Derived Verb Formation Errors among Tamil Vernacular School Students Based on Corder's (1973) Language Error Analysis Theory

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Abstract

The results of the 2024 Final Examination of Academic Session in a prestigious school indicated a decline compared to the previous year's examination outcomes. One of the contributing factors is the high frequency of spelling errors among students, particularly in words involving affixes, which consequently lead to grammatical errors. This phenomenon is more noticeable among students learning Malay as their second language. Consequently, this research is carried out to determine and examine the proficiency level of the usage of affixed derived verbs by Tamil Vernacular School students with specific focus on the derived verb formation. The findings of data gathered from the research show that mastery of derived verbs among 100 Year 5 students in Ladang Kinrara Tamil Vernacular School is below satisfactory level. This study employed a written test on derived verbs as the research instrument, and the findings substantiate that students are encountering difficulties in mastering the use of affixes in the formation of derived verbs. The most predominant errors faced are the incorrect choice of elements, inclusion of irrelevant elements, omission of required elements and erroneous sequencing of elements according to Corder's Language Error Analysis Theory (1973). These results highlight the urgent need to design more efficient pedagogical approaches to improve students' mastery of derived verb formation.

Keywords: Affix Usage, Derived Verbs, Grammatical Errors, Language Proficiency, Tamil Vernacular Schools

Introduction

Language education in Malaysia plays a crucial role in supporting the objectives of the Malaysia Education Curriculum (2013–2025) which underscores the importance of elevating Malay language proficiency among all students as a unifying force and as the foundation for lifelong learning (*Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia*, 2019). Within this multilingual context, Tamil Vernacular Schools face distinct challenges in teaching Malay language as a second language. Students in these schools often rely on Tamil language at home and within their

communities which limits their exposure to Malay outside the classroom. Consequently, the acquisition of Malay language, especially its grammatical structures become a demanding task and errors in written and spoken forms frequently persist into higher levels of schooling (Alhaadi & Zaitul Azma, 2018).

One of the most pressing issues in this regard is the mastery of affixation, which is fundamental to the Malay morphological system. Affixation is a linguistic process that enables the transformation of root words into derived verbs with new meanings and functions (Abdullah, 2006). A strong command of affixation is essential as errors in affixed verb formation can distort meaning, hinder comprehension and impede effective communication (Nik Safiah et al., 2015). For instance, inappropriate use of the *meN-* prefix or the omission of the causative suffix *-kan* can alter the intended message entirely. When such errors become habitual, they compromise not only grammatical accuracy but also higher-order skills such as essay writing, reading comprehension and critical reasoning, all of which are vital for students' academic success (Mahani & Zaiton, 2021).

The urgency of addressing these issues is reflected in the Standard Curriculum and Assessment Document (KSSR), which positions grammar mastery as a core requirement in producing coherent and effective written texts (Curriculum Development Division, 2021). The curriculum emphasizes affixation explicitly, recognizing its importance in avoiding orthographic and syntactic errors. However, empirical evidence indicates that many students in vernacular schools continue to struggle with affixation despite formal instruction. Studies have shown that errors in verb affixation are among the most common problems faced by Malay second language learners (Kamarudin & Safiah, 2016; Amirra & Vijayaletchumy, 2019). These findings suggest a gap between curriculum expectations and actual student performance, particularly among Tamil Vernacular School pupils.

This study is therefore both timely and necessary. By focusing on the mastery of derived verb affixation among Year 5 students in a Tamil Vernacular School, it seeks to uncover the specific nature and patterns of errors using Corder's (1973) Language Error Analysis Theory. The value of Corder's framework lies in its capacity to reveal not only the types of errors made such as incorrect choice, omission, and erroneous sequencing of affixes but also the underlying processes of interlanguage development in second-language learners. Understanding these patterns provides crucial insights into how students internalize linguistic rules, where breakdowns occur and what pedagogical interventions are most urgently needed.

The significance of this research can be understood at multiple levels. For students, improved mastery of affixation enhances their ability to construct accurate and meaningful sentences, thereby strengthening their confidence in both oral and written communication. For teachers, the findings highlight common error trends, enabling them to tailor instruction, develop targeted exercises and adopt more interactive and student-centred strategies to reinforce learning (Faizah & Siti Hajar, 2019). For curriculum developers and policymakers, the study offers empirical evidence to refine grammar components in the KSSR and to design supplementary materials that address persistent weaknesses, aligning classroom practices with the aspirations of the Malaysia Education Blueprint. For researchers, the study contributes to the broader body of applied linguistics by documenting error patterns among

second-language learners in a vernacular school context, offering a basis for comparative and longitudinal studies.

