.

The objective of the matriculation centre is to prepare students for admission into the bachelor degree programmes of the university. The programmes offered at the centre are science, arts and language programmes. The basic requirement for English to enter the science and arts programmes is a gred B in SPM, and to enter the language programme, a gred A in English at SPM level is required.

#### 3.3 Subjects

Students in this study are Malaysians whose first language is Malay. They are enrolled at a matriculation centre which is equivalent to Pre University level. The data for this study was obtained from simulated oral interactions of 32 group discussions whereby for each level there were 8 group discussions. Each group consist of either 3 or 4 group members and a total of 117 students were involved in the present research. The students are matriculation students consisting of first year students and some repeating students. The repeating students have to repeat the same level because they

failed the English Proficiency Test the first time around, so they repeat the same level in the following semester. English is a compulsory subject for all matriculation students in order for them to be able to register for a degree programme once they have completed their studies at the foundation level.

At the beginning of semester 1, during registration week, new intake students have to sit for an English placement test that will place them in different levels starting from level 1 to level 6. However, there are only four levels that are offered to local students which start from Level 3 until Level 6. Levels 1 and 2 are for students who do not have any knowledge of English and these two levels are relevant for foreign students who are enrolled in the institution and do not have any basic knowledge of English. For the purpose of this present study, the levels that are tested are levels 3, 4, 5 and 6 because the students are local students and they have been exposed to the English language since primary school up to secondary school. Levels 3 and 4 are lower levels whereas levels 5 and 6 are upper levels. Basically, levels 3 to 5 are for intermediate students. The difference between the three is level 3 is lower intermediate, level 4 is intermediate, level 5 is upper intermediate and level 6 is advanced.

In the placement test, students have to answer reading comprehension questions and write an opinion based essay. Based on their reading and writing results they will be placed in their respective levels. Both tests are graded according to a particular grading scheme and students who achieve band 5.5 and above are exempted from taking the English classes. However, those who do not achieve the required band will be placed in their respective levels based on their writing band scores.

The writing band is based on a grading scheme adopted from IELTS Task 2 writing band descriptors (public version) that is reproduced in Appendix 1. Students who only achieve Band 2 for writing will be placed in Level 3, Band 3 will be placed in Level 4, Band 4 will be placed in Level 5 and Band 5 will be placed in Level 6.

At the end of the semester, students have to sit for another test called EPT (English Proficiency Test). The test covers writing, reading and speaking components. The writing test is divided into two which Task 1 involving data analysis and Task 2, an opinion based essay. The writing component is similar to IELTS. For the present research, data was collected during the speaking test. The nature of the speaking test is explained in the next section.

### **3.3 Instrument**

The instrument that was employed to gather the data was an oral test that was carried out in week 13.

#### **3.3.1 Recording Process**

The data for the research was collected in week 13 when the students sit for an exit English exam. Students had to answer reading comprehension questions, write an analysis based on a non-linear text and an opinion based essay and take an oral test. For the purpose of this study, data was only taken from the oral test where students carried out group discussions.

They were placed in groups of three or four and they performed a group discussion as part of the course assessment. The group discussion comprises 2 procedures. First, students are given 2 minutes to respond to the given topic individually. Next, they are given 10 – 15 minutes to complete the discussion as a group. During the discussion, the examiner will just remain silent and observe the discussion. In grading the students, the examiners are given a grading scheme which is taken from IELTS speaking band descriptors (public version) that is reproduced in Appendix 2.

For each level, 8 group discussions were analyzed and all together there were 32 groups. The total number of hours analyzed was 4 hours. The topics for the discussion were on technology, education, social issues, health and others. Each group will get a different topic, however there are some groups that will get the same topic because the timing of the examination was at the same time. The questions that were asked were opinion based questions whereby students need to give their opinion about the topic and discuss it with their group members. An example of the question is “ Animals should be kept in zoos. What is your opinion?”.

The group discussions were audio-taped for the purpose of this study with the consent of the students, instructors and institution. During the recordings, the researcher was not present to monitor the discussion. The spoken data was transcribed and analyzed for grammatical errors using the Surface structure taxonomy of Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982, p.50). The errors were analyzed from the group dialogues.

### **3.3.2 Transcribing**

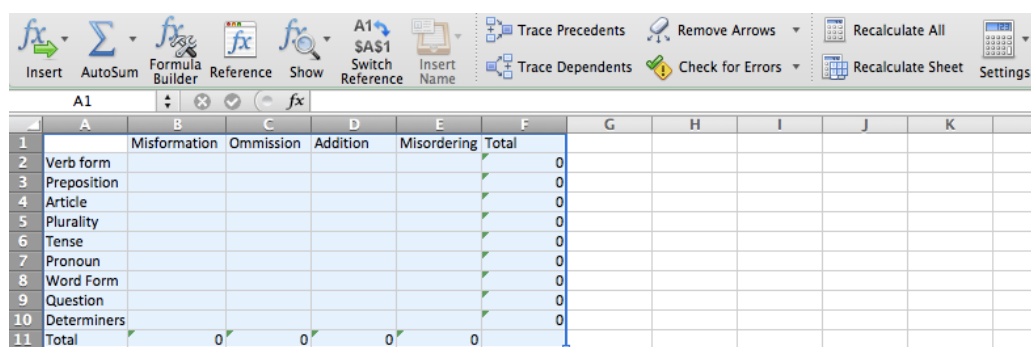
There were some parts of the audio recording that cannot be deciphered and it was indicated as *\*\*\*inaudible*. Severe errors that cannot be understood were put in brackets as such {}. When transcribing the recordings, the researcher used R1, R2, R3 and R4 to represent student 1, student 2 etc.

### 3.4 Data analysis

The data gathered from the oral test was transcribed and then analyzed in order to determine the types of errors that students make and the frequency of these errors across proficiency levels.

#### 3.4.1 Method of Analysis

The transcribed oral interaction data were examined for grammatical errors using the surface strategy taxonomy of Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982,p.50). In the first step of analyzing the errors, the researcher identified the errors and then categorized them using the surface strategy taxonomy. There are four types of errors made by students based on the surface strategy taxonomy, which are omission, addition, misformation and misordering. For the purpose of this study, the four types of errors will be analyzed in terms of preposition, question form, word form, article, verb form, subject verb agreement, plural form, tense and pronoun. The grammatical aspects selected were also the ones analyzed in Ting et al (2010) and Ainon et al (2013). The present research will also focus on the same grammatical aspects in order to be able to make comparisons with the findings of other local studies. The transcribed scripts were analyzed manually and the results tabulated as below:



	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L
1												
2	Verb form	Misformation	Omission	Addition	Misordering	Total						
3	Preposition					0						
4	Article					0						
5	Plurality					0						
6	Tense					0						
7	Pronoun					0						
8	Word Form					0						
9	Question					0						
10	Determiners					0						
11	Total	0	0	0	0	0						

Figure 3.1: Table for tabulating data

When analyzing the transcribed scripts, the symbol \* was used to show errors and ^ was used to show missing words.

### 3.4.2 Framework

In the present study, the framework that is used is the surface strategy taxonomy that emphasizes the ways surface structures are altered. There are four ways in which learners alter a language. The four ways are omission, addition, misformation and misordering (Dulay, Burt & Krashen, 1982).

#### 3.4.2.1 Omission errors

Omission errors are described as “the absence of an item that must appear in a well formed utterance” (Dulay et al., 1982 p.154). For example, in a sentence there are two types of morphemes, which are content morpheme and grammatical morpheme. Content morphemes are words that carry the referential meaning of a sentence or in other words when someone hears the words, he or she can deduce a meaningful sentence. They can be nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. On the other hand, grammatical morphemes are words that have a minor role in conveying the meaning of a sentence. Examples of grammatical morphemes are:

- i. noun and verb inflections like the *-s* in *birds*, the *-’s* in *Mother’s*, the *-ed* in *looked* and the *-ing* in *laughing* ;
- ii. articles such as *a*, *the*, etc ;
- iii. prepositions like *in*, *on*, *under* ,etc and
- iv. verb auxiliaries such as *is* , *will*, *can*, etc.

