

# A Morphological Analysis of Writing Errors among Undergraduate Students in Academic Writing: Implications of English Language Teaching in Tripura

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**Abstract:** This study explores morphological errors commonly found in undergraduate students' academic writing in Tripura to understand how limitations in morphological awareness affect overall writing proficiency. Using a descriptive and analytical approach, writing samples were collected from college students across various disciplines and examined for recurrent error types, including inflectional misuse, derivational inaccuracies, incorrect word formation, and inappropriate morpheme selection. The findings reveal that students frequently struggle with verb inflexions, pluralisation, tense markers, and the formation of derived words, indicating gaps in their understanding of English morphological rules. These errors not only create problems in the academic writing but also reflect broader challenges in second-language acquisition in the state. The study highlights the need for explicit instruction in morphology within English language teaching (ELT) practices in Tripura.

**Keywords:** Morphological Rules and Errors, Writing Proficiency, Second-Language Acquisition, Explicit Instruction in Morphology

## 1.0 Introduction

Morphology is a branch of linguistics that deals with types, functions, and nature of morphemes, the smallest meaningful units within a written word. Morphemes are classified into two main categories. (1) Free morpheme, and (2) Bound morpheme. (1) Free morphemes can be used independently as a word. (2) Bound morphemes must be used with a root word or free morpheme to express their meaning. It is further divided into two sub-categories. (i) Derivational Morphemes and (ii) Inflectional Morphemes. (i) Derivational morphemes derive meaning or alter the grammatical category of a word. They are again further divided into two types. (a) Class Changing Derivational Morphemes, for example, beauty is an abstract noun, but when the suffix -ful is added to it, it becomes beautiful, an adjective. (b) Class Maintaining Derivational Morphemes modifies the meaning of a word, but maintains its class or

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grammatical category. For example, 'do' is a verb, but adding the prefix -re to it makes 'redo,' which is also a verb. It means that the meaning of the word is modified, but the grammatical category or class is maintained. (ii) Inflectional Morphemes are actually grammatical units that do not alter the core meaning or grammatical category of a word, and they are used to express grammatical features such as tense, number, person, possession, and comparison. For example, in the case of eat and eats, both words function as verbs. The addition of the inflectional suffix -s to eat indicates that the subject is in the third person singular and the action occurs in the present tense. Importantly, the verb's fundamental meaning remains unchanged.

The following diagram represents the sub-branches of the morphology in writing.