Ultimately, this study bridges the gap between theoretical linguistics and classroom practice. It underscores the utility of focusing on affixation not as an isolated grammatical rule but as a foundation for developing literacy, communication skills and higher-order thinking. By doing so, it contributes directly to the national agenda of nurturing students who are linguistically competent, critical and creative, capable of navigating the demands of a globalized and knowledge-based society.

Methodology

The research utilizes a qualitative research design to analyse the mastery of derived verbs among the year 5 students of Ladang Kinrara Tamil Vernacular School based on the Language Error Analysis Theory of Corder (1973). The research aims to identify and explore the nature of errors made in the application of affixed derived verbs and the sources of the error among the students. The theoretical framework is the foundation for the analysis of the emergence of the error, categorizing the error according to four types that are the incorrect choice of elements, inclusion of irrelevant elements, omission of required elements and erroneous sequencing of elements. This is based on the belief of Corder's Theory that the error is reflective of the interlanguage system of the second-language learners and a window into their linguistic growth.

Participants

The sample of the research consists of 100 Year 5 students from Tamil Vernacular School, selected through random sampling to ensure a representative unbiased sample. The basis for the selection has the potential to render the findings representative of a large population of Tamil Vernacular School students in Malaysia. The students who are learning Malay as the second language are selected based on specific intentions since the fact is that the chances of mistakes encountered in second language acquisition are much higher, more so with the usage of grammatical structure based on the application of the affix.

Research Instruments

The primary research instrument is a written test of derived verbs, designed with the objective of identifying the students' capacity in utilizing affixed derived verbs. The test includes tasks that involve the application of both prefix and suffix affixes in verb formation, focusing on common affixes in Malay language namely *"meN-"*, *"beR-"*, *"ter-"*, *"di-"*, *"-kan"*, and *"-i"*. The prefix *"meN-"* includes five variants, also known as allomorphs, depending on the first letter of the root word it attaches to, namely *"me-"*, *"men-"*, *"mem-"*, *"meng-"*, while the allomorph *"menge-"* combines with a monosyllabic root word. The test items were developed based on the curriculum content outlined in the Malay language textbooks for Year 5 students, thus ensuring relevance and alignment with their learning experience.

Procedure

Test Administration

The written test was administered to the 100 students in controlled conditions and settings in their respective classrooms. The students were given a set of tasks that required them to form derived verbs from base words using the correct affixes. The test was designed to assess

their ability to apply affixes accurately, and the results were used to identify common error patterns. Data was collected through the completion of the written test. Each student's responses were carefully examined for errors in the use of affixed derived verbs.

Data Collection

Data was collected through the completion of the written test. The answers of the students were thoroughly analysed for the misuse of the attached derived verbs. The types of errors were classified according to Corder's (1973) theoretical framework, which includes, (1) Incorrect choice of elements: Errors where an incorrect affix is chosen, (2) Inclusion of irrelevant elements: Instances where an unnecessary affix is added to a base word. (3) Omission of required elements: Errors where a required affix is omitted from the word formation process, (4) Erroneous sequencing of elements: Errors in the correct order or placement of affixes in derived verb formation.

Error Analysis

Each student's responses were analysed to identify the most common mistake of each student. All the mistakes made were documented and labelled according to the category of the affix. The data was then presented in the form of graphs to see the trend and direction of the mistakes for the different affixes and verb conjugations.

Data Analysis

The data was analysed thematically, which is common in qualitative research. The errors are analysed using the theoretical model of error analysis proposed by Corder in Corder's Language Error Analysis Theory (1973). The errors were all grouped under the four categories stated above. Having grouped the errors, the analysis sought to identify patterns in the fault types, that is, how frequently the students misapplied individual affixes. This analysis was important in establishing how the second-language proficiency of the Malay students, that is, the domain of derived verb affixes, contributes to the stages of language acquisition proposed by Corder.

Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in Corder's Language Error Analysis Theory (1973), which posits that errors are an inevitable part of the language learning process, especially for second-language learners. Corder argued that errors reflect the cognitive processes of learners as they move from their native language to a target language. According to the theory, four types of error are possible:

Table 1

Types of errors according to Corder's Language Error Analysis Theory (1973)

Error Type	Description
Incorrect Choice of Elements	Choosing incorrect elements or affixes when forming derived verbs.
Inclusion of Irrelevant Elements	Adding extraneous affixes or elements to a base word, leading to a grammatical error.
Omission of Required Elements	Leaving out required affixes that are necessary to form the correct derived verb.
Erroneous Sequencing of Elements	Misplacing affixes in a way that disrupts the intended meaning or grammatical structure.