For the purpose of this study, errors on content morphemes are categorized under word form and pronoun whereas grammatical morpheme errors are categorized under verb form, preposition, article, plurality, determiners and tense. Wee et al (2010) gave some examples of omission errors such as omission of:



- i. -ed marker in simple past tense  
Example: ‘Yesterday, the car knock(-) the man’
- ii. –s marker in the verb after the third person singular noun or pronoun  
Example: ‘Student think(-)’
- iii. the ‘be’ verb in a sentence  
Example: ‘ Most of us (-) very weak’
- iv. the –ing form from a gerund  
Example: ‘Swim is my hobby’

(Wee et al, 2010, p.17)

Ting et al (2012) and Ainon et al (2013) also gave some examples of omission errors from their data:

- i. Preposition  
Example: We can go ^ buy this bag
- ii. Question- omission of auxiliary verb  
Example: How much ^ it,it it cost?
- iii. Article  
Example: ...one who is not entitled to make any claim against ^ government.
- iv. Verb form  
Example: It ^ also good for...for our reading
- v. Plurality- ‘s’ marking is left out  
Example: We have many other colour^

- vi. Pronoun- omission of possessive pronoun ('s)

Example: Ah? Who are they? Umm-My cousin. My cousin^ friend.

### 3.4.2.2 Addition Errors

Additions are characterized by “ the presence of an item which must not appear in a well-formed utterance” (Dulay, Burt and Krashen, p.156). According to Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982), there are three types of addition errors made by L1 and L2 learners, which are double marking, regularizations and simple addition. The first type of addition error is called double marking errors which are described as “the failure to delete certain items which are required in some linguistic constructions, but not in others” (Dulay et al., 1982, p.156). For example, in terms of tense formation, the tense marker is placed on the first verb. The examples below are double marking addition errors:

She *didn't went/goed*. (Past tense)

He *doesn't eats*. (Present tense)

Wee et al (2010) characterized double marking as “ the marking of two items for the same feature” (p.17). They gave examples such as below for tense

“ he doesn't *respects*” (Tense)

“The students didn't *plagiarized*” (Tense)

(Wee et al,2010, p.17).

The second type of addition error is called regularization and it is described as “those in which a marker that is typically added to a linguistic item is erroneously added to exceptional items of given class that do not take a marker (Dulay et al., 1982, p.157).

For example in the case of the word *salmon*, the plural form for salmon is identical with the singular form. Therefore, if someone puts the plural form of *salmon* as *salmons*, the person is committing the regularization addition error.

Wee *et al* (2010) explained that “in some cases “the past tense marker may be redundantly added”, for example:

‘She *cutted* the fruits last night’”(p.17).

Even though Wee *et al* (2010) did not label this type of error as a regularization addition error but if we were to refer to Dulay *et al* (1982), the above example illustrates a regularization addition error.

The third type of addition error is called simple addition and when an addition error involves neither double marking or regularization, it is considered a simple addition error. Basically, simple addition is “the use of an item which should not appear in a well-formed utterance” (Dulay *et al.*,1982, p.158). For example, in terms of modal verbs whereby students may add *-s/-es/ies/-ed/-ing* after the modal verb such as, “it might raining...” and “teachers will studied..”. Overall, these three types of addition errors show that students have acquired some basic rules, but it is a matter of them understanding successfully and applying the existing knowledge of the grammatical structure.

Ting *et al* (2010) and Aionon *et al* (2013) contributed some further examples from their data to illustrate addition errors:

I. Preposition

Example: I will to\* buy this bag

II. Question

Example: May I know what\* the colour you would like?

III. Verb form

Example: I would like to buy a newspaper, the Sun, umm which is\* I heard has an interesting article about...

IV. Plurality

Example: It's at the bottom of- the second rows\*

### 3.4.2.3 Misformation errors

The third way a learner may alter the language is by misformation. It is described as the use of the wrong form of morpheme or structure (Dulay et al., 1982, p.158). There are three types of misformations, which are regularization, archi-forms and alternating forms. Regularization errors are those in which a regular marker is used in place of an irregular one, as in *runned* for *ran* or *gooses* for *geese* (Dulay et al., 1982, p.158). Archi-form errors happen when the selection of one member of a class of forms is used to represent others in the class as a common characteristic. For example a learner may select one English demonstrative adjective such as *this*, *that*, *these* and *those* to be used in many forms and to represent the entire class of demonstrative adjectives. For example,

that dog

that dogs

Alternating forms come into the picture as learners' vocabulary and grammar enhance; they tend to make archi-forms errors in alternation of various members of a class with each other. For example for the demonstrative:

those dog

this cats

Some examples that were taken from Ting et al (2010) and Ainon et al (2013) are:

I. Preposition

Example: Wait for me at\* this Sunday-umm-at 7a.m

II. Question

Example: Are\* you remember my birthday party on this Thursday?

III. Word form

Example: Oh...ok...I'll receive your invited\*. And I understand for your assignment to do. Thank you for your inviting\*

IV. Verb form

Example: Oh, no wonder it ...have\* sold out because...

V. Plurality

Example: But we have a\* yellow colour

VI. Pronoun

Example: Umm- he- His body is-umm tall and look-umm-handsome also [laugh] and at the same time he introduce his\*, hisself\*

#### 3.4.2.4 Misordering errors

Finally, learners also make misordering errors. It is the incorrect placement of a morpheme or a group of morphemes in an utterance (Dulay et al., 1982, p.162). For example, in the utterance

He is all the late time.

*all the time* is misordered.

Some examples provided by Ting et al (2010) and Ainon et al (2013) are as follows:

i. Question

Example: So you are\* really free today?

ii. Verb form

Example: But you *don't forget*\*...I...I...I bring your...

### 3.5 Summary

The diagram below summarizes the ways surface structures are altered:

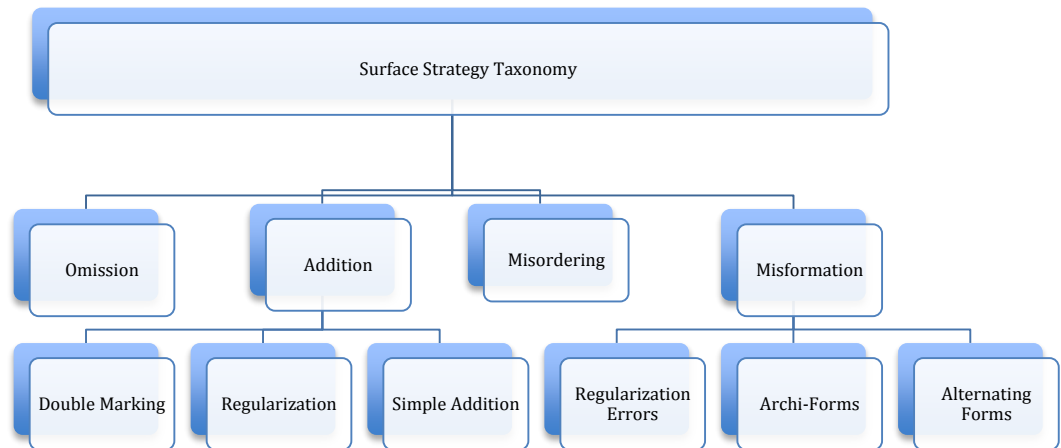


Figure 3.2: Surface Strategy Taxonomy

This chapter has described the subjects of the present study, the framework being used and the methods of data collection. The data obtained will be analyzed and discussed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to identify and categorize the errors made by matriculation students in their oral test across proficiency levels. The study aims to answer the following research questions:

- i. What are the types of grammatical errors made in the spoken English of matriculation ESL learners of different proficiency levels?
- ii. What is the frequency of occurrence of error types in each level of proficiency?

In this chapter, the results from the analysis of grammatical errors across proficiency levels in spoken English are presented. In the excerpts from the oral interactions, \* is used to indicate error and ^ is used for missing elements in the utterances. Where relevant, reference is made to related findings from other error analysis studies on grammatical errors in both written and spoken English.

The next section will present the results of an analysis of grammatical errors in the spoken form based on the surface structure taxonomy starting from level 3 until level 6. Then an overall analysis is done based on the results of the error analysis. Next, a linguistic description of errors is presented starting from level 3 until level 6 and finally an overall analysis of the linguistic description is presented.

## 4.2 Results based on the surface structure taxonomy for Level 3, 4, 5 & 6

An examination of errors based on the surface structure taxonomy shows that for Level 3 students the most frequent error made by students was misformation with 281 errors, followed by omission with 186 errors, then addition with 146 errors and finally misordering with 31 errors.