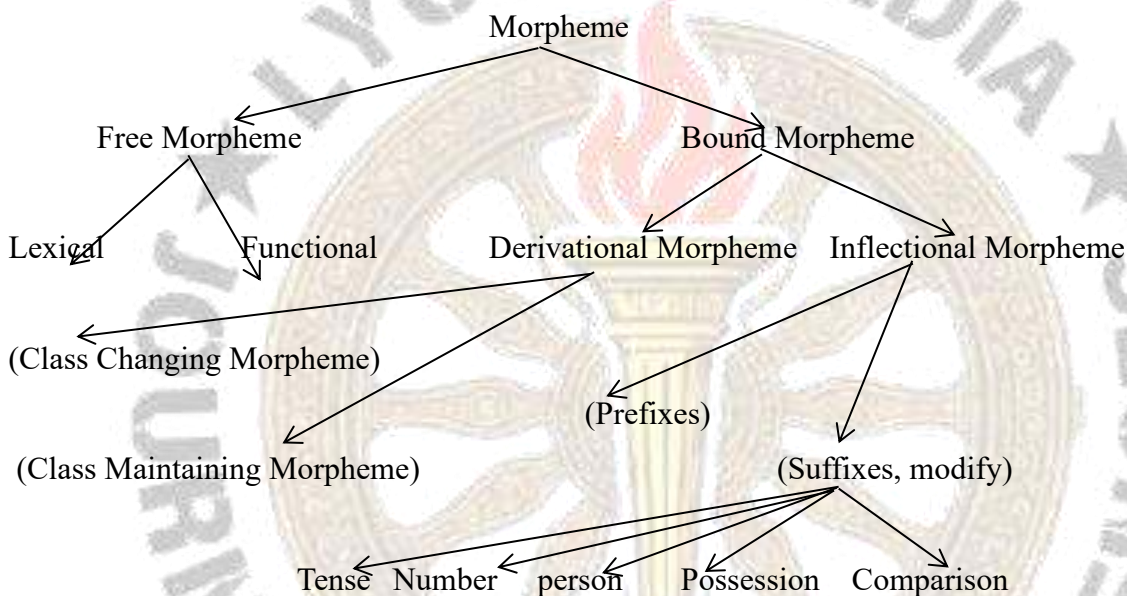


Diagram No. 1: Illustrates the details of the sub-branches and the Classification of Morphemes in Written English.

## 2.0 Review of Related Literature

In preparation for the present study on the morphological analysis of the UG level writing, some relevant books have been consulted. These are listed below:

2.1. Akmajian and Richard A. Demers, in *Linguistics: An Introduction to Language and Communication* (2004), argue that to achieve mastery of a language, one must recognize five distinct types of information that a word can convey. These are (i) Phonetic or Phonological information (ii) Lexical Structure Information (iii) Syntactic Information (iv) Semantic Information (v) Pragmatic Information. Further, they

argue that if a word does not fulfil the purposes of the information cited in writing, then it results in incomplete writing communication.

2.2. Anindita Dey, in *Language and Linguistics: A Handbook for Beginners* (2020), explores the concept of morphemes and their role in word formation. She emphasizes that students can make new words by using affixes. Two primary types of affixes are discussed here. (i) Suffixes: The most common form of word-building process is the addition of suffixes. These are of two types: Derivational and Inflectional Suffixes. The derivational suffix can change the meaning or parts of speech of a word. For example, beauty >> beautiful, (noun >> adjective), quick >> quickly, (adjective >> adverb). The inflectional suffixes are used in the case of -- tense, number, possession, or comparison -- of words. For example, cat >> cats (plural form of the root word), jump >> jumped (past tense form of the word), walk >> walking (present participle form of the verb walk).

(ii) Prefixes: It is a part of a word or morpheme that is added before the base or root of the word. It can modify the meaning of the word, but cannot change its grammatical category. For example, the prefix 'un' meaning a negative marker as in happy >> unhappy.

2.3. Prasad in *A Course in Linguistics* (2024) states that words in a sentence are not only the smallest meaningful units, because words can be divided into several meaningful units. In chapter 4 (p. 54), he mentions the example of such words, viz, "independently". Here, the author explains that "dependent" is a root word and has a specific meaning. Whereas, after adding a prefix to the root, the opposite sense of the root word is derived, and after adding the suffix to the root word, it is changed into an adverb. While classifying morphemes, Prasad observes that morphemes can be divided into two main types: (i) Class-Maintaining Morphemes and (ii) Class-Changing Morphemes. When, after adding a prefix or/and a suffix to the root, the grammatical class or the parts of speech are not changed, it is called as the Class Maintaining Morphemes. For example, eats, reads, and plays. On the other hand, after the addition of a suffix -er to the root, when the part of speech or grammatical category of that word changes, it is known as a class-changing morpheme. For example, "teach" (verb) is a root word or a free morpheme, and after adding a suffix "-er" to it, it becomes a noun, "teacher." Here, the grammatical category of the word is changed from one part of speech to another. Another such example is when the adjective "happy" is attached to the suffix -ness to make it "happiness," which is an abstract noun. Similarly, if a suffix "-able" is added to the root word drink (verb), the class of the word changes to an adjective "drinkable."