Ethical Consideration
The research is carried out in accordance with research ethics standards by providing consent and confidentiality. All the participants received a description of the research goal, voluntariness of the participation, and the freedom to withdraw at any time without penalty. De-identified data provided was guaranteed to keep the students' identity protected, and data was kept secure.

Limitations
While the study provides valuable insights into the errors made by students in affixation, the sample is limited to 100 Year 5 students from single school. This hampers the generalizability of the findings to a wider population of second-language learners. Additionally, the study focuses only on derived verbs, and future research could expand to include other aspects of Malay grammar, such as noun and adjective derivation, for a more comprehensive analysis.

Result
The outcomes of the written tests to measure the mastery of derived verb affixes by the Year 5 students at Ladang Kinrara Tamil Vernacular School are the focus of this section. The findings are outlined under four major categories based on the error types encountered in the students' usage of affixes, in line with the Language Error Analysis Theory of Corder (1973).

Error Analysis for "meN-" Prefixes:
The following charts shows the mastery of the *"meN-"* affixes for derived verbs, focusing on the correct use of these affixes in various contexts
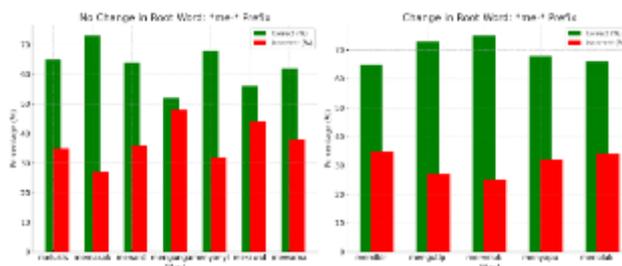
"me-" Prefix:

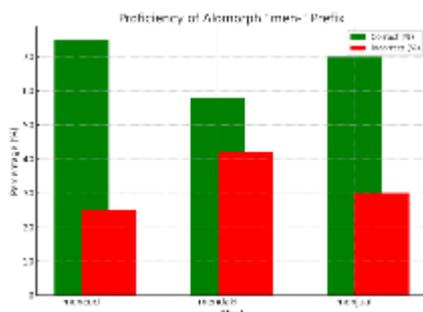Fig. 1 Error and Correct Usage of allomorph *"me-"*

"men-" Prefix

Fig. 2 Error and Correct Usage of allomorph *"men-"*
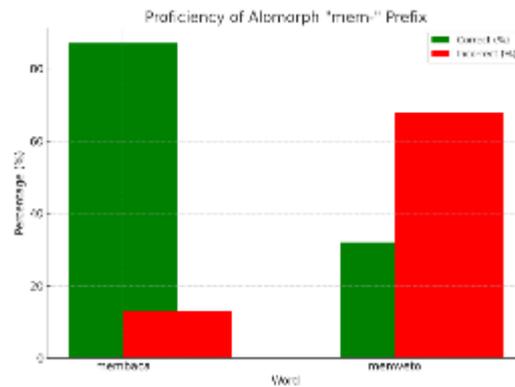
"mem-" Prefix

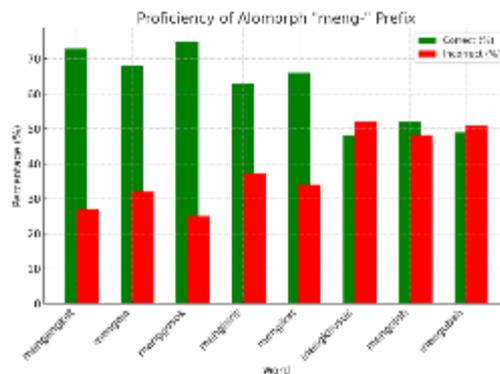Fig. 3 Error and Correct Usage of allomorph *"mem-"*

"meng-" Prefix

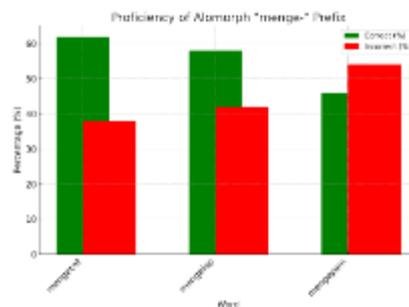Fig. 4 Error and Correct Usage of allomorph *"meng-"*

