Spoken morphological errors made by Iranian EFL learners

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Abstract

Speaking English fluently and accurately is the most important, favorite, and complicated skill for EFL learners. The present study was an attempt to investigate the morphological speaking errors of Iranian EFL learners across proficiency levels and gender. To this end, a corpus of 1399 tokens of speech morphology errors was collected. The learners' oral production was observed and recorded naturally using various communicative tasks in class. The errors were then detected, transcribed, coded and classified following James (1998) taxonomy of errors. The results represented misselection as the most frequent type at morphology level. The results further showed significant difference between genders in terms of making grammar errors.The findings of this study can provide feedback for English teachers supervisors, and syllabus designers to help EFLlearners develop their intrelanguage knowledge of grammar through revisiting teaching methods and

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implementing remedial materials.

1. Introduction

English has undoubtedly turned into today's global lingua franca. Apart from the 350-450 million of native speakers of English, there are also more than 800 million people who speak it as a foreign language. This suggests that most of the interaction in English takes place among its non-native speakers. English is also used as a bridge of communication among people possessing diverse languages acting as a facilitator of communication among nations.

One of the most prominent concerns in keeping up with such communication-driven societies is the acquisition of foreign languages, especially English. Language learning, like most other human learning, is a skill in which mistakes constitute a major aspect. Errors are defined as ungrammatical or otherwise ill-formed utterances when judged by the generally accepted rules of the language that they are learning (James, 1998). However, it is one of the most important tasks of teachers in the language classroom to detect the errors and make corrections in a way that helps learners to acquire most expeditiously the correct form of the target language. Researchers and teachers of foreign language have realized that the errors a person makes in the process of constructing a new system of language is needed to be analyzed precisely, for they possibly contain some of the keys to the understanding of second language acquisition (Seidlhofer, 2005).

Using language in general and speaking in particular, is how students connect their ideas and comments orally to create knowledge. In spite of the significance of oral communication and oral fluency, this language skill has been generally neglected in our educational system. Without a doubt, of the four skills, speaking is clearly the most wanted and simultaneously the most neglected one.

The reason behind the current status of speaking can be attributed to a number of factors such as the lack of an immediate need in the Iranian EFL setting and the idiosyncratic nature of the skill.

There have been quite a good number of studies investigating written errors in various English learning settings worldwide among which one can refer to Korean-speaking ELT students' syntactic errors in their written work by Lee (1997), analysis of errors in paragraph writing in English by first year medical students from the four medical schools at Mahidol university(Sattayatham & Ratanapinyowong,2008), and an analysis of errors in English writing of Sinhala speaking undergraduates (Abeywickrama, 2010). Nonetheless, the fact is that there have been scarce systematic and reliable sources to study speech errors.

Studying speech errors has not gained preference due to the enormity of data elicitation, detection, collection, and analysis of speech production although such spoken errors can be indicative of underlying mental processes L2 learners go though in the process of language acquisition.

"Speech errors are no longer regarded as emanating from the subconscious, but rather as concrete misapplications at the level of lexical selection, word formation, and structural organization" (Steinberg, 1999, p. 121). Speech errors can provide us with principles by which we can cope with inefficiency of the English language teaching and learning, specially speaking skill. Findings on frequency, level, gravity, sources and types of spoken errors in all levels can be of paramount contribution to all stakeholders involved in ELT in general and language teachers in particular.

The present study is organized as follows. First, the taxonomy of errors, levels of errors and some instances of previous studies on errors are reviewed in sections 2 to 4 followed by the purpose of the study in section 5. Next, the methodology is offered in section 6 where the participants, instruments, procedures and data analysis are described. Then, the descriptive and inferential results of the study are presented in section 7 followed by the discussion of the results in section 8. Finally, the conclusion of the study is presented.

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2. Literature Review

2.1 Error Taxonomy

Following James (1998), conducting EA involves four stages. The first step is what James (p. 91) calls "error detection when errors are identified or detected and it is, then, spotting the error itself." The next step is called error location and it is when the analyst locates the error. James argues that "some errors are too complicated to locate because they can be diffused throughout the sentence or the whole text and appear only after the text is carefully studied in full" (pp. 92-93). The next stage is error description. The Interlanguage Theory (IT) (Selinker, 1972) suggests that the "learner language is a language in its own right and should therefore be described on its own rather than in terms of the target language" (James 1998, p. 94). And finally, the last step in EA is error classification or categorization in which errors are categorized into dictionaries or taxonomies.

There can be four kinds of error taxonomy: (1) Linguistic Category Classification, (2) Surface Structure Taxonomy, (3) Comparative Taxonomy, and (4) Communicative Effect Taxonomy (James, 1998). The first two taxonomies are descriptive while the third one deals with error causes and the last one deals with error gravity. For pedagogical reasons, the present paper discusses the speaking errors in terms of the surface structure taxonomy.

