

PRESENT CONTINUOUS TENSE PRODUCTION ERROR IN THE ACADEMIC WRITING OF SPORTS SCIENCE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the errors made in the production of Present Continuous Tense (PCT) in the academic writing of first-semester Sports Science students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Gorontalo. Unlike previous studies that mostly focused on English major students, school learners, or general grammatical errors, this research examined PCT production among students from a non-English academic program. A qualitative descriptive error-analysis design was applied to analyze the students' written performance through three tasks: Sentence Completion Task, Picture Description Task, and Free Writing Task. The participants consisted of 20 first-semester Sports Science students. The collected data were analyzed using Dulay et al.'s (1982) Surface Strategy Taxonomy and interpreted based on Selinker's (1972) Interlanguage Theory. The results showed that misformation was the most frequent type of error, accounting for 56.16% (41 errors), followed by omission with 31.51% (23 errors), and addition with 12.33% (9 errors). The analysis indicated that students' main difficulties were related to the inconsistent use of the auxiliary verb BE rather than the formation of the -ing participle. Students frequently omitted BE in progressive sentences, selected incorrect auxiliaries due to interference from Simple Present structures, or added unnecessary forms in habitual expressions. Furthermore, error frequency differed across writing tasks. Controlled tasks produced more grammatical errors because students had to focus on specific structures, while free writing encouraged avoidance strategies due to higher cognitive demands. These findings suggest that task complexity and interlanguage interference significantly influence students' mastery of PCT. This study provides evidence for the importance of targeted grammar instruction, particularly for students in non-English academic programs, to improve their accuracy in using Present Continuous Tense in academic writing.

Keywords: Present Continuous Tense, Error Analysis, Sports Science students, Academic writing, EFL, Interlanguage



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INTRODUCTION

Although students may understand English grammar rules, they can still produce errors in writing because they often lack awareness of how texts are structured, interpreted by readers, and shaped by cultural expectations. From the perspective of intercultural rhetoric, the main challenges faced by EFL students in academic writing are not solely related to language proficiency but also involve differences in rhetorical patterns and cultural ways of organizing ideas (Ariyani & Ilham, 2026).

Students who transfer their first-language cultural patterns into English writing tend to apply native-language logic, which may affect cohesion, idea development, and the ability to meet the expectations of a global academic audience (An & Li, 2024). Therefore, intercultural language learning plays an essential role in higher education by helping students negotiate issues of identity and adapt to conventional academic writing structures (An & Li, 2024). This finding is also supported by previous research analyzing 20 essays, which identified 214 total errors, with syntactic errors representing the largest category at 61.69% (132 errors) (Tri Rahayu & Bochari, 2026). These findings emphasize the need to integrate genre awareness and intercultural perspectives into academic writing instruction.

However, most of the previous studies reported these issues instead of giving a sufficient explanation of how these issues emerged under different production demands. Furthermore, grammatically incorrect sentences are a common feature of the writing of EFL university students in Indonesia. This is reflected in the difficulty of Indonesian students to write in English, particularly in the university environment. In addition, according to Aldayel et al. (2026)

one of the problems students face is difficulties with grammar that hinder them from producing correct and acceptable essays in English. Another problem of grammar is also said to be due to the differences between the source and the target language grammars by Aldayel et al.(2026). This is even more challenging for students who are learning a foreign language in Indonesia.

The importance of a change from the linguistically based models to sociolinguistically based ones (Abdulkareem, 2013) . The study they did in the academic reading and writing course showed that language proficiency is not the only factor that makes students achieve academic writing proficiency. Despite learners' good proficiency in difficult language patterns in the new language, the students failed to fulfill the requirements of academic writing. Academic writing requires specific patterns of language that are used within the academic community but the learners were not the source of production of such patterns. It was found that when students concentrate on correct grammar rather than on speaking and logical flow in English, there are negative effects on their confidence about speaking English. This is because ideas are not clearly shared because of the pressure to 'get it right' (Wayan Diani et al. 2025).