Table 4.1: Frequency of grammatical errors in Spoken English for Level 3

	Number	Percentage
Misformation	281	44
Omission	186	29
Addition	146	23
Misordering	31	5
Total	644	100

Level 4 has a slightly different pattern whereby omission has the highest with 207 errors followed by misformation 185 errors. The position for addition and misordering is the same as level 3 with 74 errors and 9 errors, respectively. In terms of the total number of errors for Level 3 and 4, there are fewer errors in Level 4 which had 475 errors as compared to 644 errors for Level 3.

Table 4.2: Frequency of grammatical errors in Spoken English for Level 4

	No of errors	Percentage (%)
Misformation	185	39
Omission	207	44
Addition	74	16
Misordering	9	2
Total	475	101*

\*Total percentage does not add up to 100 due to rounding off error

For level 5 students, the most common errors pertained to misformation with 128 errors, followed by omission with 50 errors, addition with 48 errors and misordering with 20 errors.



Table 4.3: Frequency of grammatical errors in Spoken English for Level 5

	No of errors	Percentage
Misformation	128	52
Omission	50	20
Addition	48	19
Misordering	20	8
Total	217	99*

\*Total percentage does not add up to 100 due to rounding off error

The most common way level 6 students modify the target forms was by misformation with 119 errors. There was a big gap between misformation and omission whereby the frequency for omission was 26 and addition was 20 errors. Finally there were only 10 errors that concerned the element of misordering.

Table 4.4: Frequency of grammatical Errors in Spoken English for Level 6

	Frequency	Percentage
Misformation	119	68
Omission	26	15
Addition	20	9
Misordering	10	6
Total	175	100

Overall, it can be seen that across the proficiency levels from level 3 to level 6 the most common errors made had to do with misformation. The high incidences of misformation errors indicate that students actually know the grammatical feature however they produced the wrong form of the feature. Level 3 and 4 students had quite high frequencies of misformation and omission errors. However, level 3 and 4 differs in the positioning of misordering and omission as level 4 students have a higher frequency in omission than in misformation errors. Dulay and Burt (1982) stated that omission

errors are found in greater number during the early stages of L2 learning whereas in intermediate stages, misformation, misordering and addition are likely to occur (p.155). While, Levels 3 and 4 students comprise lower intermediate and intermediate level students, the occurrence of omission errors was still quite high.

The results from the research done by Ting et al (2010) on the errors made by students who are less proficient are similar with regard to misformation error. However, in the present study there is a higher frequency of addition errors as compared to omission but in Ting et al (2010), the frequency of omission errors was higher than addition errors. Aionon et al (2013) study, which was based on oral presentation errors made by students of an English for Academic Purposes course, also showed similar results whereby misformation accounted for the majority of the grammatical errors followed by omission and addition. In the present study, it can be said that students with a high level of proficiency also displayed the same pattern whereby misformation contributed to the highest frequency of errors; however, there was a big difference in the frequency of occurrence between misformation and the other types of errors based on the surface strategy taxonomy. The bar graph below summarizes the frequency of grammatical errors across the proficiency levels.

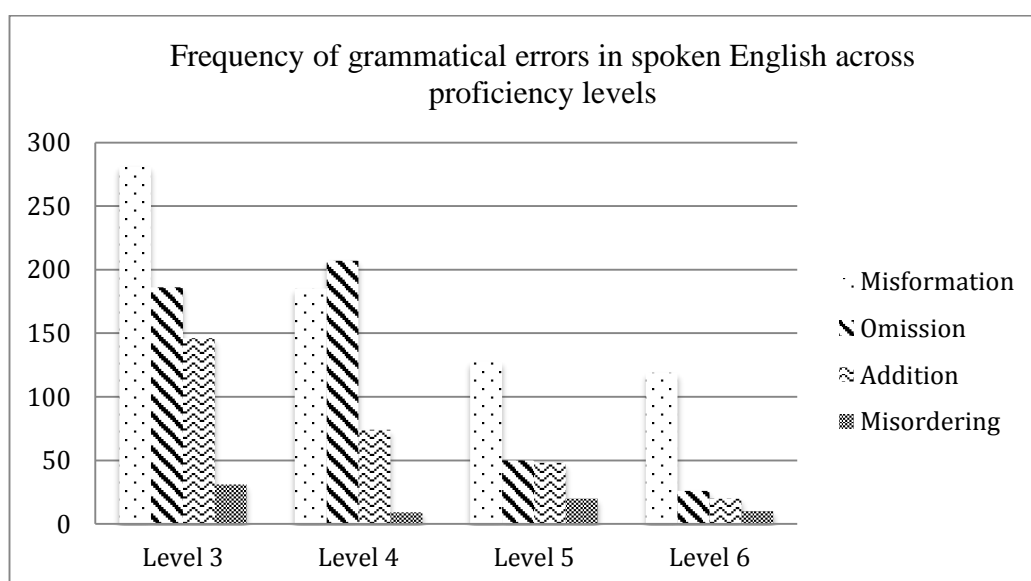


Figure 4.1 : Frequency of grammatical errors in spoken English across proficiency levels based on the surface strategy taxonomy.

### 4.3 Linguistic description of grammatical errors

This section is devoted to the linguistic analysis of grammatical errors produced by students in level 3 until level 6. This section will start with a presentation of the results for level 3 followed by a discussion of the results. The discussion will also include some samples from the transcribed scripts. The process is repeated for levels 4, 5 and 6.

#### 4.3.1 Linguistic description of errors for Level 3

Table 4.5 shows the frequency of errors made by Level 3 students in the oral interactions, based on a linguistic description of the errors.

Table 4.5: Linguistic description of errors for Level 3

	Misformation	Ommission	Addition	Misordering	Total
Verb form	65	43	27	4	139
Preposition	31	37	33	-	101
Article	7	25	49	-	81
Plurality	12	46	14	-	72
Tense	39	1	-	-	40
Pronoun	31	22	11	1	65
Word Form	47	12	11	22	92
Question	12	-	-	3	15
SVA	37	-	1	1	39
Total	281	186	146	31	

The most frequent errors made by level 3 students pertained to the use of the verb form, preposition and word form. The verb form registered the highest number with 139 errors and out of these 139 errors, 65 errors were due to misformation of the verb which is the highest.

An analysis of the errors in verb form reveals 4 main patterns of verb errors that student's make, which are:

- i. Misformation of the passive
- ii. Misformation of verb
- iii. Addition of verb
- iv. Omission of verb

Misformation of the passive occurs when students attempt to use the passive form but they produce the passive form incorrectly. Passive sentences enable the theme or the thing experiencing the action verb to be the subject of the sentence and the agent to move out of the subject position (Cowan, 2008).

Extract (1): When we go to school, we teach\* at\* class, we have we have friends, we have experience with other people,...

Extract (2): Today we will discuss about no animal should be keep\* as pet.

In (1), the verb “teach” should be in the passive form “are taught”. The error in the misformation of the passive can also change the meaning of the utterance as shown in (1). It can lead to miscommunication between the speaker and the listener. In (2), the student misformed the verb in the passive voice used with a modal (should+be+past participle). Instead of using the past participle form, the student just used the base form of the verb. This particular error was made when the student stated the topic of the discussion as shown clearly in the question paper; however, the student produced the passive form incorrectly. The student not only misformed the structure of the passive but also misread the word. The next student who spoke made the same error as well. Thus, although this statement was the topic of the discussion, students made the error repeatedly.

The words “agree” and “disagree” are often misformed or used in the wrong

way by students as shown in (3) and (4) below. Students tend to generalize verb forms suggesting that they may not be aware that verbs fall into four categories in terms of lexical aspect which are stative verbs and three types of dynamic verbs (activity verbs, achievement verbs and accomplishment verbs).

Extract (3): We can conclude that some of us are agree\* that...

Extract (4): I'm not agree\* with...

In the case of (3), the student used the verb “agree” which is a stative verb that describes states or situations rather than actions. As such the verb should have been in the simple present tense, i.e. “we can conclude that some of us *agree* that...”. Another example of an error with the word “agree” is illustrated in (4). Similar to (3), the word agree is formed with the “be” verb instead of “do” or “does”. Most of the errors involving the verb form for level 3 students had to do with subject verb agreement and tense.