Based on James (1998), "errors are divided into five principal categories in which learners modify target forms, in other words, five ways in which IL and TL diverge in specific and systematic ways" These 5 categories include (1) omission, (2) addition, (3) misselection (misformation), (4) misordering, and (5) blends.

Omission is an error in which an item which must be present in a well-formed utterance is absent. The auxiliary verb *'is'* and the indefinite article *'a'* are omitted in (1) below.

1.*My father plumber.

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Addition refers to the presence of an extra item which must not be present in a well formed utterance. Such errors are divided into three categories: (a) regularization, e.g.* *sheeps*, *cutted*, (b) double markings, as in **Did you went there?*, and (c) simple addition.

Misselction refers to "the use of the wrong form of the morpheme or structure" (Dulay, Burt & Krashen, 1982, p. 158). Misselection errors tend to be the most frequent type of errors, because they affect all possible language structures such as morphology, syntax, words, phrase, and clause. It is clear that *seen* for *saw*, *crying* for *to cry, herself* for *himself,* and *books* for *book* are the wrong selected forms.

Misordering is the fourth and relatively the most uncontroversial category among scholars. Part of linguistic competence, in addition to selecting the right forms to use in the right context, is to arrange them in the right order. Some languages have stricter word order regulation than others. Russian is freer than English. Modern English is less free in its word order than the Old English. In English, certain word classes seem to be specially sensitive to misordering, for instance adverbials (2), interrogatives (3), and adjectives (4) (Akmajian, Demres, Farmer, & Harnish, 1997).

2. *I get up at 6 o'clock always.
3. * Tell me where did you go.
4. *The words little.

James' taxonomy (1998) is distinguished from the previous models as he complemented it by adding one last type of errors known as blend errors. This error is typical of situations where there is not just one well-defined target, but two or more. The learner is not sure about which of these categories he has in mind. In such situations, the type of error that materializes is the blend error, sometimes called the contamination or cross-association or hybridization error. Blending is exemplified in **according to Ali's opinion* which arises when two alternative grammatical forms are

combined to produce an ungrammatical blend. In this example *according to Ali* and *in Ali's opinion* seem to have blended.

2.2 Levels of Errors

Errors are divided into 3 main types: substance, text, and discourse errors. Substance errors embrace those errors related to encoding in speaking and writing on the one hand and decoding in listening and reading on the other. In James' (1998) classification, text errors are divided into misspeaking, miswriting, mishearing and misreading. Finally, discourse errors involve formulating spoken (misrepresenting) and written (miscomposing)discourse on the one hand and errors of processing spoken (misconstrual) and written (misrepresentation) discourse on the other (James, 1998).

The focus of this study is on the investigation of speaking text errors arising from the ignorance and misapplication of the lexico-grammatical rules of the language, including how these rules are exploited to achieve texture. For text errors, both lexical and grammar errors must be investigated. This paper studies the grammar errors in the speaking medium which lead to errors in composing spoken text (misspeaking).

Errors of grammar vary in magnitude. They can include a morpheme, a word, a phrase, a clause, a sentence or even a paragraph. Linguists have traditionally realized grammar errors in terms of morphology and syntax, the former handling word structure, the latter structures larger than the word (James, 1998). Ellis (1997) maintains that classifying errors in these ways can help us to diagnose learners' learning problems at any stage of their development and to plot how changes in error patterns occur over time.

Morphological typology represents a method for classifying languages according to the ways by which morphemes are used in a language—from the analytic languages that use only isolated morphemes, through the agglutinative (stuck-together) and fusional languages (such as English) that use bound morphemes (affixes), up

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to the polysynthetic, which compress lots of separate morphemes into single words (Crystal, 2010).

Morphology is concerned with the way words are formed. If learners experience problems in supplying the correct word classes, morphology errors will ensue. : *six book*, defin*ment (√ition)* are noun morphology errors.: *visit me soon*ly* is an adverb morphology error. Prepositions happen to have no morphology (James, 1998). Morphology errors are "basic but persistent, regularly resurfacing in many proficiency levels even in the EFL writing of highly educated people such as PhD students" (James, 1998, p. 154).