In considering and interpreting the results of some recent research on second language writing, the notion that the context of the assignment affects the students' use of thinking power in their engagement with the process of L2 development is raised. The research conducted by Thao & Quynh (2020) , found that the more complex the tasks, the better the information and structure. But no better accuracy was obtained when the complexity of the tasks increased. In a similar, many aspects of written work are influenced by the task's complexity and



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preparation. Experts claim that these parts include the difficulty of sentence structure and the correctness of the language (Wang et al., 2024). The language the students use can be explained in terms of the pressure of the work they are given: the task determines the effort. The majority of these investigations have examined the overall outcomes and the difficulty of the language but not whether the students adopted the appropriate grammar rule correctly at different levels of control.

The importance of this distinction is important for the reason that learning of the rules may be partially observable even though learners may not use their knowledge in production. Therefore, the grammatical error discovered may be more than just a surface error from target language, it may be a chaotic stage in the development of the interlanguage, especially when the learner has to figure out meaning, word choice, sentence construction and encoding. Recent studies conducted in Indonesia, also stated that the existence of grammatic errors was not at random but could be associated with something occurring within the language and/or the influence of the first language (Shiddiq et al., 2023). However, few studies have explored how specific tense errors can be read in relation to the control of the production process and the development of grammatical knowledge of Indonesian university EFL students. Sport Science have had experience of English only as a discipline and academic resource (except for non-English majors) while the English Education and English majors have had experience of English as a discipline and academic resource.

In Sport Science, students reported that although they felt they should have English skills for accessing scientific information, completing assignments, communicating in international sport environments and becoming a professional,

they found problems in academic writing skills and other English skills in the Indonesian context (Manchón et al., 2023). In this sense, the English that the students in Sport Science produce may present a good context for understanding the process of learning knowledge in a foreign language in a non-formal language-specialist programme. English is a key element in the academic development of Sport Science students, but there is little knowledge about the manner in which the various morphological forms were used in the different stages of the production control, or what sort of errors might be informative about the development of interlingual knowledge.

Thus, the present study bridges a gap between grammatical accuracy, production control, interlanguage development, and English learning within the discipline. Rather than looking at grammatical errors as indicators of students' poor English fluency, it looks at the production of present continuous tense as a product of students' learning of grammatical concepts. It focuses on errors involving the missing and misusing of to be, word morphology, and order of constituents. This is particularly significant for Indonesian EFL learners, as the progressive form of English requires auxiliary to be that has no direct equivalent in Indonesian. These errors may indicate a possible influence of L1 over a general problem with the construction of the English present continuous form. Therefore, the present study is not solely focused on detecting PCT mistakes. This gives a more distinct account of which PCT errors occur, how often they occur and whether their distribution changes across three elicitation conditions among first-semester IKOR students.

Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions:



1. What are the common types of errors made by first-semester students of IKOR EFL and the rates of occurrence of each of these errors?
2. What is the difference in the number of errors made by male and female participants when using the Present Continuous Tense?
3. What is the accuracy rate of the Present Continuous Tense in three specific tasks: Sentence Completion Test, Picture Description Test, and Free Writing Task?

METHOD

This study uses descriptive qualitative approach which is a method to map students' linguistic performance based on error analysis. The application of this method is an exploratory method that aims to analyse the internal process of inter language systems of learners by analysing surface errors in written texts. To focus the analysis on three main types of deviation, the analysis of errors is based on the Surface Strategy Taxonomy framework: omission (missing elements), misformation (errors in the formation or selection of elements), and addition (unnecessary elements added).

This study was carried out at University of Muhammadiyah Gorontalo with 20 (16 male, 4 female) students of the English language, enrolled into the intermediate level of English language grammar class. Purposive sampling method was used for sampling. For the purpose of comparative validity of data across linguistic tasks, an in-depth analysis was conducted on a representative sample of participants (P1 through P20) that provided complete answer sheets to all three instruments administered.

Data were collected using a triangulation approach involving three written instruments designed with progressively varying levels of control and cognitive demands (task demands), namely: 1) Sentence Completion

Test (SCT): Students were given 20 minutes to complete 15 sentence-completion items to assess the micro-grammatical components of PCT in isolation. 2) Picture Description Test (PDT): Students were given 20 minutes to observe sports-themed visual stimuli and were required to write at least two PCT sentences per picture. 3) Descriptive Free Writing (FW): Students are given 40 minutes to spontaneously write a complete descriptive paragraph on the theme "Current Activities on the Sports Field," with a minimum length of 150 words.