2.4. S.K. Verma and N. Krishnaswamy in *Modern Linguistics: An Introduction* (1989), provide an introductory classification of word types based on their morphological structure. They highlight the differences among simple, complex, and compound words, along with their features, to illustrate how these categories differ. A Simple word is a word that forms from a single free morpheme—example: book, chair, table, etc. These words are not further divisible into smaller meaningful units. A complex word, on the other hand, forms from the two morphemes, one free morpheme and one bound morpheme, or both bound morphemes. For example, teacher (free + bound), uneasy (bound + free), and conclude (bound + bound). These combinations can carry specific meanings or grammatical functions. For example, happy >>> unhappy. Here, the prefix-un has a negative influence, and it has reversed the meaning of the root word. A compound word consists of two or three, or more than three, morphemes, of which at least two are free. For example, two free morphemes and a bound morpheme: dogsitter (Here, dog is an example of a free morpheme, and sit is also an example of a free morpheme, -er suffix is an example of a bound morpheme).

### **3.0 Research Methodology**

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative research methods to collect, analyse, and interpret data on morphological errors in English writing among undergraduate students at general degree colleges in Tripura.

#### **3.1 Quantitative Research Method**

A quantitative method was used to collect data on the number of students who commit morphological errors in English writing. This approach helped measure the frequency, distribution, and statistical significance of such errors among undergraduate learners. The primary objective was to quantify the extent of morphological inaccuracies in students' written work.

#### **3.2 Qualitative Research Method**

A qualitative method was adopted to interpret and analyse learners' writing quality based on English morphological rules. This approach aimed to explore the underlying reasons why vernacular-medium students commit more errors in writing words in English. Through qualitative analysis, the researcher identified the types, patterns, and contextual factors contributing to morphological errors in students' writing.

### 3.3 Research Tools

To collect authentic and reliable data from the target population, the following research tools were used:

(i) Questionnaire (ii) Interviews (iii) Observation of classroom writings (iv) Teachers' and students' feedback.

### 4.0 Data Collection, Analysis, and Interpretation

There are twenty-eight (28) Government Degree Colleges under the department of higher education in Tripura. For the present study, the researcher selected and visited ten (10) of these institutions to collect relevant data. The names of the selected colleges are presented below in Table 1. The writings of undergraduate students were collected and analysed based on the four parameters: (i). Lexical Error Analysis of Morphemes (ii) Functional Error Analysis of Morphemes (iii) Derivational Error Analysis of Morphemes, and (iv) Inflectional Error Analysis of Morphemes.

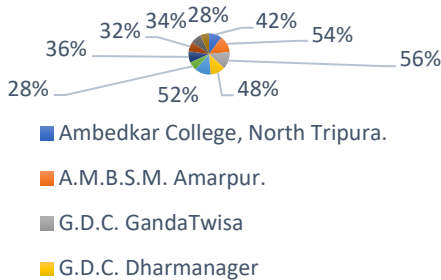
Sl. No	Name of the Colleges
1	Ambedkar College, Fatik Ray, (North Tripura)
2	A.M.B.S. Mahavidyalaya, Amarpur (Gomati District, Tripura)
3	Govt. Degree College, Ganda Twisa (Dhalai Tripura District)
4	Government Degree College Dharma Nagar (North, Tripura)
5	Government Degree College, Pani Sagar (North, Tripura)
6	Netaji Subhash Mahavidyalaya, Udaipur (Gomati District, Tripura)
7	Ram Thakur College, Agartala (West Tripura District)
8	Rabindranath Thakur Mahavidyalaya, Bishalgarh (Siphahijala District, Tripura)
9	Swami Vivekananda Mahavidyalaya, Mohanpur, Fatikcherra, (West Tripura District)
10	Women's College, Agartala, (West Tripura District)

Table 1 illustrates the institutional details of the selected and visited colleges in Tripura.

