Article

Analysis of Thai Students' Ability in Composing Using Indonesian Affixes in Southern Thailand

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A B S T R A C T

This study aimed to analyze the ability of 30 Matayom 5 students (equivalent to Grade 11 high school) at Thammasat Whittaya School, Southern Thailand, to write essays using Indonesian affixes correctly and to identify the most common types of affixation errors. Mastery of affixes (prefixes, suffixes, infixes, and confixes) is considered crucial because even the smallest error can affect the overall quality of the essay, impacting both meaning formation and grammatical accuracy. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through writing tests, observations, and teacher interviews. The analysis revealed that students' abilities were moderate, with a high tendency for errors in prefixes, suffixes, and confixes, particularly related to phonological changes and grammatical inaccuracies. Infix errors were the least common. These findings underscore the urgent need to strengthen morphology learning through explicit strategies, ongoing contextual practice, and the development of teaching materials specifically tailored to the needs of Thai students.
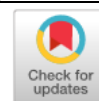
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INTRODUCTION

In the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), morphology plays a crucial role in connecting lexical knowledge with grammatical competence. Morphological knowledge enables learners to understand how words are formed, modified, and used accurately within sentences, making it a foundational element of second or foreign language writing.

As the national language of Indonesia, Indonesian has a relatively complex morphological system, particularly in its use of affixation. Learners are required to master various prefixes, suffixes, confixes, and infixes, which significantly alter word meaning and grammatical category (Hasana, 2022). This complexity presents a unique challenge for foreign learners.

Morphological awareness is especially important in writing because it allows learners to manipulate word forms to express precise meanings and appropriate grammatical functions. Through affixation, learners can transform base words into different word classes, enriching their written expression and improving textual coherence.

Affixation is a morphological process in which affixes are attached to root words to generate new meanings distinct from the original lexical forms. For this reason, mastery of Indonesian affixes is considered a core component of writing proficiency, as it directly affects accuracy, clarity, and stylistic appropriateness in written texts (Putra & Zain, 2022).

Producing high-quality Indonesian writing requires learners to manage multiple linguistic levels simultaneously, including morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. When learners lack sufficient morphological competence, errors in word formation occur, which can obscure meaning and reduce the overall comprehensibility of their writing (Sa'diyah, 2022).

Affix acquisition difficulties among L2 learners often stem from factors such as mother tongue interference, limited grammatical knowledge, and insufficient vocabulary mastery. Affixation poses particular challenges because it demands an understanding of how word forms change categories and meanings, rather than simply adding elements to a base word (Tepu Sitepu, 2025).

Furthermore, affixes function within sentence structures and require learners to select forms that align with syntactic and semantic demands, a process that involves considerable cognitive effort (Khairunnisyah & Firmansyah, 2024). These challenges are intensified by limited access to learning infrastructure abroad, such as Indonesian language corpora and standardized proficiency assessments, which are vital for identifying and correcting non-standard usage (Melinda & Febriyana, 2023).

In Thailand, the growth of Indonesian for Foreign Speakers (BIPA) programs across various educational levels highlights the increasing importance of Indonesian as a tool for education and regional diplomacy (Syamsuyunita, 2024; Saragih, 2025). However, Thai learners frequently encounter morphological errors, particularly in affixation. Analyzing these errors provides valuable insights into learners' cognitive and linguistic challenges and serves as a foundation for developing more explicit instructional strategies and context-based teaching materials (Lubis & Rahayu, 2024).

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to provide a nuanced and in-depth analysis of the morphological abilities of Thai students. While the data collection involved writing tests that produced frequency data, the study remains qualitative as it focuses on error analysis (EA) to describe the nature, causes, and patterns of linguistic deviations (Indrawan, 2024). The quantitative elements (such as error frequencies) serve as a foundation for a deeper qualitative interpretation of the students' interlanguage development. The researcher acted as the primary instrument in identifying, classifying, and interpreting the contextual meaning behind each affixation error.

Respondents

The subjects were 30 Matayom 5 students (equivalent to Grade 11 high school) at Thammasat Whittaya School, Southern Thailand. They were selected because they are actively enrolled in the Indonesian for Foreign Speakers (BIPA) program. Given the specific and focused nature of the population, this study utilized saturated sampling (census sampling), where all 30 students in the class were included as participants to ensure a comprehensive overview of the group's morphological challenges.

Instruments

The research utilized three primary instruments: a writing test, observation sheets, and interview guidelines. The writing test was designed to elicit natural language production, specifically the use of prefixes, suffixes, infixes, and confixes in a continuous essay. Observation sheets were used to document the classroom environment and linguistic behavior, while interview guidelines provided structural support for collecting qualitative insights from Indonesian language teachers regarding the students' learning difficulties.