Besides misformation of verb forms, the frequency of omission of the verb form is also quite high with a total number of 43 instances followed by addition errors with 27 instances. Omission of verb happens when there is supposed to be a verb in the sentence but the student omits it as in the examples below:

Extract (5): ... this ^ why I have the same opinion

Extract (6): ... because children maybe ^ not mingle with each other

In (5), the student omitted the verb “is” and in (6) the student omitted the verb “do”. Addition of verb errors happens when the verb is not needed in the sentence but it is added. For example:

Extract (7): I'm not totally agree with what you said just now because  
not all the product is\* can be blamed as wrong product...(addition)

(7) shows that the student added the verb “is” although it is not needed in that particular position preceding the modal verb ‘can’. There were only 4 misordering of verb form errors made by Level 3 students. A student misordered the verb “can” that is accompanied with the word “also”. For example:

Extract (8): But I think, we also can(\*) exercise at home...

The second highest number of errors made related to the use of the preposition. There were a total of 101 errors and out of these 101 errors, 37 errors were by omission, 33 errors were by addition, 31 errors were by misformation while there were no misordering of the preposition.

Extract (9): Excuse me, ^ my opinion, I cannot study on\* myself....(omission and misformation)

Extract (10):... so it can give bad effect to among\* children (addition)

Extract (11): thank you for\* the first speaker...(misformation)

In (9), the student omitted the preposition ‘in’. In (10), the preposition “among” is not needed in the utterance. In (11), the student used the preposition ‘for’ instead of ‘to’. Ting et al (2010) studied the grammatical errors made by less proficient students in oral communication and found that the incorrect use of the preposition was ranked first compared to other grammatical errors. Most students use the wrong preposition followed by addition of the preposition where it was not necessary and lastly omission of the preposition when it was in fact required. Ting et al (2010) concluded that “students are uncertain of the correct usage of prepositions...”(p.58).

After prepositions, the third highest number of errors made pertained to the use of the word form with a total of 92 errors whereby out of the 92 errors made, most level

3 students misformed a word with a total of 47 errors. Errors of word form in the study include the wrong usage of noun, adjective and adverb. In the present study, verbs are not included in this category because they are treated as a separate category. An example of a word form error is as follows:

Extract (12): ... so their father don't have education, not education\*...

In (12), instead of using the adjective form "educated" in the second instance, the student misformed the word by using the noun form "education".

Besides misformation, there was a high frequency of misordering of words. Students tend to misorder their words, for example in (13).

Extract (13): I ...I agree with you two but in my personally is different\*

In (13), not only the student misordered the words but also omitted some words as well, "in my personally is different" should in fact be "...personally, I have a different view". Compared to the other levels (level 4, 5 and 6), level 3 students had a high frequency for misordering of words.

Besides verb form, preposition and word form errors, other grammatical errors relate to the incorrect use of the article, plurality, pronoun, tense, subject verb agreement and lastly question form. There were a total of 81 errors in the use of articles. The highest number was for the addition of an article where it was not required with a total of 49 errors, followed by its omission 25 errors and misformation 7 errors. Plurality ranked the fifth in terms of the most number of errors with a total of 72 errors. Most level 3 students omit the plural marker -s when it is required resulting in a total of 46 errors, followed by addition of the plural marker when it was not needed with 14 errors and 12 errors for misformation of the plural form.

In the sixth place is the incorrect use of the pronoun with a total of 65 errors.

Misformation of the pronoun had the highest frequency with 31 errors, omission 22 errors, addition 11 errors and misordering 1 error. The category of grammatical error ranked seventh is tense with a total of 40 errors. The misformation of tense had the highest frequency of errors with 39 errors, followed by omission 1 error and there were no errors of addition and misordering of tense. Misformation of tense occurs when the students use a verb in a sentence but the verb is used in the wrong tense. For example instead of using the past tense the speaker used the present tense. For example, in (14), instead of using the past tense of the verb “want”, the student used the simple present tense.

Extract (14): ...I still remember a case that...one...one children\*... boy start...

want\* to be like superman, he want\* to fly from the high level of building...

Subject verb agreement is ranked in the eight position with a total of 39 errors; out of these errors, 37 errors were made because of the misformation of subject verb agreement , 1 error in addition and 1 error in misordering. Misformation of subject verb agreement occurs when the student used a verb after the subject, but, misformed it by omitting the –s for singular subject. For example:

Extract (15): ... the hero usually kill\* their enemies

Extract (16): Government hospital are\* better because their doctors is\* more professional than private hospital

Extract (17): ... homeschooling use\* a lot of money

In (15) and (17), the subject is singular but the verb does not agree with the subject. In (16), the student is aware that a verb follows a subject but he or she uses the wrong form of the verb whereby the subject is singular in “government hospital is better” and the subject is plural in “...their doctors are more professional...”. The results indicate that



the students know certain grammatical rules regarding verb usage, however, they tend to form it and use it in the wrong way.

Finally, the lowest number of errors pertains to the question form with a total of 15 errors. There were 12 errors of misformation, 3 errors of misordering and none for omission and addition. An example of the first two categories are shown in (15) and (19), respectively.

Extract (18): What...*whats* do you think Amy?

Extract (19): How... how *we can* solve the problem?

Throughout the data there were instances when some of the utterances that the level 3 students produced were not comprehensible and difficult to analyze. Many students produced fragmented utterances and many expected their friends to provide completion.

#### 4.3.2 Linguistic description of errors for Level 4

Based on the analysis of the errors made by Level 4 students, the highest number of errors pertained to the use of the verb form, followed by word form and pronoun.

Table 4.6: Linguistic description of errors for Level 4

	Misformation	Ommission	Addition	Misordering	Total
Verb form	55	71	7	3	136
Preposition	18	22	18	1	59
Article	4	37	17	-	58
Plurality	1	30	9	-	40
Tense	9	1	-	-	10
Pronoun	16	38	17	-	71
Word Form	59	7	6	5	77
Question	8	-	-	-	8
SVA	15	1	-	-	16
Total	185	207	74	9	

There are 136 errors made involving the verb form whereby the omission of verb made up a total of 71 errors, misformation of verb 55 errors and addition and misordering have a total of 7 and 3 errors, respectively.

The omission of the verb form resulted in 71 errors; some level 4 students omitted the 'be' verb as shown in (20) and others, the modal verb as shown in (21), for example:

Extract (20): ...so I think that woman ^ not suitable to work during night shift...

(omission)

Extract (21): ... I believe that woman ^ not be allow\* to work during night shift

Level 4 students tend to omit a verb at places where the verb is needed no different from Level 3 students. Besides omission of the verb form, the students also misform the verbs, for example:

Extract (22): when their... they are studies\* at home...

In (22), the student misformed the verb "study" where instead of "studies", it should have been in the present participle form "studying". There are quite a number of instances of misformation of the verb form in Level 4 students' utterances which resulted in 55 errors. There were only 7 errors involving the addition of the verb when it was not needed and 3 errors of misordering of the verb. For example:

Extract (23): students attendance to classes should not be made compulsory, this

is(\*) can encourage the student (addition)

Extract (24): ...people today have many ways to find to find knowledge to... to

their add education(\*) (misordering)

In (24), "to their add education" the verb "add" is supposed to be after the infinitive i.e, "to add to their education". The verb "is" in (23) is not needed in the utterance.

The second most common error was in the use of the word form, followed by pronoun, preposition, articles, plurality, subject verb agreement and tense. The ranking of the grammar items' in terms of frequency of errors is different from that of level 3's. However, for both level 3 and 4, errors to do with the question form ranked last.

### 4.3.3 Linguistic description of errors for Level 5

This sub section presents the linguistic description of errors for Level 5.

Table 4.7: Linguistic description of errors for Level 5

	Misformation	Omission	Addition	Misordering	Total
Verb form	18	15	18	3	54
Preposition	23	8	7	-	38
Article	4	11	13	-	28
Plurality	15	10	4	-	29
Tense	24	-	2	-	26
Pronoun	12	5	4	-	21
Word Form	19	1	-	17	37
Question	6	-	-	-	6
SVA	7	-	-	-	7
Total	128	50	48	20	

The distribution of errors made by Level 5 students displayed a different pattern from those made by students in levels 3, 4 and 6. The only similarity across all levels is that the highest frequency of errors made involves the verb form and the least number of errors is in the use of the question form. However, Level 5 results are similar to Level 3 in terms of the ranking of errors for verb form, preposition and word form. Most level 5 students have problems with the verb form, preposition and word form. Incorrect use of the plural marker ranked fourth followed by errors to do with the article, tense, pronoun, subject verb agreement and finally the question form.