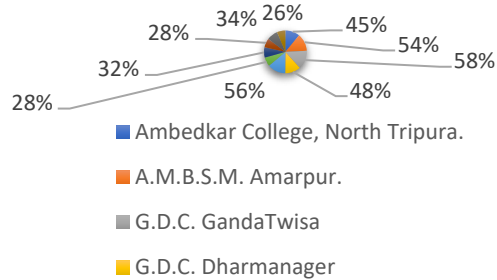
### 4.1 Lexical Error Analysis of Morphemes

Lexical errors refer to inaccuracies related to the use of correct and meaningful words in a sentence. The absence of appropriate lexical choices can negatively affect learners' vocabulary acquisition. Three major types of lexical errors were identified in the written compositions of undergraduate students in Tripura.

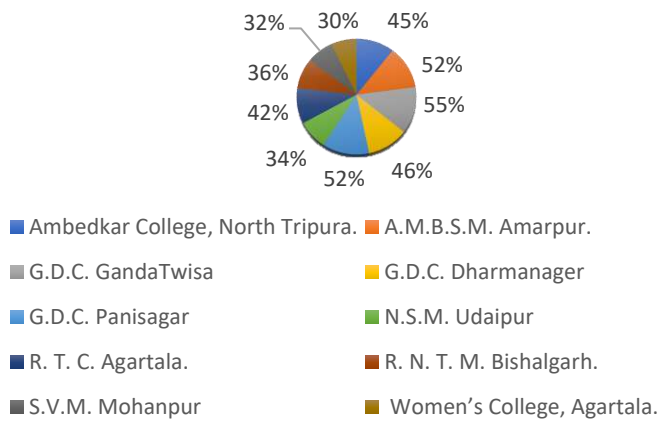
### Word Selection Error



### Spelling Mistakes



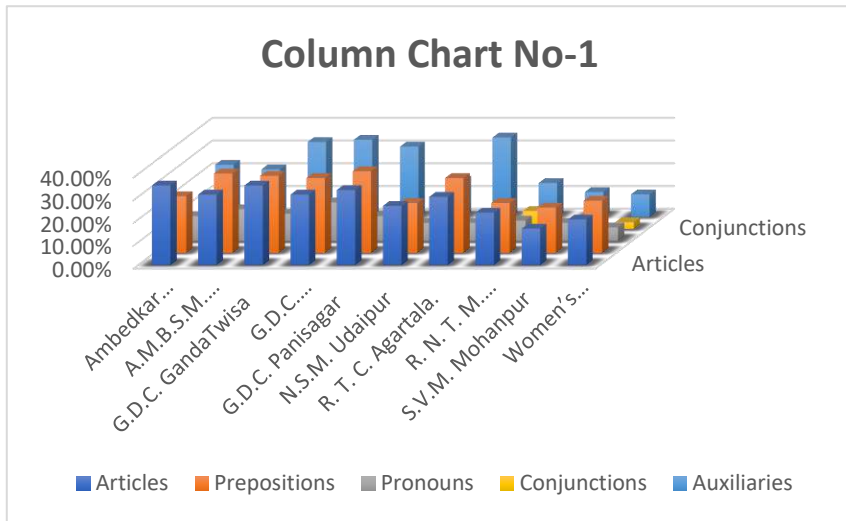
### Repetition of Words



These include:(i) Word Selection Error, (ii)Spelling Mistakes, and (iii)Repetition of Words. Pie Chart No. 1 illustrates the percentage of the Word Selection Error in Writing. Pie Chart-2 illustrates the Percentage of Spelling Errors in Writing. Pie Chart No. 3 illustrates the percentage of Errors in Word repetition.