Procedures

The study was conducted over 28 days at Thammasat Whittaya School. It began with a preliminary observation of the Matayom 5 classroom to assess the learning environment. This was followed by a brief introductory session on Indonesian affixes to ensure all students understood the task's context. Students were then given 40 minutes to write an essay on a familiar topic. After the essays were collected, the researcher performed a meticulous evaluation to identify morphological errors. To maintain ecological validity, all procedures were integrated into the school's existing schedule to ensure students performed in a natural academic setting.

Data Analysis

Following the interactive analysis model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2025), the data was processed through three concurrent flows:

Data Reduction: Sorting and focusing on specific affixation errors while discarding irrelevant information.

Data Display: Organizing the identified errors into descriptive tables and matrices to visualize frequency patterns.

Conclusion Drawing/Verification: Interpreting the frequency data to explain why certain errors (e.g., phonological changes) occur frequently among Thai learners.

Data Validity

To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the findings, the study employed triangulation of methods and triangulation of sources. The results from the writing tests were cross-referenced with classroom observations and teacher interviews (Rahmawati, 2024). This multi-dimensional check ensures that the interpretation of morphological errors aligns with the actual linguistic reality of the students and is supported by existing morphological theories.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

An analysis of essays written by 30 fifth-grade Matayom students at Thamasat Whittaya School indicates that their ability to use Indonesian affixes still faces various morphological challenges. A total of 25 students made errors in the use of prefixes, suffixes, infixes, confixes, and other affixes, which are linguistically important elements in Indonesian word formation. This finding is relevant because affixes are morphemic elements that determine the syntactic function and lexical meaning of a word. Therefore, these errors demonstrate the need for a deeper understanding of the Indonesian affixation system in the context of BIPA learning in Southern Thailand.

This finding is important because affixes function as morpheme elements that determine both the syntactic function and lexical meaning of words in Indonesian grammar. Therefore, the presence of these errors highlights the need for a more comprehensive understanding of the Indonesian affixation system, particularly in the context of teaching Indonesian as a foreign language in Southern Thailand. Strengthening teaching in this area is essential to support learners in developing better linguistic competencies and producing more accurate and meaningful written texts.

Table 1. Frequency of Errors in the Use of Indonesian Affixes in Matayom 5 Students (N = 25)

No	Student Name	Affixes	Affix Error	Correct Form
1	Faisol Masan	prefiks (ter-)	Burung itu tekurung di rumah	Burung itu terkurung di rumah
2	Naccawat La-mao	infiks (-em-)	Anak itu semembunyi di belakang rumah	Anak itu bersembunyi di belakang rumah
3	Phokpong Khankham	sufiks (–i)	Adik mencuci-i piring	Adik mencuci piring
4	Muhammaddasri Sa-i	sufiks (–an)	Saya membeli minumanan dingin	Saya membeli minuman dingin
5	Yusup Sakula	infiks (el-)	Abang gelempar bola	Abang melempar bola
6	Wiraphat Fanfa	prefiks (ber-)	Murid bedoakan sebelum belajar	Murid berdoa sebelum belajar
7	Phokpong Penjan	konfiks (di-...-kan)	Buku itu diletakkankan atas meja	Buku itu diletakkan atas meja
8	Phuripat Roaddoun	prefiks (ter-)	Adik tesenyum kepada guru	Adik tersenyum kepada guru
9	Worrawat Lawan	prefiks (ber-)	Saya lari setiap pagi untuk menjaga kesehatan	Saya berlari setiap pagi untuk menjaga kesehatan