In this study, the data analysis technique is done following the methodological steps proposed by Corder (2007) as an interlingual analysis. The data processing steps are as follows: (1) Collecting student works from three tests; (2) Separating the student's incorrect sentences from student's correct sentences; (3) Eliminating the pure spelling errors (orthographic errors) such as "traning," "shooting," "swimer" that do not interfere with the validity of the syntactic analysis (Pramudiana & others, 2022) ; (4) Descriptive quantification with frequency and percentage; and (5) Linguistic explanation based on theories of interlanguage development and task demands (Aziz & others, 2020)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the three instruments showed 73 cases of explicit grammatical errors, distributed into the categories of misformation (56.16% / 41 cases), omission (31.51% / 23 cases) and addition (12.33% / 9 cases). The results are reported in text for each instrument as follows: In the Picture Description Test (PDT), grammatical errors are considered.

A total of 170 real sentences were produced by the students in response to the stimuli and an analysis of these sentences showed that in 13 cases grammatical errors



(7.65 % in total) occurred and 157 sentences were without grammatical deviations. Errors of the “misformation” type were most common (8 cases, 61.54%), followed by the “omission” type (5 cases, 38.46%) and the addition type was not observed (0.00%). A

summary of the grammatical errors found in the first instrument is given in Table 1. Table 1. The figures in the table show the number of errors made in the Picture Description Test (n = 13).

Table 1. Error Distribution in the Picture Description Test (n = 13)

Error Category	Specific Error Pattern	Example Case	Target Syntax (L2)	Freq.	%
Misformation	Plural Noun Morphology	<i>the athlete was running...</i>	<i>The athlete is running...</i>	5	61.54%
		<i>some athlete are doing...</i>	<i>Some athletes are doing...</i>	3	
Omission	Absence of the Auxiliary Verb “be”	<i>...when he Ø swimming...</i>	<i>...when he is swimming...</i>	4	38.46%
	Omission of a Required Article	<i>Ø coach of a football...</i>	<i>The coach of a football...</i>	1	
Addition	Unidentified	-	-	0	0.00%

Based on PDT data, the omission errors are related to the use of the auxiliary verb “is” in subordinate clauses which are preceded by a temporal conjunction, for example, “when he swimming”. In the present example, this inter-language pattern “when + Subject + Ø + V-ing” shows that students think that the be verb can be omitted in subordinate clauses. Meanwhile, misformation errors in the PDT were produced because of failed synchronisation of plural markers after plural quantifiers (“some athlete are”) and systematic errors in the selection of auxiliaries (P7 used “was running”, “were swimming” where it was required to use the present tense “is running”).

1. Grammatical Errors in the Sentence Completion Test (SCT)

The highest errors were obtained by the SCT which had 50 grammatical errors, as a result of the isolated nature of the instrument which requires a high micro-cognitive load. There were no more omission errors in the SCT instrument, with 24 cases (48.00%) still being the most common, followed by addition errors (9 cases, 18.00%), and finally, misformation errors (17 cases, 34.00%). Table 2 presents a detailed description of the error patterns.

Table 2. Distribution Error of Reading Completion Test (RCT), n= 50

Error Category	Specific Error Pattern	Pattern Example	Target Syntax (L2)	Freq.	%
Misformation	Incorrect Choice of Interrogative	<i>Do you training...?</i>	<i>Are you training...?</i>	14	48.00%
	Auxiliary	<i>He are running...</i>	<i>He is running...</i>	7	
	Subject-Auxiliary Agreement	<i>is</i>	<i>He is running...</i>	3	
	Spelling of -ing	<i>demonstrateting...</i>	<i>is</i>		
	Participles		<i>demonstrating...</i>		



Omission	BE Deletion (Plural)	<i>They Ø playing football...</i>	<i>They are playing football...</i>	13	34.00%
	BE Deletion (Singular)	<i>The team Ø preparing...</i>	<i>The team is preparing...</i>	4	
Addition	Addition of Standard Auxiliary BE	<i>She is plays basketball...</i>	<i>She plays basketball...</i>	9	18.00%

Complex interlanguage dynamics are revealed by an analysis of the SCT data, especially in the high frequency of misformations in the interrogative sentence pattern "Do you train for the competition?" This mistake clearly demonstrates intralingual interference in the form of overgeneralization, where learners mix the Simple Present and Present Continuous sentence patterns by identifying the interrogative marker for the present absolute as "Do." Additionally, learners' syntactic encoding is unstable when they make mistakes in numerical feature agreement, like "He is running." In the meantime, 17 instances of omission in the SCT further support the status of the auxiliary verb "BE" as a vulnerable feature, where the pattern "They playing" predominates because students struggle to understand subject-auxiliary inversion in micro-discourse interrogative sentences.