Morphology errors are the grammar errors that involve inflectional and derivational   morphemes. Inflectional morphology errors affect inflectional affixes which are only suffixes (not prefixes) and are classified according to the part of speech each affix occurs with. They never change the category (parts of speech) of the base morpheme and are listed as below:

1. Noun inflectional morphemes: (a) plural marker –s [*girl- girls*] and (b) possessive marker 's [*Maryam 's book*]
2. Verb inflectional morphemes: (a) Third person present singular maker-s [*bake- bakes*], (b) Past tense marker-ed [*wait-waited*], (c) Progressive marker –ing [*sing-singing*], (d) Past participle markers –en or –ed [*eat-eaten & bake-baked*]
3. Adjective inflectional morphemes: (a) Comparative marker –er [*fast-faster*] and (b) superlative marker –est [*fast-fastest*]

Derivational morphemes are the second group of morphemes affected by morphology errors including affixes (both prefixes and suffixes) whose function is to create new words from base form such as (*teach- teacher*, *modern – modernize, friend- friendly- read –readable, act- active, happy-unhappy*). When the root of the words remains and there is an error due to a morpheme addition or substitution, the error is known as a derivational morpheme error (Fromkin, Rodman & Hyams, 2011).

Syntactic errors, on the other hand, occur when the relationship between the internal elements are erroneous. Most syntax studies have focused on sentence structure. Syntax errors are

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identified according to where they occur in the four stages of the grammatical encoding: phrase, clause, sentence and intersentence. The difference between morphology and syntax error lies in the fact that, in the former the error occurs at the level of word structure but in syntax level, the relationships between elements of structures larger than words are not grammatical.

2.3 Experimental Studies

The majority of the studies conducted on the error analysis of EFL learners is restricted to the written errors (Willcott, 1972; Farhat, 1994; Abisamara, 2003; Mohaghegh, Mahmoudi, & Shariati, 2011); however, not many studies have targeted the spoken production of EFL learners. In the following, the relevant studies are reviewed.

Mariko (2007) studied grammatical development in SLA via identifying Japanese learners' errors of spoken and written English in terms of noun, verb, and other part-of-speech-related errors. A substantial body of spoken and written data were used to investigate differences between spontaneous spoken production and less time-pressured written production to show the acquisition sequence of certain grammatical features in the different production modes. The results indicated that the lower level learners mostly made verbal errors while the learners at the advanced level made nominal errors more than other parts of speech. Furthermore, noun-related errors in written production did not seem to vanish over the course of development and some errors shared common developmental patterns, while others varied uniquely across proficiency levels.

Ting, Mahadhir, and Chang (2010) examined the grammatical errors in spoken English of university students who were less proficient in English. The data were obtained from the simulated oral interactions of 42 students participating in five role play situations during the whole semester. Error analysis of 126 oral interactions showed that the six common grammar errors made by the learners were preposition, question, article, plural form of nouns, subject-verb agreement, and tense. Based on surface structure taxonomy proposed by Dulay et al. (1982), misselection and omission accounted for 72% of errors. Preposition and question

were the most difficult for the less proficient students constituting about 35% of total errors, followed by word form and article. Some less frequent errors included subject-verb agreement, tense, pronoun, plural marking and misordering of sentential constituents.

The results also showed an increase in grammatical accuracy in the students' spoken English towards the end of their course (about 50 hours in 14 weeks), implying that an oral communication course can have perceptible effects on less proficient students' oral abilities. Kovac (2011) investigated the frequency and distribution of speech errors, as well as the influence of the task type on their rate. The participants of the study were 101 engineering students in Croatia. A recorded speech sample in the English language (L2) for approximately ten hours was transcribed, whereby more than three and a half thousand speech errors were recorded. Morphological errors were dominant due to significantly frequent omission errors such as articles. Statistical analysis of the influence of the task type on speech errors displayed that the retelling of a chronological order of events resulted in a significantly higher rate of syntactic errors compared to other tasks.

3. The Purpose of the Study

The general aim of the current study was to shed light on the learning problems facing Persian EFL learners. The fact is that Persian and English enjoy separate grammar and argument structures. Generally, Persian is a more flexible language and allows more scrambling than English which is a more systematic and rule based. As a result of this mismatch, Persian EFL learners may encounter numerous problems in the process of second language acquisition (Fallahi, 1991). Given the above, this study aimed at finding different types and tokens of morphological errors in the speech of Persian learners of English across four levels of proficiency and genders. To this end, the following research questions were addressed in the present study:

1. What are the most frequent morphological errors made by Iranian EFL learners?

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2. Do speech errors decrease along with an increase in proficiency level?
3. What is the role of gender in speech errors?

4. Methodology

4.1 Participants

The participants of this study were both adult females and males fromfour levels of proficiency including Elementary, Pre-intermediate, Intermediate, and High Intermediate at Iran Language Institute (ILI), Yazd branch. The subjects ranged from 14 to40 years of age but mostly between 15 and 30. All of them were learning English beside their school or university schedule and were highly motivated to participate in class discussions and interactions. They were not told beforehand that they were observed and their speech would be recorded so that the data would be as natural as possible.Around 980 language learners in both genders participated in this study at all levels. Table 1 depicts the participants of the study more vividly.