#### 4.3.4 Linguistic description of errors for Level 6

This sub section presents the linguistic description of errors for Level 6.

Table 4.8: Linguistic description of errors for Level 6

	Misformation	Omission	Addition	Misordering	Total
Verb form	25	11	5	2	43
Preposition	6	-	7	-	13
Article	2	11	5	-	18
Plurality	1	3	3	-	7
Tense	25	-	-	-	25
Pronoun	14	1	-	-	15
Word Form	17	-	-	8	25
Question	4	-	-	-	4
SVA	25	-	-	-	25
Total	119	26	20	10	

The highest number of errors made by Level 6 students was also related to the verb form. The frequency of errors for the word form, tense and subject verb agreement is the same number, i.e 25 errors. The third most frequent error was the wrong usage of the article, followed by pronoun, preposition, plurality and finally question form.

The high incidence of verb form errors comprised 25 errors of misformation, 11 errors of omission, 5 errors of addition and 2 errors of misordering. There is a big difference between the number of errors of misformation and omission. Most of the verb form errors are caused by the misformation of the verb, omission of the verb, addition of the verb and misformation of gerund. Similar with the other levels, level 6 students also make errors in their use of the verb 'agree' as shown below in (25) and (26).

Extract (25): I'm\* totally agree with this statement...(misformation)

Extract (26): I am\* definitely disagree with your opinion...(misformation)

When looked into this problem further, some of these level 6 students started from the lower level and moved their way up to level 6. Although they are presently in Level 6, they continue to make certain types of errors. However, not all level 6 students make these types of errors as there are some who are in fact proficient.

Besides verb forms, word form also is a problem for students but not as many errors are made for word form. Errors in the usage of articles ranked third, followed by preposition, pronoun, plurality, questions and there were no errors for determiners.

#### **4.4 Discussion of the results based on linguistic description**

It can be seen that throughout level 3 to level 6, there is a similar pattern in terms of the highest and the lowest frequency of grammatical errors across the proficiency levels. Verb form being the most problematic area for students and question form being the least problematic. Aion et.al (2013) had similar findings as the present study. However, Aion's research was not across proficiency levels but was confined to third and fourth year students in an English for Academic Purposes class. Their findings are quite similar to the present study as they also found that most students have problems with verb forms and word forms.

On the other hand, Ting et.al (2010) had different results in their linguistic description of errors as compared to the present study. Ting et al (2010) found that the most problematic areas involved the use of the preposition, question form, article, plural form of nouns, subject verb agreement and tense. Grammatical errors in forming questions ranked the second most frequent in Ting's study. However, in the present study errors in forming questions is consistently ranked last in terms of frequency. This might be because of the nature of the task set to the students in Ting's study and the present study is different.

#### **4.4.1 Verb form errors.**

In the present study, verb forms was found to be the most difficult grammatical area for students. Verb forms consist of main verbs and a combination of auxiliary verbs and main verbs. In the present study, the categories subject verb agreement and tense are categorized separately and not under verb form. To resolve gray areas in distinguishing the three categories, the present researcher has settled on these guidelines in the error analysis which are also used by Ting et al (2010) and Ainon et al (2013).

Verb form errors involve the main verb or auxiliary verb being omitted in an utterance or being misformed in an utterance. Tense errors involve the wrong use of tense in an utterance whereas subject verb agreement errors are confined to errors in the third person in the present. These guidelines are a limitation to the framework as some of the categories in the surface structure taxonomy cannot then be applied. At the same time, this limitation cannot be avoided.

A study done by Rosli Talif and Edwin (1989) discovered that students in rural and urban schools in Malaysia have difficulties with the verb form compared to other grammar items. Wee et.al (2010) conducted a research looking exclusively at verb form errors in the EAP writing of 39 second year learners in a public university in Malaysia. Their results showed that most of their subjects made errors in terms of omission of the –s suffix in the area of third person singular verb (-s/-es/-ies) and the ‘be’ verb is often over generalized by omitting it or using it in the wrong way.

Comparing Wee et.al (2010) study with the present study, the present study found that most student misformed their verbs whereas Wee’s et.al results shows that students often omit their verbs. For the lower levels, 3 and 4, in the present study, the frequency

of students omitting their verbs was quite high but not as high as misformation of verbs. Based on the findings of the present study, teachers need to give extra attention to teaching their students about verb forms as it appears to be the most difficult area for students.

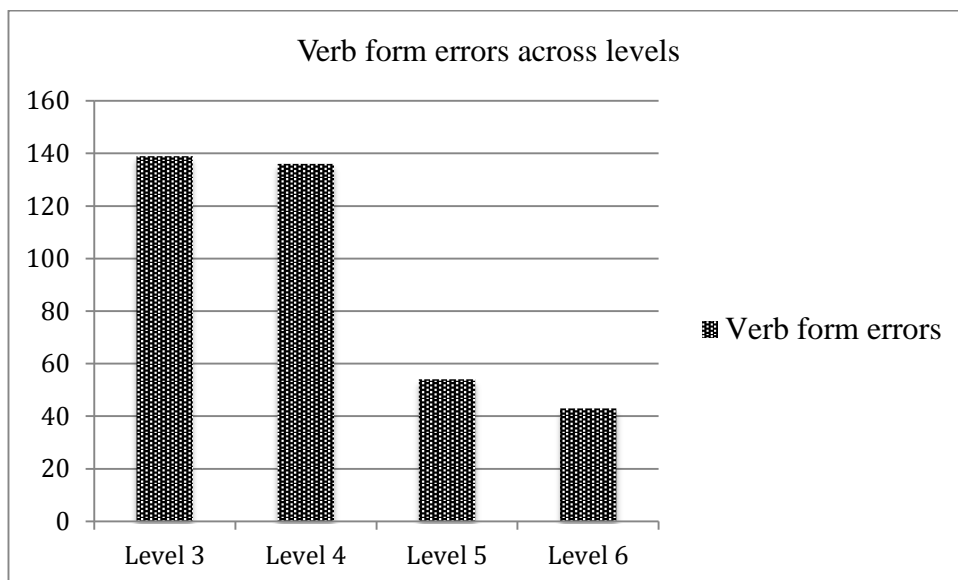


Figure 4.2: Frequency of verb form errors across proficiency levels

#### 4.4.2 Word form errors

Errors of word form include the incorrect use of the noun, adjective and adverb forms of the morpheme, for example the word “difference”, “different”, “differ” and “differently”. Word form is also a problematic area for students. This is consistent with the findings of Aiono et al (2013) and Ting et al (2010). Basically the problem is that students use the incorrect form of the noun, adjective and adverb especially when converting nouns to adjectives. There are certain instances as well when the word that the students used was not suitable in the context of the produced utterances.

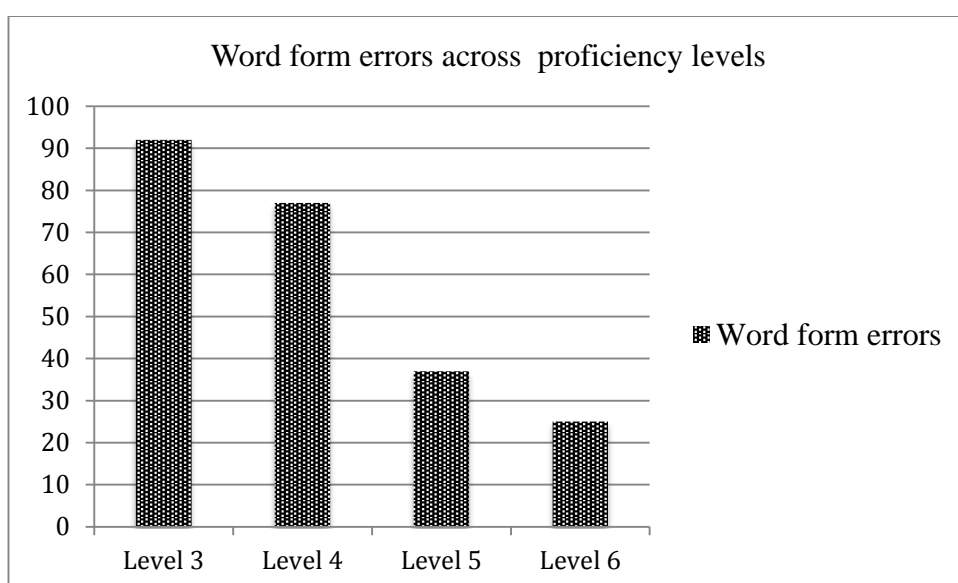


Figure 4.3: Frequency of word form errors across proficiency levels



### 4.4.3 Preposition errors

According to Cowan (2008), a preposition is a word that together with a following noun indicates a meaning related to location in space (in, on) or time (about, at), an instrumental meaning (by, with) or other such meaning (p.671).