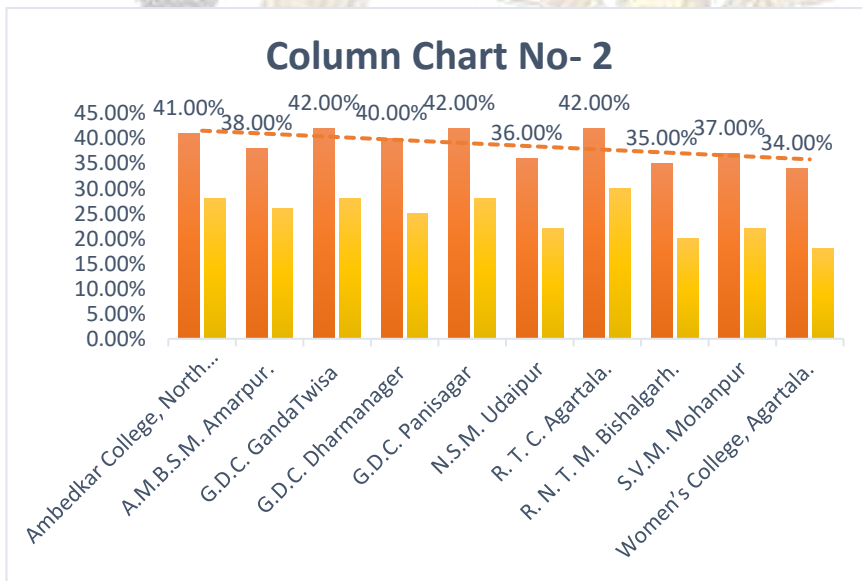
4.2 Analysis of the Functional Error of Morphemes: This includes the grammatical units used in writing to express the relationship between the content words in a sentence. Based on the research scholar's observations during a field visit to selected institutions of higher education in Tripura, it was noted that students from vernacular-medium backgrounds cannot construct grammatically accurate sentences. The most frequent areas of difficulty they find are discussed here. These are

(i)Articles(ii)Prepositions(iii)pronouns (iv)Conjunctions, and (v)Auxiliaries, etc. and their error percentage are given in the column chart no.1 below.



4.3 Analysis of the Errors of Derivational Morphemes: There are two types of Derivational Morphemes, namely Class-Changing Morphemes and Class-Maintaining Morphemes. Class-changing morphemes change the class of a word when added to the root. For example, happy is a base or root word, and it is an adjective under the grammatical category. Still,

whenever the morpheme -ness is added to this root word, happy, as the suffix, then it changes its grammatical category and becomes happiness, which is an abstract noun. These morphemes combine to form new words with new meanings. Hence, the name is the derivational morphemes.



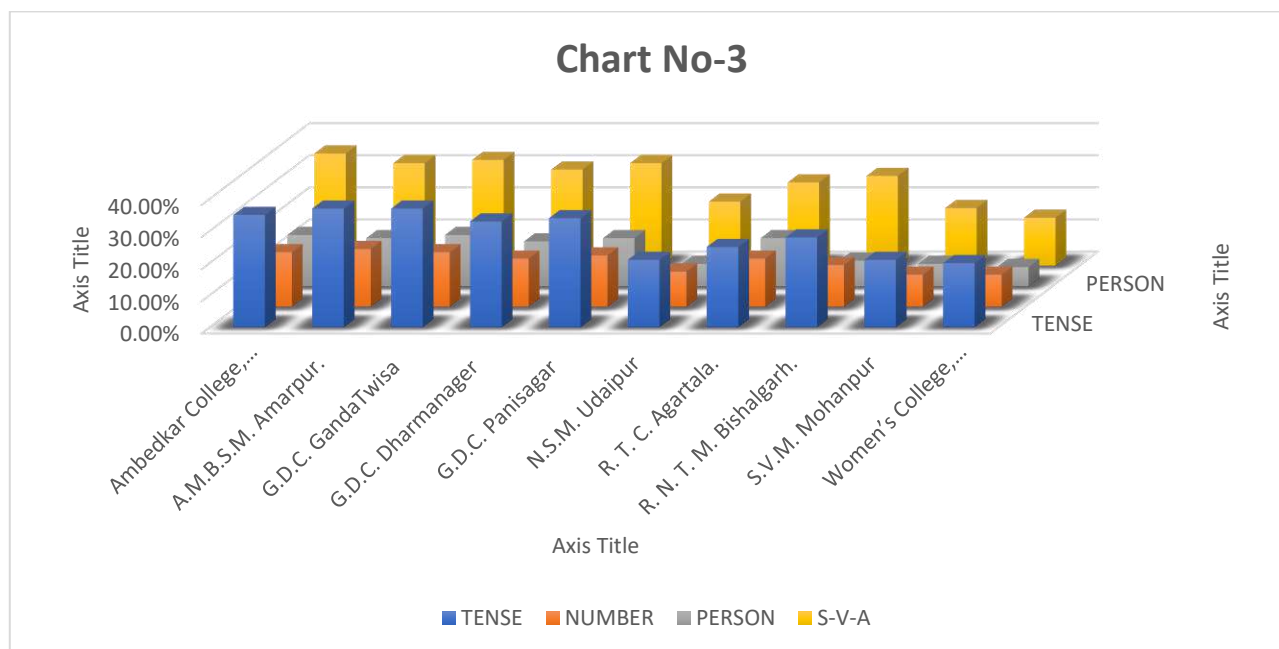
On the other hand, the class of morphemes maintains its class even after being added to the base word. For example, cat is a root word, and it is a noun, and if a suffix 's' is added to the root word, it will be cats, that is, from the singular noun to the plural noun only—no changes in the grammatical category.