Table 1: Number of classes and participants

Level	Gender	Number of class	Participants
Elementary	Male	5	140
Elementary	Female	5	140
Pre-intermediate	Male	5	130
Pre-intermediate	Female	5	130
Intermediate	Male	5	120
Intermediate	Female	5	120

High intermediate	Male	5	100
High intermediate	Female	5	100
Total		40	980

4.2 Instrumentation

The data of this study was gathered through natural observation in class complemented by individual interviews. The data was recorded by a voice recorder in a natural way and in a way that the language learners did not notice that their speech was recorded while they were speaking English duringinteracting with either their teachers orpeers in different tasks.The tasks included answering the questions raised by the teachers or peers, giving summaries of the passages after reading them, description of pictures, communication activities carried out in pairs or groups after learning conversations, making sentences with new words and expressions plus the free discussions at different times throughout the class time.

Placement test was waived in this study to differentiate the participants in the levels because the language learners had already been placed in their right levels through standard tests both written placement test and oral interview by the supervisors who had enough expertise in this regard.It is safe to assume that all the learners were of the same English proficiency in each level in both genders.

4.3 Data Collection Procedure

The present research was designed to investigate morphological errors as part of grammar errors made in spoken English by the Iranian EFL learnersat ILI. After getting the permit to carry out the intended study from the central office in Tehran, the researcher himself observed 5 classes in four levels of proficiency in each gender. Altogether, 40 classes were observed and the spoken data uttered by the learners were recorded. In some classes, the recording

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was done by the researcher's colleagues who were asked to record the spoken data as described earlier.

Because the study was aimed at obtaining authentic and natural data for analysis, the language learners were not aware of the process of data collection. The classes were chosen randomly and were held in the afternoons and late evenings. The recording took place while the learners were communicating. The recording was paused while the teacher was teaching or while the learners were watching movies or listening to English as part of their oral communication activity. The recording time took 3 terms or roughly 9 months beginning in June 2011 and ending in early January2012. Table 2 depicts the recording schedule.The same number of hours was spent on each single class (five whole sessions equal to 10 hours of class time). In addition, the data from 100 minutes of individual interviews from each level was collected in order to have sufficient spoken data as a supplementary way to elicit speech as a remedy for avoidance in which some learners might not feel good to speak in class.

Table 2: Recording schedule for data collection

Levels	Classes	Length of class	Interview	Total Raw Data	Erroneous part
Elementary	5	120 minutes	100 minutes	700 minutes	350 minutes
Pre-intermediate	5	120 minutes	100 minutes	700 minutes	350 minutes
Intermediate	5	120 minutes	100 minutes	700 minutes	350 minutes
High intermediate	5	120 minutes	100 minutes	700 minutes	350 minutes

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4.4 Data Analysis

Altogether, 700 minutes of data recording were gathered in each level and gender.Care was taken to collect equal amount of recording in each specific level in both genders in order to have equal amount of data from each specific level.

The next step was error detection during which the researcher carefully listened to the recordings in order to depict the flawed tokens of English.   Coding of the errors was the next step in which the morphological errors were identified. Following James' (1998) taxonomy, thetype of errors affecting only word level is referred to as morphology errors. In other words, such errors affectedbound morphemes , that is inflectional and derivational morphemes.

The frequency and taxonomy of the different speech errors were investigated in each gender across various levels of proficiency in terms of frequency, types and level of errors.

Next, the sentences which were considered as erroneous were transcribed while correct sentences were left untapped. Each sentence was analyzed as a token ofanalysis based on James' taxonomy of error. Altogether,2600 sentences were detected and transcribedtotaling 1399 different tokens of morphology errors.

Finally, SPSS 16.0 software was used to analyze the collected data. Because we were dealing with frequency of different types of levels, two types of chi-square tests were used.For variables with one category, a chi-square test for goodness of fit was utilized whilea chi-square test of independence was usedfor analyses with two or more categories.For each analysis, a separate SPSS file was formed in order to define different variables and to enter the specific frequency of every special type of error into SPSS cells

5. Results

Morphology errors include those affecting bound morphemes both derivational and inflectional (James, personal communication, June, 2012).By the same token, they are the smallest and easiest to detect and classify. In this section, first, the morphological errors at each

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level of proficiency are investigated. Later, the morphological errors of each level are analyzed separately to see which type or error is the most frequent and the reverse.