The use of prepositions is also an area of difficulty for students. Level 3 students had the highest frequency of errors in their use of the preposition. Based on Ting et.al (2010) study on errors made by low proficiency students, the most common error pertained to the use of the preposition. As cited in Ting et.al (2010), the difficulty in mastering preposition usage according to Chodorow (2008) is “due to the great variety of linguistic functions that they serve” and it depends on the intention of the writer or speaker (p.24).

Students in Levels 4, 5 and 6 also produced preposition errors however there were not as many as those produced by level 3 students. For Levels 3 and 5, error in preposition usage ranked as the second most frequent. However, level 4 results show that it is ranked in the fourth position and for level 6 in the seventh place, in terms of frequency of preposition errors.

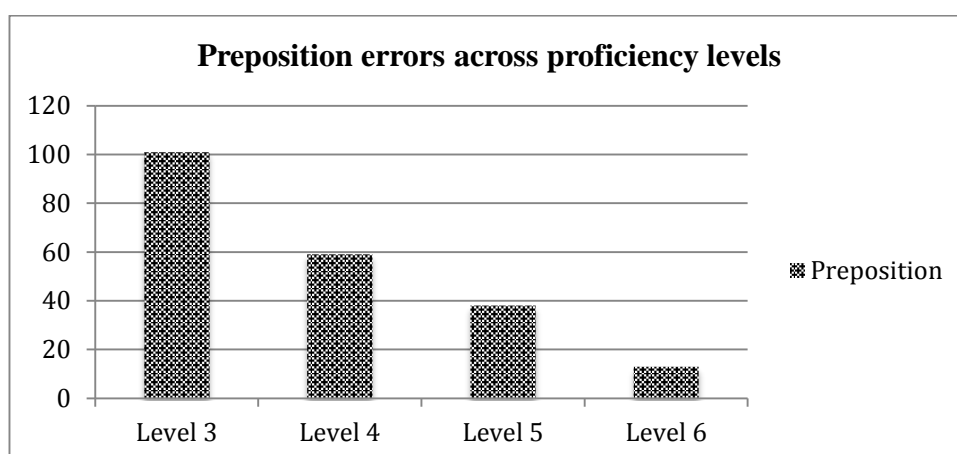


Figure 4.4: Frequency of preposition errors across proficiency level

#### 4.4.4 Article errors.

There are basically two types of articles in English which are the definite (the) and indefinite (a/an). Articles are a type of determiner. The definite article (the) appears before singular and plural count nouns as well as non count nouns. The indefinite article (a/an) appears before singular count nouns and it is used with noncount nouns only when it precedes a partitive (Cowan, 2008, p.219).

Level 3 students had the highest frequency of errors in article usage compared to the other levels with 81 instances. Out of 81 errors, 49 were addition errors and 25 omission errors. Level 3 students tend to add articles in places where it is not needed. In Ting et al (2010) study, they found that less proficient students tend to add articles unnecessarily and omit them when needed. This is a similar case with the findings of the present study. However, in the present study the frequency for addition is higher than that of omission.

Level 4 students produced a total of 58 errors related to article usage and displayed a different pattern from level 3 whereby errors in omission are higher than addition. Level 5 students produced a total of 28 errors and level 6 students, 18 errors. Across the levels fewer errors were made in the category of misformation and no error was found in the category of misordering.

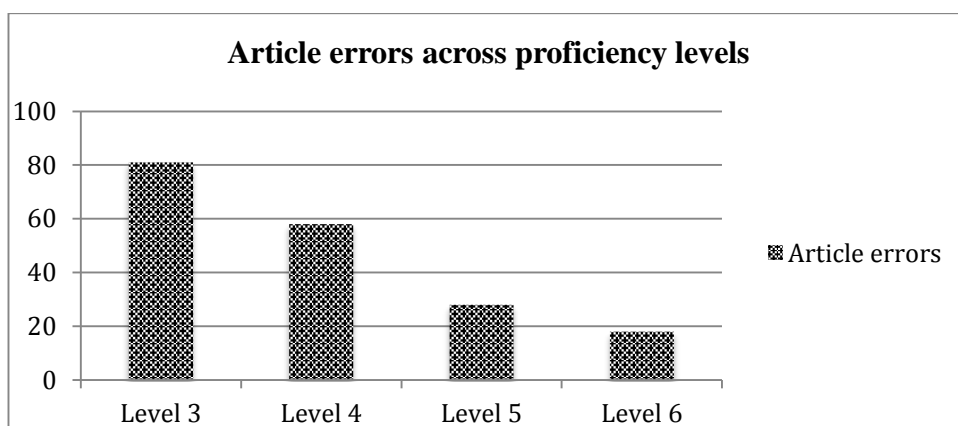


Figure 4.5: Frequency of article errors across proficiency levels

#### **4.4.5 Plural form errors**

Errors pertaining to plurality had to do with the misuse of the plural inflections ‘s’ and ‘es’. Inflections are affixes added to a root word to indicate a grammatical meaning. In English, ‘s’ or ‘es’ is added to indicate plurality.

In terms of plural form errors, level 3 students had the highest frequency with 72 errors compared to the other levels. Most level 3 students omit the plural marker with a total of 46 errors. Misformation consists of 12 errors and addition, 14 errors. Level 4 students also had omission as the most common error with 30 instances, followed by misformation and addition with 3 errors, respectively.

Level 5 students produced a total of 29 errors and the highest number of errors made pertained to the misformation of plurality with 15 instances, followed by omission with 10 errors and addition 4 errors. Level 6 students made a total of 7 errors with omission and addition being the highest with 3 instances each and 1 error due to misformation. Across the proficiency levels there were no misordering errors under the category of plurality.

There is a high frequency of errors related to plurality in level 3 and 4 in the category of omission. According to Maros et al (2007), as cited in Aion et al (2013), omission of the plural marker could probably be a result of mother tongue influence. Maros et al ‘s (2007) finding regarding the difficulty with plurality was based on a contrastive study of 120 essays by secondary one students. According to Nor Hasimah (2008), the plural inflection “does not exist in Austronesian languages including Malay. The absence of inflection clearly influences students’ acquisition of English” (p.111).

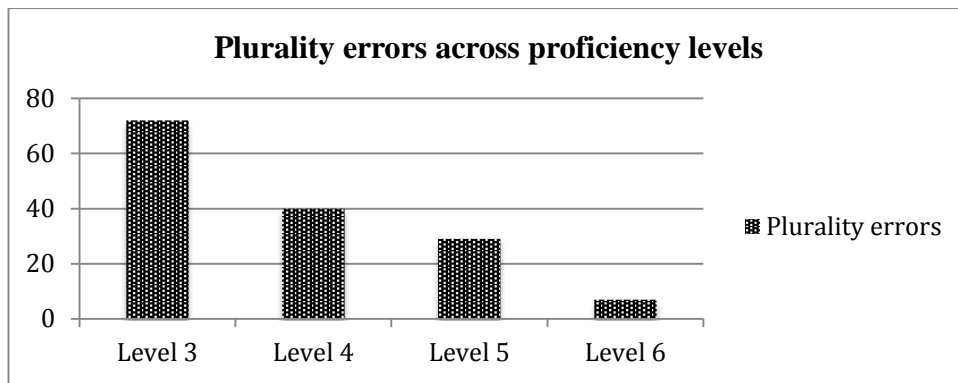


Figure 4.6: Frequency of plurality errors across proficiency levels

#### 4.4.6 Pronoun errors

According to Cowan (2008) “pronoun is a word that substitutes in some way for a noun phrase or a clause. A pronoun may be a personal pronoun, possessive pronoun, indefinite pronoun, reflexive pronoun or demonstrative pronoun” (p.671).