The addition error that appears in "She is plays basketball every day" is the most intriguing feature. Inserting "is" before a Simple Present verb that ends in "-s" is a double marking that shows the student's

mental blending of two conflicting competence rules. When learners start to understand the value of using the BE but overuse it in unsuitable habitual contexts, this transitional phase is normal.

2. Grammatical Mistakes in Descriptive Free Writing (FW)

Students must write a cohesive text of at least 150 words about a real-life scenario on a sports field for the Descriptive Free Writing (FW) test. The free writing exercise gives students complete linguistic freedom, in contrast to the two earlier tools (P1 to P14). Only ten genuinely obvious instances of grammatical errors were discovered as a result of this freedom, which significantly reduced the number of grammatical errors. Misformation errors accounted for 9 cases (90.00%) of the analysis results in this FW discourse, whereas omission errors only occurred in one case (10.00%) and there was not a single instance of an addition error (0.00%). Table 3 provides a succinct summary of the error distribution map for this third instrument.

Table 3. Error Distribution in Descriptive Free Writing (n = 10)

Error Categories	Specific Error Patterns	Case Study	Target Syntax (L2)	Freq.	%
Misformation	<i>The Simple Past in Today's Conversation</i>	<i>Practice continued...</i>	<i>Practice is continuing...</i>	4	90.00%
	<i>The Easy Present for Practical</i>	<i>some of us</i>	<i>some of us</i>	3	
	<i>Measures Stative Verbs in the Progressive Tense</i>	<i>drink...</i>	<i>are drinking...</i>	2	
		<i>You are seeing...</i>	<i>You can see...</i>		



Omission	<i>Absence of the Subject in a Clause</i>	<i>..., but Ø is not cooling...</i>	<i>..., but it is not cooling...</i>	1	10.00%
Addition	<i>Unidentified</i>	-	-	0	0.00%

According to the FW data presentation, students' interlanguage difficulties have moved from the mechanical to the macro-discourse level, as evidenced by the complete dominance of misformations. Pupils have demonstrated fluency and the ability to generate dozens of correct PCT sentences on their own, including "I am exercising" and "My friends are stretching." However, their cognitive system undergoes a temporal regression as the discourse grows into a full paragraph, making it impossible for them to maintain tense consistency. When describing events that are actually happening at the time the paragraph is being written, students abruptly switch to using the Simple Past ("Practice continued") or Simple Present ("some of us drink water"). At the level of rapid spontaneous discourse production, these symptoms show that the learners' representation of the target grammar has not yet been completely and automatically integrated. In the meantime, the low number of addition errors and omission errors support the idea that the students are using an avoidance strategy by avoiding complicated

syntactic structures to reduce the number of surface errors.

DISCUSSION

The three instruments' combined results reveal that learners' grammatical error profiles are dominated by misformation errors (56.16%), followed by omissions (31.51%) and additions (12.33%). The predominance of misformation in all linguistic tasks suggests that students are not completely ignorant of the Present Continuous Tense (PCT) formula. Instead, this pattern is indicative of a dynamic but unstable interlanguage system (unstable interlanguage phase), where learners have learned fragments of L2 morphological rules but consistently fail to integrate and apply them in the proper syntactic context. (Ariyani & Ilham, 2026) asserts that interlanguage is a permeable system that experiences ongoing cognitive restructuring. Morphological errors are more noticeable than the total lack of forms because of this feature. This overall taxonomic evaluation of learners' errors is presented in Table 4.