5.1 Analysis of Morphological Errors across Levels

The frequency of morphological errors varied across all the levels. Figure 1 below shows that they werethe most frequentat the elementary level and declined along with an increase in the proficiency level.
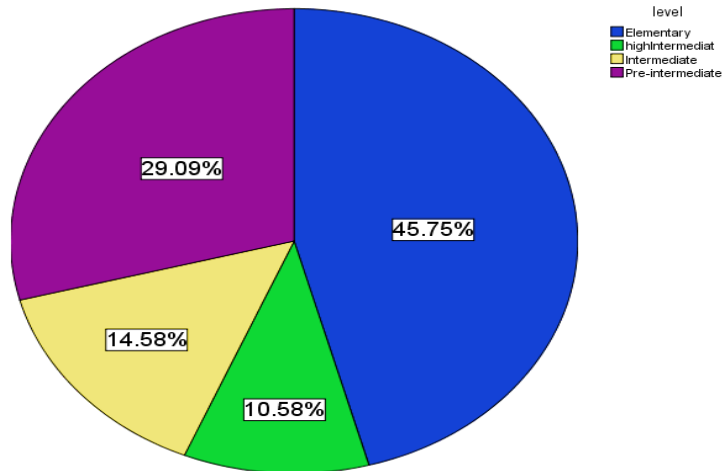

Figure 1: Morphology errors across levels

A Chi-square test for goodness of fit was used to analyze the morphological errors. The results indicated that there was a significant difference among the levels in terms of morphological errors, $\chi2$ (3, n = 1399) = 4.27, $p < 0.001$. Table 3 reveals the statistical significance of the difference among morphological errors across the levels.

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Table 3: Frequency of morphological errors across levels

Levels	F	(%)	χ2	df	P
Elementary	640	45.74			
Pre-Intermediate	407	29.09			
Intermediate	204	14.58	4.27	3	.000
High Intermediate	148	10.57			
Total	1399				

Figure 2 depicts the percentage of morphology errors whichmanifested themselves in four possible types:misselection as the most frequent followed by addition, omission, andmisordering. There was no instance of morphological blend error.
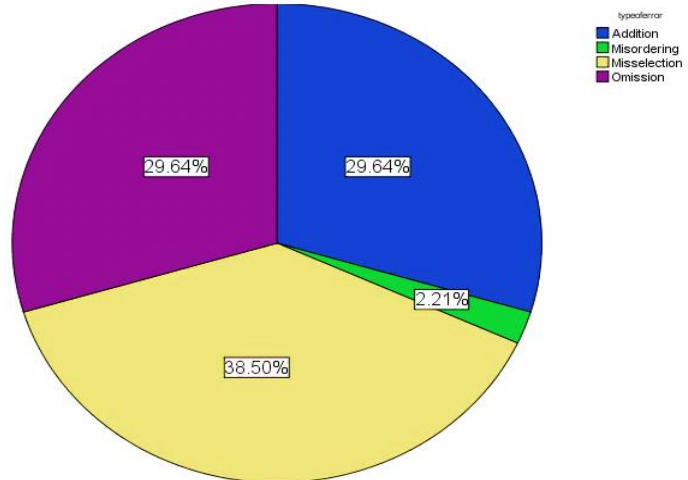
Figure 2: Frequency of types of morphology errors

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The chi-square test for goodness of fit indicated a significant difference across five types of errors, χ^2 (3, 1399) = 416, p< 0.001. (See Table 4)

Table 4: Chi-square results for morphological types of errors

Error Type	F	(%)	χ^2	df	p
Addition	415	29.66			
Omission	414	29.59			
Misselection	539	38.52	416.877	3	.000
Misordering	31	2.21			
Total	1399				

As depicted in Table 5, morphology errors reach the lowest frequency at the high intermediate level. Among the five types of errors, misselections affect morpheme the most. The reason lies in the fact that it takes the learners long, especially at the elementary and pre-intermediate, to learn and apply the correct morphemes. However, English learners may resort to omission and addition of certain morphemes in circumstances in which they fail to express the target in the right forms.Misordering was almost nil (2%) for they affect only word structure. Indeed, wrong placements of morphemes usually take place in structures beyond words. Moreover, blending does not take place at morphology errors because the learners do not normally mix up morphemes the way they do at syntax level.

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Table 5: Frequency of morphology error types through levels

	Elementary		Preinter-mediate		Intermediate		High-Inter mediate		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Addition	199	31	109	26	70	32	37	25	415	29
Omission	193	30	109	26	65	30	47	31	414	29
Misselection	234	36	172	42	79	36	64	43	549	38
Misordering	14	2	17	4	0	0	0	0	31	2
Blend	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Total	640	100	407	100	204	100	148	100	1399	100

Table 5 shows the frequency of various types of morphology errors at the elementary level in order: misselection, addition, omission, and misordering respectively. Since misordering errors affect syntactic level structure most, there are very few instances in case of morphology. The pre-intermediate level is the second proficiency level with 407 morphology errors. The above table reveals the frequency of misselection errors as the most frequent followed by additionand omission with exactly the same number of occurrence.The fourth frequent type was misordering. Like elementary level, there was no blend error detected for the pre-intermediate learners.