"menge-" Prefix

Fig. 5 Error and Correct Usage of allomorph *"menge-"*

Error Analysis for Other Prefixes
"ber-", "ter-" and "di-" Affixes:
The following chart presents the error rates for the prefixes *"ber-", ter-,* and *"di-",* which were tested on words derived from nouns, adjectives, and verbs.
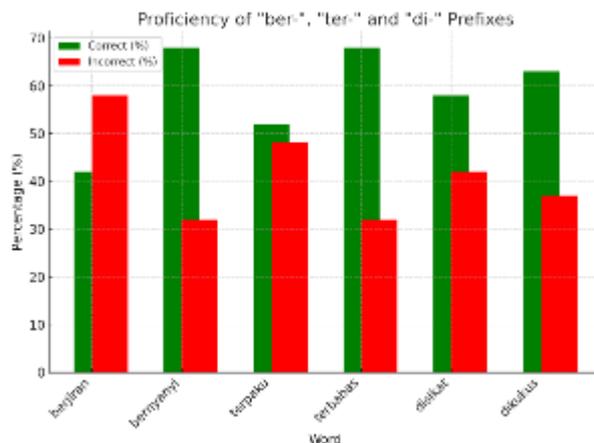
Fig. 6 Error and Correct Usage of Prefixes *"ber-", "ter-" and "di-"*

Error Analysis for Suffixes: "-kan" and "-i"
The following chart shows the mastery of the *"-kan"* and *"-i"* suffixes for derived verbs, focusing on the correct use of these affixes in various contexts.
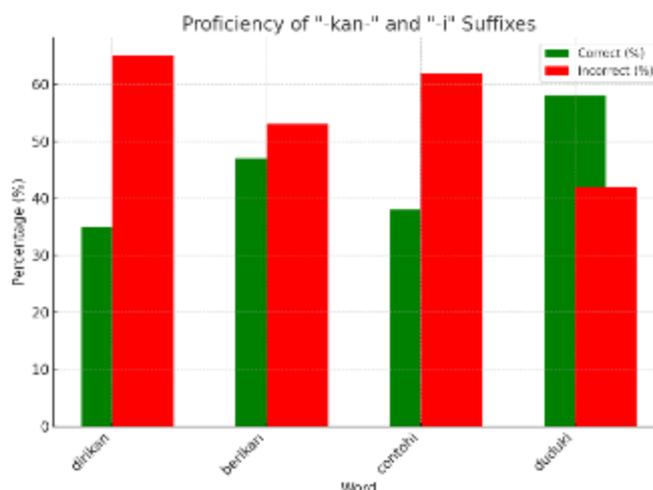

Fig. 7 Error and Correct Usage of Suffixes *-kan and -i*

Discussion

The implication of this study offers valuable insights into the mastery of affixation in derived verb formation among Year 5 students at Ladang Kinrara Tamil Vernacular School. The findings indicate that while students demonstrated a solid understanding of some affixes, significant challenges persisted with others, particularly those requiring more complex morphological or syntactic transformations. This discussion interprets the data, examines the underlying reasons for errors, and links the findings to the four types of errors identified in Corder's (1973) Language Error Analysis Theory, which includes incorrect choice of elements, inclusion of irrelevant elements, omission of required elements and erroneous sequencing of elements.

The study identified varying levels of proficiency in applying the *"meN-"* affix, which is significant in the formation of active verbs. For example, the *"me-"* allomorph, which involves no significant morphological change to the root word, was relatively well understood, with

accuracy rates of 65% for *melukis* (to draw), 75% for *menulis* (to write), and 68% for *menyanyi* (to sing). Nevertheless, allomorph *"me-"* had a 35% error level, particularly in words like *menganga* (to gape) and *merawat* (to treat), with 48% and 44% incorrect usage, respectively. These errors can be attributed to incorrect choice of elements, where students likely selected the wrong affix or misapplied the "meN-" prefix in cases involving consonants that result in less predictable morphological shifts. Moreover, the *"me-"* allomorph - led to the omission of required elements, as students neglected certain vowel sounds or morphological shifts necessary to maintain the grammatical integrity of the verb.

The *"men-"* allomorph showed greater accuracy, with 75% correct usage for derived verbs like *mencuci* (to wash) and menjual (to sell), yet errors still appeared in words like *mendaki* (to climb), which showed 58% accuracy. These errors happened due to erroneous sequencing, where students failed to apply the right affix in a morphologically consistent manner when dealing with root words that involve specific morphological changes. For instance, students mistakenly combine the wrong affix or sequence of affixes with roots that start with the letter d, creating errors like *memdaki* instead of *mendaki*.