According to Ting et al (2010), the pronoun errors in their data involve certain types of pronouns:

- i. Incorrect use of personal pronouns to refer to gender
- ii. Incorrect form of reflexive pronouns
- iii. Incorrect use of relative pronouns for human and inanimate objects
- iv. Addition of relative pronouns
- v. Omission of possessive pronouns

(Ting et al, 2010, p.62)

Cowan (2008) listed the pronoun errors that ESL/EFL students make as follows :

- i. Selecting incorrect pronouns
- ii. Inserting unnecessary pronouns
- iii. Misidentifying antecedents
- iv. Omitting obligatory pronouns

In the case of pronoun usage, level 3 students produced a total of 65 errors, with misformation of the pronoun consisting of 31 errors followed by omission 22 errors, addition 11 errors and misordering 1 error. Level 4 students' displayed a pattern of pronoun errors that is different from Level 3 students as the frequency for omission is higher than misformation in level 4 compared to level 3. Students in Level 4 produced a total of 71 errors with omission, 38 errors, addition 17 errors and misformation 16 errors.

Students in Level 5 and level 6 also had misformation errors as the most common. Level 6 students made a total of 15 pronoun-related errors and out of the 15 errors, 14 errors were due to misformation and only one because of omission. Level 5 students made a total of 21 pronoun-related errors whereby 12 errors were because of misformation, 5 errors due to omission and 4 errors of addition.

Ting et al (2013) findings are similar to those of level 5 and 6. Ting et al (2013) also found that the most common kind of pronoun errors made by students related to misformation, followed by omission and then addition. Based on the graph below, level 4 students made the most errors in pronoun usage.

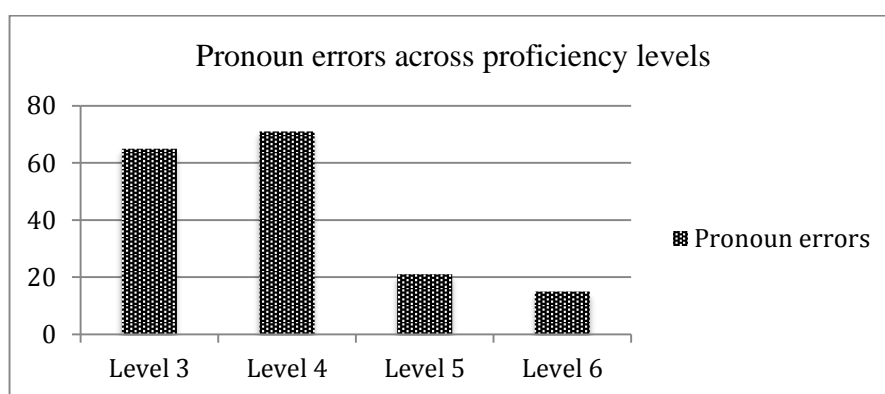


Figure 4.7: Frequency of pronoun errors across proficiency levels

#### 4.4.7 Subject verb agreement errors

Marlyna, Khazrati and Tan Kim Hua (2005) studied the occurrence of errors in subject verb agreement and the copula 'be'. The problem that occurs in subject verb agreement usage is when "the verb has to be inflected in the present tense to agree with the subject" (p.3). The writers believe that the reason why errors were made in subject verb agreement is because it does not exist in the Malay language (Marlyna et al, 2005).

Based on the graph below, the highest number of errors in subject verb agreement was produced by level 3 students and the second highest was by level 6 students. The frequency of subject verb agreement errors from level 3 to level 5 is on the decline, however, level six students produced a higher number of subject verb agreement errors compared to levels 4 and 5.

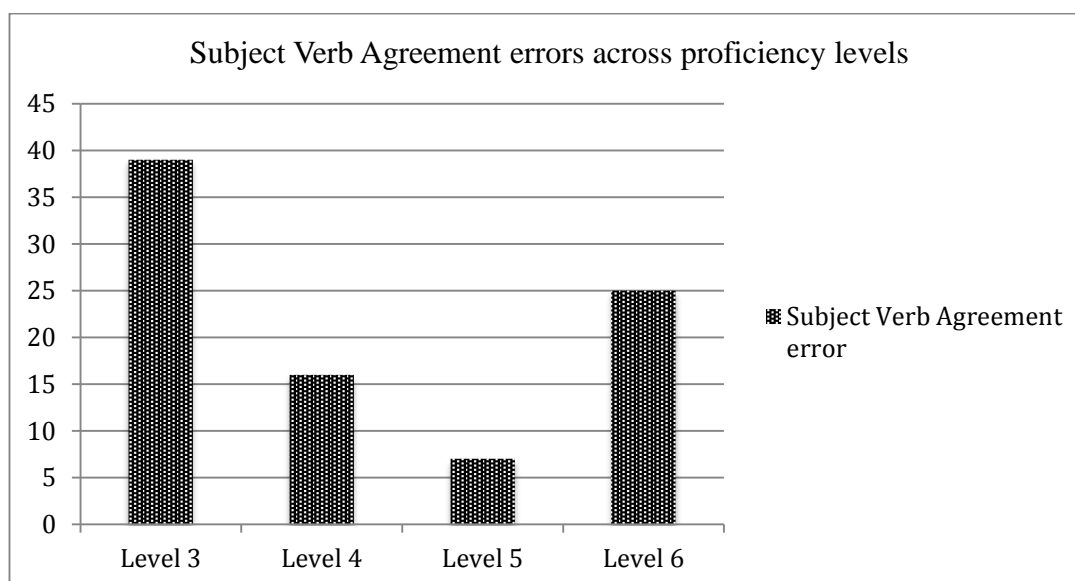


Figure 4.8: Frequency of subject verb agreement errors across proficiency levels

#### 4.4.8 Tense errors

Tense is a feature of verbs, which informs the time that an action occurs in relation to the moment of speaking. There are three dimensions of tense that are present, past and future. English marks only past and present time by inflections on verbs whereas future tense is expressed with *will* or *be going to*.

Ahmad Taufik Hidayah (2013) carried out a study focusing on the use of the simple present tense and the simple past tense in written essays among TESL college students and he found that the most common error committed by students is in the misformation of tense due to regularization. He also concluded that the source of the errors involve the incompetence of students in mastering the English grammar (Ahmad Taufik Hidayah, 2013).

Bardovi and Reynolds (1995) suggested two implications for teaching tense to ESL students:

1. More attention should be devoted to teaching verbs that pose more difficulty for students. For example activity verbs and stative verbs in the case of the simple past tense.
2. Frequency adverbs should be focused on as the clues to tense, since students tend not to consistently use these cues until much later in their learning.

(cited from Cowan 2008, p. 379)

Level 3 students produced the highest number of errors in tense, followed by level 5 and level 6. Level 4 students produced the lowest number of errors compared to the other levels and 9 out of 10 errors were errors of misformation.

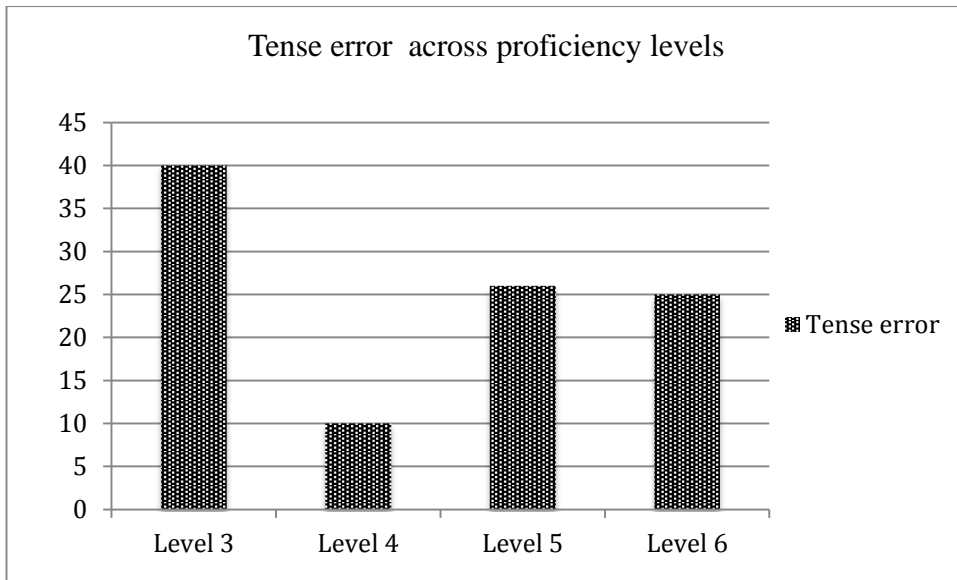


Figure 4.9: Frequency of tense errors across proficiency levels



#### 4.4.9 Question form errors

For errors related to the question form, level 3 students made 15 errors of which 12 errors were because of misinformation and 3 errors for misordering of the question structure. Level 4 students produced a total of 8 errors whereby all 8 errors were because of misinformation. Level 5 students made a total of 6 errors and all 6 were misformed while level 6 students made 4 errors all which were also misformed.