10	Alawee Yamacharoen	prefiks (me-)	Siswa sedang menbaca cerita	Siswa sedang membaca cerita
11	Badrun Yeesama-ae	sufiks (–i)	Guru mengajari-i siswa menulis	Guru mengajari siswa menulis
12	Sofa Thaipraksa	sufiks (–an)	Nenek memasakkan-kan sup	Nenek memasakkan sup
13	Rattana Chaiykhaotong	prefiks (ber-)	Kami bejalan-jalanan sore tadi	Kami berjalan-jalan sore tadi
14	Nisreen Mattala	konfiks (per-...-an)	Besok ada pertemuan-an guru	Besok ada pertemuan guru
15	Silinna wansu	konfiks (pe-...-an)	Guru menilai petulisan siswa	Guru menilai penulisan siswa
16	Sarina Yala	konfiks (pe-...-an)	Siswa pengumpulanan tugas dilakukan besok	Siswa pengumpulan tugas dilakukan besok
17	Tanasda Ongsara	konfiks (me-...-kan)	Siswa menuliskan-kan jawabannya	Siswa menuliskan jawabannya
18	Nadeeya Saethong	konfiks (per-...-an)	Kami mulai perjalananan pukul tujuh	Kami mulai perjalanan pukul tujuh.
19	Maryam Panwan	prefiks (ber-)	Anak-anak bermainkan layang-layang	Anak-anak bermain layang-layang
20	Firhana Hahyeebilang	prefiks (ber-)	Adik belarik ke taman	Adik berlari ke taman
21	Rusnee Nuydech	prefiks (ter-)	Nenek tedudukkan di kursi	Nenek terduduk di kursi
22	Malisa Jeennui	prefiks (me-)	Kakak mefotokan temannya	Kakak memfoto temannya
23	Saitun Inman	konfiks (me-...-i)	Ayah meperbaiki-i pintu rusak	Ayah memperbaiki pintu rusak
24	Sukat Usoh	konfiks (pe-...-an)	Nenek mencatat pembelianan barang	Nenek mencatat pembelian barang
25	Sasina Sani	sufiks (-an)	Saya membeli makan pedas itu	Saya membeli makanan pedas itu

Table 2. Correct Use of Indonesian Affixes by Matayom 5 Students (N = 5)

No	Student Name	Affixes	Correct Form	Origin Word
1	Kuoanbas Saradi	prefiks (me-)	Siswa Thailand menuliskan pengalaman mereka saat mengikuti kegiatan budaya Indonesia	tulis
2	Muhammadreeyal Akem	konfiks (pe- / -an)	Guru menjelaskan pelajaran bahasa Indonesia dengan contoh imbuhan yang mudah dipahami	ajar
3	Taskeem Danden	prefiks (di-)	Cerita yang dibaca siswa sangat menarik dan membantu mereka memahami struktur kalimat	baca
4	Theeraphat Wijit	prefiks (ber-)	Kelas mereka tampak berhias dengan berbagai poster bertuliskan kosakata Bahasa Indonesia	hias
5	Nabin Khotchawet	konfiks (pe- / -an)	Sekolah mengadakan pelatihan menulis karangan untuk meningkatkan kemampuan siswa	latih

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The results of this study were obtained from an analysis of 30 essays by fifth-grade Matayom students (equivalent to eleventh-grade high school in Indonesia) at Thamasat Whittaya School, Southern Thailand. The most common error found was the inaccurate use of affixes, found in 25 of the 30 students.

The results of this study were obtained from an analysis of 30 essays by fifth-grade Matayom students (equivalent to eleventh-grade high school in Indonesia) at Thamasat Whittaya School, Southern Thailand. The analysis focused on four types of affixes in Indonesian: prefixes, suffixes, infixes, and confixes. Each essay was examined to identify 25 errors in affix usage and 5 errors in correcting them according to Indonesian morphological rules.

Table 3. Distribution and percentage of student errors

Type of Error	Amount	Percentage
Prefiks	10	40%
Sufiks	5	20%
Konfiks	8	32%
Infiks	2	8%
Jumlah	25	

Prefix-Affix Errors

The most common type of error was the use of prefix-affixes, occurring at 40%. These errors included the incorrect use of the prefixes me-, ber-, and ter-. Some students wrote words with prefix forms that did not conform to phonological rules, such as "memcuci" (washing). Furthermore, structural errors were also found, such as the use of double prefixes, such as "makan-kan" (cooking-kan), which should be used as "makankan." These findings indicate that students still struggle to understand the process of phoneme fusion and the rules of phonological change in Indonesian prefixes.

Suffix-Affix Errors

The use of suffix-affix errors was also lower at 20%, particularly the suffixes -kan, -i, and -an. Some students overused suffixes, such as "jari-i" (teaching-i). Other errors occurred because students added suffixes to words that do not require them, such as "jari-i" (teaching-i) or "jalan-an" (street-an) which should be used as "jalan". This indicates that students do not yet fully understand the function of suffixes in forming word meaning.

Infix Affix (Infixation) Errors

Incorrect use of infix affixes (-el-, -em-, -in-) occurred at a low rate of 8%, but was still considered significant. This error was seen when some students mistakenly identified forms such as masukin and tutupin as the result of infixation, even though both forms are uses of non-standard suffixes. This finding indicates that students are not yet fully able to differentiate the process of infixation from the process of suffixation. Overall, students need a deeper and more systematic understanding of the characteristics and use of infix affixes in Indonesian

Confix Affix Errors (Combination of Prefixes and Suffixes)

Incorrect use of confixes (ke-…-an, pe-…-an, per-…-an, di-…-kan) was also found at a fairly high rate, at 32%. A common error was the addition of double suffixes, such as in writing, traveling, or being placed. This type of error indicates that students know the general confix pattern, but do not yet understand that the suffix in the confix does not need to be added again with the suffix -an. In addition, some students choose the wrong confix, for example perjalanan-an, Peraturan-an when it should be perjalanan and Peraturan.