At the intermediate level, there were only three types of morphological errors known as misselection with the highest rate (79), addition (70) and omission (65) with the lowest frequency. The learners at the high intermediate level made far fewer errors compared to the learners of the previous levels. The three main types of morphology errors were omission, addition, and misselection. Table 6 summarizes the results of the statistical analyses of morphology error types across proficiency levels.Unlike other proficiency groups, the number of errors at the intermediate level was similar ($p= .646$).

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Table 6: Chi-square analysis for morphological error types

Error Type	F	(%)	$\chi 2$	df	p
Elementary	640	45.74	1.838	3	.000
Pre-Intermediate	407	29.09	1.201	3	.000
Intermediate	204	14.58	.875	2	.646
High Intermediate	148	10.57	7.554	2	.023
Total	1399	100			

5.2 Analysis of Morphological Errors across Genders

Figure 3 below illustrates the effect of gender on error frequency. The obtained results show that the number of errors made by male learners (679) was fewer than that of females' (720).

It should be noted that the morphological and syntactic errors totaling 1399 errors have been merged here to have a better overall understanding though the analysis of the syntactic deviances is not our concern in the current paper.
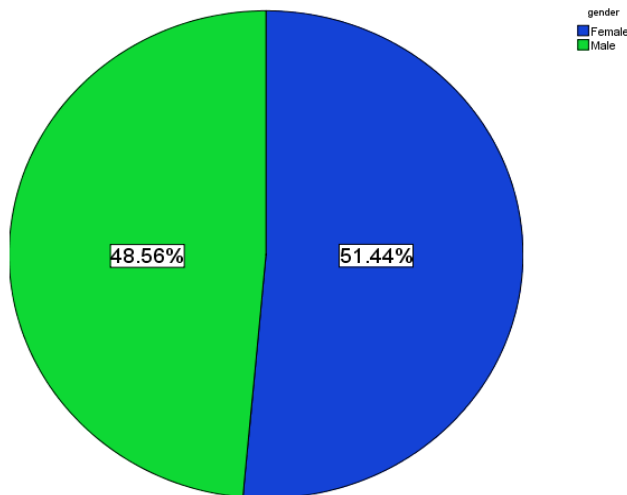
Figure 3: Frequency of errors across gender

A chi-square test for goodness of fit was used to contrast the overall

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role of gender in terms of error frequency. The results turned out to be significant. Indeed, the females made more errors compared to the males, χ^2(3, n = 1399)= 3.85, p = 0.050.

Comparing the levels of proficiency revealed interesting points. In general, the female learners made more errors. At the elementary level, the females outnumbered the males in making errors of all types with a paramount difference, but at the pre-intermediate level the difference got milder and then insignificant at the intermediate level. The result was the reverse at the high intermediate although the difference was not statistically significant. Although the male learners committed fewer mistakes, the frequency of errors was not the same at different levels. At the elementary and pre-intermediate levels the females made more errors than the males, but at the intermediate level both genders made almost the same number of errors. Unlike the previous levels, at the high intermediate level, the males made more errors indicating that females outperformed males in accuracy as they approached the higher levels. Table 7 depicts the above results.

Table 7: Gender errors across proficiency levels

Level	**Male**	**%**	**Female**	**%**
Elementary	305	46	330	54
Pre-intermediate	194	47	213	53
Intermediate	104	49	105	51
High Intermediate	76	52	72	48
Total	679		720	

To analyze the statistical significance of the gender difference at four levels, a chi- square test for independence was utilized showing a statistically significant effect, χ^2 (3, n = 1399) = 8.2, p= .04, Cramer's V=.04.

6. Discussion

The results of the study reveal that although morphology errors occur across all levels of proficiency, they involve low level learners more often than the high level learners. They decline along with an increase in the proficiency level.The analysis of consistent use of non-target inflectional morphology in oral production in comparison with written production in the literature indicated that written production morphology errors are far fewer.

The above fact is in line with the Missing Surface Inflection Hypothesis (Lardiere, 2000) which states that L2 learners have the relevant abstract morphosyntactic knowledge once they have been through adequate exposure and instruction, but problems arise mainly in oral production. The grammatical forms have been learned on the part of the L2 learners; nonetheless, they are not able to retrieve them consistently (White, 2003). Speech morphology errors occur more frequently due to the overt manifestation of surface morphological and phonological forms. In essence, morphological errors are mainly performance, not competence problems. The observed morphological variability, in Hawkin's (2000) words, can be attributed to a breakdown in communication, rather than a representational deficit. L2 learners commit the most errors of inflectional morphology in oral production, under communicative pressure, but not in comprehension or in untimed written tasks.