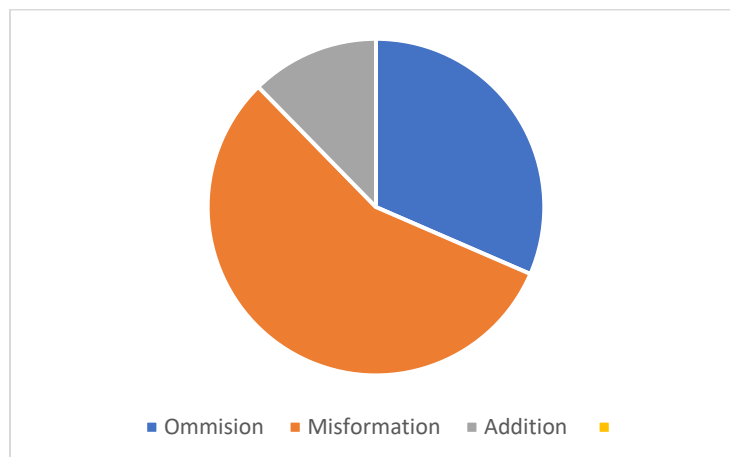
Table 4. Comparison of Error Frequency Distributions Across Instruments

Error categories	Picture Description Test	Sentence Completion Test	Free Writing	Total	Percentage
Misformation	8	24	9	41	56.16%
Omission	5	17	1	23	31.51%
Addition	0	9	0	9	12.33%
Total of Errors	13	50	10	73	100.00%

Profile of Student Error Categories

Distribution of the three categories of grammatical errors based on a total of 73 errors.





Picture 1. Students' Errors Categories

Therefore, misformation is the error category with the highest proportion (56.16%), followed by Omission (31.51%) and Addition (12.33%).

1. Comparative Variability Based on Task Characteristics (Task Demands)

Each test instrument's cognitive load has a significant impact on fluctuations in the number of errors. According to (Shiddiq et al., 2023), the context of the particular linguistic task greatly influences the hierarchy of grammatical errors. Strict structural control produced the greatest number of errors (50) in the Sentence Completion Test. This happened as a result of forcing students' cognitive attention to concentrate on manipulating particular micro-grammatical elements within isolated sentences. On the other hand, there were only ten grammatical errors in the Free Writing task, a significant decrease. According to interlanguage theory, this phenomenon is a learner's avoidance tactic.

According to (Wang et al., 2024), when EFL students are given the opportunity to produce language in their own way, they tend to overlook complex structures or progressive interrogative structures that they haven't yet mastered. "I am exercising" or "My friends are stretching" are examples of clise-klise

pendek kalimat that are already automatic in their memories.

2. Anatomical Deformation: Tense Conflict and Failure of Feature Concordance

The most frequent mistakes are inconsistent temporal aspects of discourse interpretation and incorrect auxiliary verb selection. The question is, "Do you train for the competition?" The overgeneralization of the Simple Present interrogative rule to the Present Continuous aspect results in significant intralingual interference, as shown by (14 cases).

When trying to differentiate between the syntactic roles of "Do/Does + base verb" and "Am/Is/Are + V-ing," learners encounter functional confusion. The results of (Manchón et al., 2023), who found intralanguage errors when students tried to apply L2 interrogative rules, are consistent with this error.

Meanwhile, learners' inability to maintain present-time discourse-level consistency is demonstrated by the emergence of past auxiliary patterns like "the athlete was running" in the Picture Description Test and "Practice continued" in the Free Writing task. When students are required to align the discourse-level time



markers of the present with the surface form of the inflected verb, they encounter temporal dissociation. However, they comprehend the aspect of action continuity through the use of the -ing suffix or the past progressive structure. The existence of micro-morphosyntactic coding dysfunction at the

level of the singular subject's numeric feature marker is further highlighted by subject-verb agreement errors like "He are running." (Thao & Quỳn, 2020) frequently reports this pattern of misformation in the taxonomy of surface errors. Table 5 provides an overview of this problem.

Table 5. Core Auxiliary BE Error Pattern Mapping Across Constructions

The Interlanguage Learner	Surface Pattern Phenomenon	Target Grammatical (L2)	Related Testing and Construction
Omission	<i>They Ø playing football</i>	<i>They are playing football</i>	Progressive Declarative / SCT & PDT
Misformation	<i>Do you training...?</i>	<i>Are you training...?</i>	Progressive Interrogative / SCT
Addition	<i>She is plays basketball</i>	<i>She plays basketball</i>	Habitual Present / SCT

3. Omission: Proof of Progressive Structures' Partial Acquisition

Partial acquisition is clearly demonstrated by omission errors (31.51%), which consistently focus on the omission of the auxiliary "BE," as in the phrases "They playing" and "when he jumping." The lexical aspect marker -ing is typically learned earlier and has more perceptual salience for learners than functional auxiliary verbs like is, am, and are, according to the theory of the natural order of acquisition. Because they view the BE as a secondary grammatical element that does not take away from the sentence's primary meaning, learners are able to identify the semantic meaning of a progressive action and successfully encode it into the present participle.

