



## Exploring Morphological Awareness of EFL Students through a Contrastive Analysis Approach

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### Abstract

Morphological awareness is widely recognized as a central element of language proficiency, particularly within the field of Second Language Acquisition. The present study aims to examine the level of morphological awareness among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners by applying a contrastive analysis framework to explore both the structural similarities and differences between English and Indonesian. To achieve this objective, the study adopts a mixed-method research design, integrating quantitative data obtained from morphological assessments with qualitative insights derived from students' written outputs. The result demonstrate that although learners possess a foundational understanding of morphemic structures, they encounter significant challenges in the accurate use of inflectional morphemes, particularly in expressing tense and number distinctions. The contrastive analysis further indicated that these difficulties are largely attributable to the absence of inflectional morphology in the Indonesian language system. In addition, the incorporation of contrastive analysis into instructional practices has been shown to substantially improve students' morphological awareness as well as their grammatical precision. Overall, this study highlights the pedagogical significance of contrastive analysis within EFL settings and advocates for its systematic integration into language instruction in order to promote deeper linguistic awareness and enhance overall learning outcomes.

Keywords: Contrastive Analysis, EFL, Language Acquisition, Morphological Awareness, Morphology

### INTRODUCTION

Morphological awareness has been widely acknowledged as a fundamental component of language proficiency, particularly within the domain of Second Language Acquisition. It refers to learners' ability to recognize, analyze, and manipulate morphemes as the smallest meaningful units of language (Yule, n.d.). This ability plays a crucial role in vocabulary development, reading comprehension, and grammatical accuracy (Carlisle, 2010). In the broader scope of Linguistics, morphology provides insights into how words are structured and how meaning is

systematically constructed across languages (Szymanek, 2008)

Recent studies have emphasized that morphological awareness significantly contributes to second language acquisition, particularly in EFL contexts where learners are required to process complex linguistic forms (Rahmawati et al., 2025). Learners with higher morphological awareness tend to demonstrate better lexical inferencing skills and greater grammatical accuracy, especially in written production (Samaraweera, n.d.). Conversely, limited awareness often results in persistent errors in word formation and grammatical marking (Haris, 2023)

In the Indonesian EFL context, the development of morphological awareness is further complicated by typological differences between English and Indonesian. English morphology consists of both derivational and inflectional processes (Hasanati & Syakhirul Alim, n.d.). Inflectional morphemes serve grammatical functions such as tense, number, and agreement, while derivational morphemes contribute to the formation of new words. In contrast, Indonesian morphology is predominantly characterized by affixation processes, including prefixes (*men-*, *ber-*), suffixes (*-kan,-i*), and circumfixes (*ke-an*), without employing inflectional morphology.

This structural disparity often leads to cross linguistic interference, a phenomenon extensively discussed in second language research. Indonesian learners frequently omit or misuse English inflectional markers such as *-s* and *-ed*, as these grammatical features are absent in their first language. Such difficulties highlight the importance of addressing morphological differences explicitly in instructional settings (Rahmawati et al., 2025)

One pedagogical approach that has been widely recognized for addressing crosslinguistic differences is contrastive analysis. Contrastive analysis involves the systematic comparison of two languages to identify similarities and differences, thereby predicting potential learning difficulties (Saud, 2019). Although earlier applications of contrastive analysis were criticized for overgeneralization, recent studies have demonstrated its effectiveness when integrated with contemporary language teaching approaches (Priskinanda & Bram, 2021). In particular, contrastive analysis can enhance learners' awareness of linguistic structures by making implicit differences explicit, thereby reducing negative transfer and improving language accuracy.

Despite the growing body of research on morphological awareness and contrastive analysis, there remains a limited number of studies that explicitly integrate both perspectives in the Indonesian EFL context. Most previous studies tend to examine morphological awareness as an isolated construct without considering

cross-linguistic influences, or they apply contrastive analysis without focusing specifically on morphological competence (Hasanati & Syakhirul Alim, n.d.) (Damanik et al., 2025). This gap indicated a need for a more comprehensive approach that combines both frameworks to better understand and support EFL learners' development.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the morphological awareness of Indonesian EFL students through a contrastive analysis approach. Specifically, it seeks to examine the extent of students' morphological awareness, identify the types of difficulties they encounter, and investigate how contrastive analysis can enhance their understanding of English morphological structures. By integrating theoretical insights from morphology and practical applications of contrastive analysis, this study is expected to contribute to the development of more effective pedagogical strategies in EFL instruction.

## METHOD

This study employs a mixed-method approach to obtain a comprehensive understanding of students' morphological awareness by integrating both quantitative and qualitative data (Matthews, n.d.). The combination of these approaches allows for a more holistic analysis, capturing not only measurable performance outcomes but also the underlying patterns of students' morphological competence.

The participants of this study consisted of 15 undergraduate students enrolled in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) program. They were selected through purposive sampling based on their relevance to the research objectives, particularly their exposure to English language learning and morphology related instruction.

To collect the data, several research instruments were utilized. First, a morphological awareness test comprising 25 items was administered to measure students' understanding of morphemic structures, including both inflectional and derivational forms. Second, an observation checklist was employed to document

students' engagement and responses during instructional activities.