How can one account for the higher frequency of such errors at lower proficiency levels? One main reason can be attributed to the fact that L2 speakers at a lower level of language competence have a limited amount of declarative knowledge and since the mechanisms of linguistic encoding are not automated, the speaker's attention is directed towards the processes of lexical, grammatical and phonological encoding. Therefore, less attention is available for other phases of message production, resulting in a significantly higher rate of morphological errors (Levelt, 1989).

The findings of the study are in line with Abbasi and Kariminia's (2011) findings. They investigated the grammar errors

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of writing of pre-intermediate level Iranian students in their translation and found that bulk of errors were morphological. Kovac (2011) investigated the frequency and distribution of speech errors of engineering students in Croatia. A recorded speech sample of more than three and a half thousand speech errors were recorded and the results revealed that morphological errors were dominant due to a significantly frequent omission errors such as articles. However, the results of this study reveal that morphology errors occurred across all levels of proficiency indicating that advanced English learners still fall into trouble with morphological constructions.Some examples of morphology errors are given in Table 8.

Table 8: A sample of morphological errors

Type	Example
Omission:	*flectional* Maryam's mum is *make dinner. He *try to call e yesterday. He was *try to find to find his book. He is Ali* other. She *play alone.
	Derivational hey played *careful. He is a *teach at my school.
Addition	*Inflectional* They have six *childrens. He *putted the plate on the table. . Lots of *womans wear black shoes. It is *mine's book.
	Derivational He was angrily. He drove *fastly. He works hardly.
Misselection	*Inflectional* The tree *are outside. I *has a book. She *have a good time.

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	He is tallest than me.
	Derivational He came home *lately. They work *continual. They *argument about the matter .
Misordering	*Inflectional* They are Ali *car's.
	Derivational He is get *upping. They were *walk in parking.

The most frequent type of morphology errors belongs to misselection. Learners tend to produce the wrong morpheme as the first priority.Then, they equally tendto omit and add morphemes to sound correct. Morphology markers do not get misordered or blended often.

MMisslection > Omission = Addition > Misordering > Blend

Overall, morphology errors affecting inflectional morphemes outnumber the derivational morphemes. The relative frequency of morphology errors of the two types along with their subtypes was observed the results of which are given in Table 9 below.

Table 9: Frequency order of morphology errors

Inflectional morphology	Noun > Verb > Adjective > Adverb
Derivational morphology	Noun > Adjective > Verb > Adverb

The findings reveal that L2 learners have persistent problems with nominal and verbal inflectional morphology despite abundant evidence and frequency in the input and instruction. Plural marker –s among noun inflectional morphology errors outnumbers possessive marker-s. In the first place, the learners tend to make omission errors of plural marker-*s* and possessive-*s* marker due to L1 transfer and simplification

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although they are overused in some cases. By comparison, inflectional morphology errors relatively follow the pattern below.

3rd person-s >Past tense -ed>Progressive –ing>Past participle –en / –ed.

The bulk of studies on language production has focused on inflectional morphology because it is more frequent in spontaneous speech; as a result, errors are more noticeable there (Garrett, 1988). One very problematic morpheme is the third person *s*. As McCarthy (2006) puts it, 3rd person has an unmarked setting cross-linguistically. Typologically, unmarked values tolerate more distinctions than marked ones; 3rd person is more likely than 1stor 2ndperson to show gender/number distinctions, suggesting that 3rdperson is unmarked (Harley, 1998); however, it is marked in English and that is where Persian learners of English fall into trouble by either omitting or adding it.

The data reveal that speakers are more likely to drop affixes than to randomly add them. Fromkin (1973) argues that this is because of frequency effect, since the base form in English is usually more frequent than any particular inflected form. One contrast is particularly interesting: in the present-tense forms of most verbs, speakers tend to drop the -s affix, substituting the (more frequent) plural for the singular; but with the irregular verb *to be*, most errors involve replacing the plural form *are* with the(more frequent) singular form *is.* Errors occurring with past *ed* and past participle markers –*en* or –*ed* can be accounted for via frequency effect.

In some instances, the morpheme features are erroneously expressed twice. In particular, verbs are normally inflected for tense, but are uninflected when embedded under an auxiliary or modal. In overtensing errors, the verb is erroneously inflected for tense such as (a) *Did you found her*? (for did you find her?) or (b) *Who does he* thinks he is? (for 'does he think he is?)