In the present study, the nature of the task given to the students does not require them to use a lot of question forms but there are certain parts of the conversation that require them to ask questions like “what is your opinion?” and “do you agree with me?”.

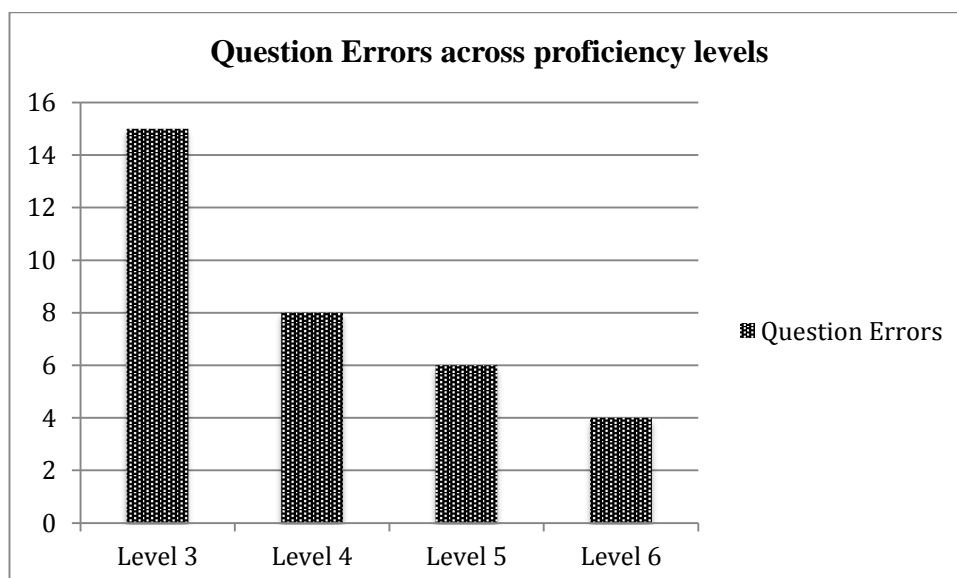


Figure 4.10: Frequency of question errors across proficiency levels.

## 4.5 Conclusion

To sum up, based on the surface structure description of grammatical errors identified in the oral data, the results show that level 3, 5 and 6 have the same pattern where the most frequent type of error is misformation, secondly omission, thirdly addition and finally misordering. Results for Level 4 showed a slight difference where the position of omission and addition is reversed.

Based on the linguistic description of the errors, the most problematic area for students is the verb form which is consistent across all levels with verb form having the highest frequency of errors. This is followed by word form across the levels. This finding is significant because it is not only in this study that students have displayed problems with the verb form and word form but this has also been evidenced in Ainon et al (2013) research. A summary of the results based on the linguistic description is shown below:

Table 4.9 : Summary of results based on linguistic description.

	<b>Level 3</b>	<b>Level 4</b>	<b>Level 5</b>	<b>Level 6</b>
1	Verb form 139 errors	Verb form 136 errors	Verb form 54 errors	Verb form 43 errors
2	Preposition 101 errors	Word form 77 errors	Preposition 38 errors	Word form Tense
3	Word form 92 errors	Pronoun 71 errors	Word form 37 errors	SVA 25 errors
4	Article 81 errors	Preposition 59 errors	Plurality 29 errors	
5	Plurality 72 errors	Article 58 errors	Article 28 errors	Article 18 errors
6	Pronoun 65 errors	Plurality 40 errors	Tense 26 errors	Pronoun 15 errors
7	Tense 40 errors	SVA 16 errors	Pronoun 21 errors	Preposition 13 errors
8	SVA 39 errors	Tense 10 errors	SVA 7 errors	Plurality 7 errors
9	Question 15 errors	Question 8 errors	Question 6 errors	Question 4 errors

## **CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The study examined the grammatical errors produced by matriculation students across proficiency levels, utilizing Dulay, Burt and Krashen's (1982) framework for surface structure descriptions together with an analysis of students' linguistic errors. This chapter will first summarize the present study and findings of the study. This is followed by a discussion of the implications arising from this study and some suggestions for future research.

### **5.2 Summary of the Study**

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the grammatical errors made by matriculation students in their oral examination. The study set out to identify and categorize the errors made by this particular group of learners and to determine the frequency with which the errors occurred. Specifically, the study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the types of grammatical errors made in the spoken English of matriculation ESL learners of different proficiency levels?
2. What is the frequency of occurrence of error types in each level of proficiency?

To gather the data for this study, audio recordings were made of group discussion that were carried out during an oral exam. The recordings were then transcribed and analyzed using the surface structure taxonomy by Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982).

### 5.3 Summary of Findings

In summarizing the findings of the present research, the two research questions will be discussed together because in identifying the types of error, the frequency of the errors is also considered. The types of grammatical errors produced were classified using the surface structure taxonomy that include errors of misformation, omission, addition and misordering. The results show that students make the most error by misformation of the grammar items. Levels 3, 5 and 6 had misformation as the most common type of error. However, for level 4, the highest frequency of errors related to omission. Even so, the difference between the number of misformation and omission errors produced is not much.

The results show that Level 3, 5 and 6 have the same pattern in terms of the ranking of the types of errors according to their frequency. The order of the types of errors for these three levels is misformation having the highest frequency, followed by omission, addition and misordering. However for level 4, there is a slight difference in the number of errors for misformation and omission whereby omission has the highest frequency of error, followed by misformation, addition and misordering.

In brief, it can be concluded that the way most students alter grammatical structures, regardless of their level of proficiency, is by misformation and omission. They tend to misform and omit certain structures when they speak.

In terms of linguistic description, there are some similar patterns across the proficiency levels. The highest frequency of errors related to the usage of verb forms, word forms and preposition while question forms had the least number of errors. For other grammatical items, there were differences according to level.

#### **5.4 Pedagogical Implications of the Findings**

This study has identified the common grammatical errors made by matriculation students and the ways in which they alter selected grammatical structures in their spoken English. The findings of this study may be used to allow for more effective teaching and learning of oral communication to be developed. These problematic areas need to be given more focus in class. Therefore, teachers and curriculum developers need to be aware of the common errors in order to develop methodologies and resources to improve students' oral performance.

A lot of research needs to be done on the problems of errors that have been identified in the present research. The types of errors that have been identified also need to be corrected and dealt with to improve students' language proficiency. The errors that are produced by students have to be a major concern for teachers because this shows that students have not internalized certain grammatical rules and more time needs to be spent on overcoming and preventing these errors.

## **5.5 Recommendations for Future Research**

Further research on students' errors could provide more insights on how to deal with such errors. There is a need for more exclusive and focused research on specific problematic areas that students face. For example research focused solely on verb forms or word forms will provide more detailed insights into the problem.

A different setting with a different sample and type of task would also contribute more insights on grammatical errors in the spoken form. It can be seen that there are some differences in the findings of the present study and Ting et al's (2013) study due to the different nature of the task set to the students. Other grammatical errors that were not examined in the present study also need to be analyzed. The present research is also focused on the second language learners in Malaysia and the data is small, so for future research a wider set of data is needed to contribute more insights on the issue of grammatical errors in the spoken form.

Other than that, the present researcher recommends that in future analyzing and comparing students' grammatical errors in both the written and spoken form side by side would contribute to greater understanding in the area of grammar. For example, by looking into the relationship between how students write and speak and whether there is a relationship between the two.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

This study has provided some insights into the types of grammatical errors that are produced by a particular group of second language learners. Verb forms seem to be the most difficult area for students to master, which includes subject verb agreement, verb tense, and the passive form. Word forms and prepositions also pose a problem to students. There are four ways in which students make their errors which are misformation, omission, addition and misordering.

It is hoped that this study has helped to identify the problems in grammar that students face when speaking English and it is hoped that this research will encourage teachers and curriculum developer to devise ways and means to tackle these problems.