Similarly, the *"mem-"* allomorph, which is used with roots starting with specific consonants like b and v, exhibited the highest proficiency at 87% accuracy for words like *membaca* (to read). However, *memveto* (to veto), which had a low accuracy rate of only 32%, indicates a problem with incorrect choice of elements and erroneous sequencing when combining the *"mem-"* prefix with loanwords or less familiar roots. The *"mem-"* prefix in this case creates confusion due to the morphological complexity of integrating foreign terms with native affixation rules.

The *"meng-"* allomorph, which involves substantial changes to the root word, showed a relatively high accuracy level of 75% for verbs like *mengangkat* (to lift) and *menggosok* (to rub). However, more complex verbs like *mengubah* (to change) and *mengkhusus* (to specialize) had accuracy rates of 48% and 49%, respectively. The misselection of affixes and omission of required elements are key contributors to the errors observed in these words, as students fail to apply the appropriate affix when morphological changes are less predictable. The students' struggle with prefix *"meng-"* can be explained by their difficulty in properly sequencing the correct affix with the root word when substantial morphology changes are involved, indicating that further practice with these transformations is required.

The *"menge-"* allomorph performed the worst, presenting 38% of incorrect usage and a 62% accuracy rate. This affix was primarily applied to monosyllabic roots such as *mengecat* (to paint) and *mengelap* (to wipe). The significant error rate suggests incorrect choice of elements and inclusion of irrelevant element, where students failed to properly apply the correct affix to monosyllabic base words. This affix also not be as familiar to students, contributing to both misselection and inclusion of unnecessary elements.

The prefixes *"ber-"*, *"ter-"*, and *"di-"* also presented significant difficulties. The challenges with *"ber-"* and *"ter-"* affixes are likely stems from misselection and erroneous sequencing errors, particularly when these prefixes are applied to verb forms derived from nouns. For instance, verbs like *berjiran* (to be neighbours) and *terbabas* (to stray) were misused due to confusion between the prefixes *"ber-"* and *"ter-"*, with students mistakenly

applying them to roots that did not require such affixes. These errors point to the need for explicit teaching on the distinctions between these affixes and their respective functions. Similarly, the *"di-"* prefix, used to form passive verbs like *disikat* (to be combed) and *dikukus* (to be steamed), showed moderate proficiency with a 42% error rate. The error rate indicates unnecessary addition or misapplication of passive affixes when active forms should have been used. The confusion between active and passive voice structures underlines the need for further clarification and practice in applying prefix *"di-"* correctly.

Finally, the *"-kan"* and *"-i"* suffixes, which are the formers of causative and transitive verbs respectively, presented significant difficulty for students. The *"-kan"* suffix had a 65% incorrect usage rate, suggesting a substantial struggle with forming causative verbs like *panaskan* (to heat) and *dahulukan* (to prioritize). The challenge arises from the unnecessary addition of incorrect affixes when students attempt to form causative verbs. Similarly, the *"-i"* suffix, with a 53% error rate, suggests confusion with transitive verb forms such as *duduki* (to occupy) and *sertai* (to participate), pointing to both unnecessary addition and misselection of affixes in contexts that require transitive verb forms.

Conclusion

The findings of this study depict the importance of targeted teaching strategies for addressing specific areas where students face difficulties in affixation, particularly with complex prefixes like *"menge-"* and suffixes like *"-kan"*. The study finds that students are more proficient with affixes that are commonly used in everyday language, such as "meN-" (*mem-*) and *"meN-"* (*men-),* while they struggle with affixes that involve more complex morphological transformations, such as "*meng-*" and "*menge-*". High error rates observed for *"ber-", "ter-", "di-", "-kan",* and *"-i"* suggest that additional practice and explicit instruction on the distinctions between active and passive voice, as well as causative and transitive verb formations, would significantly improve students' proficiency in derived verb formation. By incorporating more focused exercises, teaching students the nuances of each affix, and emphasizing their contextual application, teachers can help improve the students' command over these complex affixes and ultimately enhance their language proficiency. This study also provides educators with evidence-based insights into the linguistic difficulties encountered by second-language learners in vernacular schools. The findings highlight critical areas where targeted instructional strategies can be implemented to enhance grammatical competence, improve curriculum design, and support effective teaching practices. This research thus bridges theoretical linguistics and practical pedagogy, offering valuable guidance for educators aiming to strengthen Malay language proficiency in early education, and ultimately contributing to improved learning outcomes in multilingual classroom settings.

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