Discussion

The research results indicate that students at Thamasat Whittaya School also face the same difficulties as those found in previous studies. This aligns with research (Sulastri 2020), which states that affix usage errors found in students' writing are not only identified but also analyzed in depth to understand the patterns and characteristics that emerge. This analysis indicates that the types of errors occurring reflect students' inability to master basic affixation concepts, such as determining base forms, selecting appropriate affixes, and applying morphophonemic rules. These findings provide a clearer picture of the linguistic challenges students face, particularly when they must integrate morphological understanding with effective and effective writing skills.

Furthermore, several factors contribute to the occurrence of these errors. A lack of understanding of affixation rules is the primary cause, followed by writing skills that still need to be improved, and a lack of guidance or targeted feedback from teachers. Although there are differences in the dominant types of errors among students, the root of the problem remains closely related to their understanding of morphological rules and the pedagogical aspects of the learning process. Therefore, a more systematic and intensive learning strategy is needed to ensure students are able to apply the concept of affixation appropriately in real language contexts (Kaso 2025).

The dominant affixation errors found among Thamasat Whittaya School students indicate their inability to fully apply morphological rules. This aligns with research findings (Lina Yuliasari et al. 2025), which also highlight the complexity of morphological issues. They even found that: "This study found morphological errors in affixation, reduplication, and compound words among BIPA FIB UB students. Affixation errors are located in the morphophonemic processes of assimilation, adaptation, and dissimilation." (Fernando, Basuki, and Suryadi 2021) Thus, it can be concluded that morphological problems for non-native speakers, including Thai students, are not limited to affixation but involve broader word formation processes, such as reduplication and phonological aspects.

An analysis of Thai students' compositions shows that the prefix me- is the most frequently used affix, and almost all the words formed are verbs. This finding is consistent with research (Asmoko et al. 2022), which also concluded that "the most frequently used affix is the prefix me-. And the most productive word class is the verb class." This similarity indicates that the prefix me- has the most essential function in forming active sentences in Indonesian, making it dominant among foreign learners.

This similarity indicates that the prefix me- has a very essential function in forming active sentences in Indonesian (Tyas Pratama 2025). Its dominant use by foreign learners indicates that this affix is considered the most easily recognized and most frequently encountered in the linguistic input they receive, both through learning materials and communicative interactions (Afina Aulia et al. 2025). In addition, the prefix me- plays an important role in forming prefixed verbs that indicate the subject's actions or activities, making it a morphological element that is relatively easy to map into the learner's first language structure. These factors make the prefix me- more quickly mastered than other affixes, although a thorough understanding of the morphophonemic rules that govern it remains a challenge for some learners (Laksanti 2023).

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the morphological ability of Matayom 5 students at Thammasat Whittaya School, Southern Thailand, in using Indonesian affixes is at a moderate level with a high propensity for error. The study identified that 83.3% of the participants struggled with affixation, particularly regarding the complex rules of word formation and phonological changes. The most dominant type of error was found in the use of prefixes (40%), followed by confixes (32%), suffixes (20%), and infixes (8%). These errors primarily stem from a lack of understanding of morphophonemic rules—such as phoneme assimilation and deletion—and the tendency to over-generalize grammatical rules, resulting in redundant "double affixation" like *penulisanan*. While the prefix *me-* is the most frequently and productively used by students to form active verbs, its mastery remains incomplete due to these underlying phonological complexities. Furthermore, the study reveals that these morphological challenges are deeply influenced by the typological differences between the Thai language, which is isolating, and Indonesian, which is agglutinative. To improve students' linguistic competence, this study underscores the urgent need for explicit morphological instruction where affixes are taught not as isolated vocabulary, but as a systematic process of meaning and category change. Additionally, there is a necessity for ongoing contextual practice that moves beyond multiple-choice exercises toward continuous writing tasks that require students to apply affixes in meaningful

sentences. Finally, the development of BIPA teaching materials specifically tailored to the needs of Thai students—particularly those addressing common pitfalls in morphophonemic assimilation—is essential. By addressing these morphological gaps, Indonesian language educators in Thailand can better support students in producing grammatically accurate and semantically clear written compositions, ultimately strengthening language diplomacy through BIPA.

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