Contrastive analysis, which shows the impact of the lack of a copula system or functional auxiliary verbs indicating temporal aspects in the syntactic system of the students' first language (L1), Indonesian, further supports this tendency. Negative L1 transfer has a significant impact on ESL/EFL learners' writing, according to (Emeral et al., 2026). When students must concurrently construct

Present Continuous sentences within embedded clauses or formal interrogative sentences, the absence of formal equivalents for these auxiliary verbs adds to the cognitive processing load and triggers strategies to reduce grammatical elements.

4. Overgeneralization and Blending of Constructions as an Addition Mechanism

Even though the addition error (12.33%) only occurred in the Sentence Completion Test and had the lowest frequency, its pattern "She plays basketball every day" was extremely consistent and instructive. This error indicates that the learner's cognitive mind has combined two conflicting grammatical representations. A clear sign of functional overgeneralization of the BE is double marking, which occurs when the auxiliary "is" appears before a verb that ends in "-s." Learners often overuse the BE auxiliary in Simple Present habitual sentences, which should not contain copular forms, once they start to understand how important it is to place it in English sentences.



Interlanguage development framework, it is normal for learners to go through this phase of transition as new and old rules overlap until they are able to permanently reorganize their cognitive map of grammar (Ni'amah, 2025).

CONCLUSION

The most common error type was misinformation with 41 of 73 errors (56.16%), followed by omission (23.29%) and addition (12.33%). The results of the study suggest that the students had gained some aspects of the PCT construction, but not yet the stable control of the use of the construction in various linguistic contexts. The results of the structural analysis revealed that the BE auxiliary verb was the most fragile element in the PCT production. Students failed to use BE in progressive constructions, used the wrong auxiliary verb in interrogative and progressive sentences and used BE in the correct context of habitual. The examples of "They Ø playing football", "Do you training?" and "She is plays basketball" show that the students have problems with auxiliary selection, subject-auxiliary agreement, tense, and aspect. The errors thus include a lack of stability in the interlanguage system and not a denouing of knowledge of the PCT form. The distribution of errors was also found to be different across the three tasks. The Sentence Completion Test yielded the largest number of errors, 50 cases; the Picture Description Test yielded 13 cases and the Free Writing Task yielded 10 cases. The greater number of errors made in the structurally controlled task indicates that students had more difficulty tasking themselves specifically to grammatical features when they were asked to. The lower error rate in free writing, on the other hand, is not necessarily considered as a higher level of grammatical accuracy. In the free writing data, students often had simpler and more

common constructions and some PCT forms were not used. This pattern of results indicated that the task requirements affected the way that students used and retrieved their emerging knowledge of the grammar. In terms of the participant comparison the study comprised 16 males and 4 females students. The findings in the article however do not support a detailed statistical comparison of the error frequencies between male and female subjects. Thus, there is no definite gender difference in PCT errors in the study. The evidence available provides support for error-type and task-related variation conclusions. From a pedagogic point of view, the results indicate that the use of auxiliary BE in non-English major programs should be emphasized in the pedagogic strategies rather than being limited to the formation of the -ing participle. Students should be exposed to these more often to differentiate the uses of am/is/are + V-ing, do/does + base verb and Simple Present. In addition, there should be planned opportunities for students to practice the structures and then apply them in a more natural setting to provide a gradual introduction of the grammar into the students' more spontaneous writing. In conclusion, the study will prove that the errors made by Sports Science students are systematic and context sensitive. The common occurrence of BE omission and/or wrongly used BE together with the dominant misinformation errors suggest an interlanguage system that is still in an evolving state. Further differences between the writing tasks are reflected in the differences in grammatical performance, indicating that task demands and level of production control influence the grammar. The findings offer some contextual evidence to help understand how non-English major EFL learners' grammatical knowledge developed and how their emerging PCT system was manifested in academic writing.



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