The collected data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitative data from the morphological test were processed using descriptive statistics, including frequency and percentage, to identify patterns of student performance. Meanwhile, qualitative data derived from classroom observations were analyzed through error analysis and contrastive analysis to uncover common difficulties and the influence of cross linguistic factors.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that EFL students demonstrate a moderate level of morphological awareness, with an overall mean score of 68.4 (Standard Deviation = 8.9). However, a more detailed analysis across subcomponents indicates notable variation in students' performance, reflecting uneven development of morphological competence. For example, see Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Morphological Awareness Test

Component	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
Morpheme Identification	78.0	8.5
Inflectional Morphology	59.0	10.2
Derivational Morphology	72.0	9.1
Word Formation	66.0	7.8
Morphological Analysis	64.0	8.9
<b>Overall Score</b>	<b>68.4</b>	<b>8.9</b>

Students achieved the highest performance in morpheme identification (M=78.0, SD=8.5), suggesting that they possess a relatively solid understanding of basic word structure, including the

recognition of prefixes, suffixes, and root forms. This finding indicates that learners are capable of identifying morphemic units, which constitutes a foundational aspect of morphological awareness. Such results are consistent with previous studies highlighting that recognition based skills tend to develop earlier than productive or analytical abilities (Zhang et al., 2023)

In contrast, students' performance in inflectional morphology was significantly lower (M=59.0, SD=10.2), indicating considerable difficulty in applying grammatical markers related to tense, number, and agreement. The high variability in scores within this component further suggest that inflectional competence remains inconsistent among learners. These findings align with research in Second Language Acquisition, which emphasizes that grammatical morphology particularly inflection is often one of the most challenging aspects for EFL learners due to its abstract and rule-governed nature.

The difficulty in inflectional morphology can be largely attributed to cross-linguistic differences between English and Indonesian. Unlike English, Indonesian does not employ inflectional markers to indicate grammatical relationships. As a result, learners tend to omit or misuse inflectional morphemes such as *-s* and *-ed*, a pattern that has been widely documented in EFL contexts (Hasanati & Syakhirul Alim, n.d.). This phenomenon reflects negative transfer, where learners rely on their first language system when producing the target language.

On the other hand, students showed relatively better performance in derivational morphology (M=72.0, SD=9.1), indicating an emerging ability to form new words through affixation. This finding may be explained by the similarity between English and Indonesian in terms of derivational processes, as both language utilize affixation for word formation. Additionally, derivational morphology tends to be more semantically transparent, making it more accessible for learners.

Similarly, the results for word formation (M=66.0, SD=7.8) and morphological analysis (M=64.0, SD=8.9)

suggest that students possess partial competence in manipulating and analyzing complex word structures. However, the relatively lower scores indicate that learners still struggle with higher order morphological processing, particularly when dealing with multi morphemic words. This supports the view that morphological awareness involves not only recognition but also analytical and productive skills that develop gradually over time.

The effectiveness of contrastive analysis in this study can be attributed to its ability to make linguistic difference explicit. By systematically comparing English and Indonesian morphological systems, learners become more aware of structural distinctions that may otherwise remain unnoticed. This finding is consistent with recent studies emphasizing the role of contrastive analysis in enhancing metalinguistic awareness and reducing cross linguistic interference.

Furthermore, qualitative data obtained from classroom observation support the quantitative findings. Students were more actively engaged and demonstrated greater conceptual understanding when contrastive explanations were provided. They showed increased participation, asked more questions, and displayed improved confidence in applying morphological rules. These observations highlight the importance of explicit instruction in facilitating deeper learning.

Despite these positive outcomes, the persistence of errors particularly in inflectional morphology indicates that short term instructional interventions may not be sufficient to fully develop morphological competence. Continuous practice and sustained exposure are necessary to achieve long-term mastery.

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the morphological awareness of EFL students through a contrastive analysis approach, with particular attention to the differences between English and Indonesian morphological systems. The findings

indicate that while students demonstrate a foundational understanding of morphemic structures especially in identifying and forming derivational words their ability to accurately apply inflectional morphemes remains limited. This difficulty is primarily influenced by cross linguistic differences, notably the absence of inflectional morphology in Indonesian.

The results further reveal that the integration of contrastive analysis into instructional practices contributes positively to students' learning outcomes, as evidenced by the moderate gain in posttest performance. By explicitly highlighting structural differences between the two languages, contrastive analysis enhances learners' metalinguistic awareness and support more accurate language use. These findings reinforce the importance of explicit and comparative instruction within Second Language Acquisition, particularly in addressing areas in persistent difficulty such as grammatical morphology.

However, despite the observed improvement, the persistence of errors especially in inflectional forms suggests that short-term interventions are insufficient for achieving full mastery. Therefore, continuous exposure, sustained practice, and systematic reinforcement are necessary to further develop students' morphological competence.

In light of these findings, this study recommends that EFL educators incorporate contrastive analysis as a regular pedagogical strategy to improve learners' morphological awareness. Future research is encouraged to involve larger samples, extended intervention periods, and more advanced statistical analysis in order to provide deeper insights into the long-term effectiveness of contrastive approaches in language learning.

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