Irregular verbs are more likely to be overtensed than regular verbs. This may be due to the vowel-changing nature of most irregular past-tense patterns versus the suffixation nature of regular patterns; perfect -*en* is much less often involved in overtensing than other irregulars. The results also show that overtensing is more common

with low-frequency verbs than high-frequency verbs.

Error of progressive marker–*ing*, as another instance of morphological errors, is frequently observed in spite of the fact that this is among the first grammatical constructions the language learners are taught at basic levels. However, omission and addition of this marker are quite noticeable at the elementary and the pre-intermediate levels. Learners add this marker wrongly to the base form of the verb in simple present tense frequently like (*I going to school every day).

As with inflectional morphology, derivational affixes can be left out, added, or replaced by an inappropriate affix. Derivational morpheme errors comprise the second group of morphology errors by affecting affixes (both prefixes and suffixes). Derivational speech errors show that semantic intentions are intact; however, the choice of semantic features has been incorrect.

One very frequent instance of derivational morphology error observed in this study is 'regularization'. With semantically transparent derivational affixes, loss (omission) errors are common, but addition errors are not (Steinberg & Sciarini, 2006). It seems that the transparency of the semantics leads to the base form being a strong competitor which, because of its higher frequency, is more likely to win out when inappropriate (Levelt, 1989); but the derived form is unlikely to win out when it is inappropriate. With semantically opaque affixes, however, loss and addition errors are more balanced.

Overall, concerning the types of morphology errors, misselection occurs the most followed by omission and addition. The other two types of errors (misordering & blend) have no noticeable trace in morphology errors.

Garrett's serial model can account for a great number of errors (1988) by distinguishing two major stages of syntactic planning: The functional level where content words are selected, and the positional level where function words are selected. Based on his model, content words and function words play very different roles in language production. To illustrate, semantic errors, as in examples (5 & 6), occur in lexical selection:

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5. It is six o'clock. Is not it too early to buy bread? (Is not it too late to buy bread?)
6. Get me a fork. (Get me a spoon)

As Garrett (1988) illustrates, the substitution of "early" for "late" in (5) indicates that the two words are adjectives, belonging to the same part of speech. Additionally, the use of "fork" instead of "spoon" in (6) also shows that the two words share the same syntactic property. The above two examples lends support to the fact that such errors occur in the lexical selection stage.

According to Garrett (1988), morphology errors occur during the functional stage, when lexical items are placed into the wrong places, and because there is often no phonological similarity, this must take place before any phonological information is fitted in. On the other hand, this model can account for morphological errors involving grammatical morphemes which affect the elements which are from different categories but can move within a word or phrase leading to morphology errors. (See examples 7-10)

7. Do you go to parked? (Did you go to park?)
8. I *plays with him.
9. He was *play in the park.
10. They *is here.

In Garrett's (1988) view, these errors occur at the positional stage, when morphological information is being specified. He also suggested that at the positional stage what are planned are smaller chunks of the utterance, given that such errors affect morphemes.

7. Conclusion

This study revealed that although morphology errors occur across all levels of proficiency, they involve low level learners more often than the high level learners. The analysis of consistent use of non-target inflectional morphology in oral production in comparison with written production in the literature indicates that written production morphology errors are far fewer. This fact is in line with the Missing

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Surface Inflection Hypothesis (Lardiere, 2000) which states that L2 learners have the relevant abstract morphosyntactic knowledge once they have been through adequate exposure and instruction, but problems arise mainly in oral production. In essence, morphology errors are mainly performance, not competence problem. L2 learners commit the most errors of inflectional morphology in oral production, under communicative pressure, but not in comprehension or in untimed written tasks. As Erdogan (2005, p. 266) rightly points out, "language teaching cannot stand away from the findings of error analysis."

Students' errors have always been of interest and paramount help to teachers, syllabus designers, and test developers. This may lead educators to devise appropriate materials and effective teaching techniques, and constructing tests suitable for different levels and needs of learners. Teachers can benefit from the findings of error analysis in several ways. Errors help teachers to assess how far towards the goal the learners have progressed and what remain for them to learn.Additionally, errors provide teachers with feedback on reflecting how effective their teaching methodologies are and what changes they have to make to get higher performance from students. Moreover, errors reveal the points that need further attention.

If the teachers know the nature of the learners' system through studying their errors, they could help the learners improve their competence and bring it as close to native competence as possible. Even the mere awareness of errors would influence their thinking. Syllabus design of an English teaching course is a very important component of teaching-learning process. There are many factors to be considered to decide about what to teach to what level and age group. Errors provide significant data for syllabus designers because they show what materials are important to be included and what need to be revised. To summarize, the implication of error analysis to language teaching can be seen from the aspect of language teachers and syllabus designers.

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