Undergraduate students make more mistakes when attempting to change

the grammatical class of morphemes. The observed error percentage is shown in Column Chart No. 2 which illustrates the percentage of the derivational Error in the undergraduate writing.

4.4. Inflectional Error Analysis of Morphemes: The four major types of errors of inflectional morphemes that have been identified in the writings of undergraduate students from the General Degree Colleges in

Tripura. These are (i)Tense (ii)Number (iii)Person, and (iv)Subject- Verb- Agreement. Undergraduate (UG) students from various government degree colleges with vernacular medium school backgrounds often fail to recognise and apply the grammatical relationships between numbers and persons in sentences.



The Subject-Verb-Agreement error occurs when the subject and verb in a sentence do not match in number and person. For example, (i)Bina go to college every day. (Incorrect sentence). (ii)Bina goes to college every day. (Correct sentence). Explanation: The subject is Bina, and it is in the third-person singular number. The verb go should take the inflectional morpheme -s to agree with the subject. The error has occurred due to the omission of the inflectional suffix-s, which is required for the third person, singular number, and present tense. During field visits to various colleges in Tripura, the research scholar identified multiple instances of such errors in undergraduate students' written compositions. The percentage of such errors is illustrated in the above Chart No. 3.

### 5.0 Findings and Recommendations

The Undergraduate (UG) Students in Tripura cannot write in English correctly; multiple factors contribute to this problem. Some of the key causes are discussed below.

5.1. Incorrect Pronunciation and Its Effects on Writing: There is an essential distinction between a syllable and a morpheme. A syllable is the smallest unit of sound in a spoken word, but a morpheme is the smallest unit of meaning in a written word. It has been observed that many undergraduate students from vernacular-



medium school backgrounds mispronounce syllables, resulting in incorrect spelling and writing. For example, they listen first, then speak, and finally write. Because listening shapes speaking, and speaking shapes spelling. Exposure to incorrect pronunciation in early schooling among vernacular-medium background students even leads to writing errors at the undergraduate level in Tripura.

5.2. Weakness in Derivational Morphology and Memorization Habits: Most of the students do not bother about making new words with new meaning following the rules of the derivational morphology in their writing; instead, they like to depend on their private tutors' rote memorized notes, which they reproduce during examinations. This dependence undermines their ability to form and recall correct word forms and spellings, reducing long-term language competence.

5.3. Peer Imitation and Exam-Oriented Attitudes: A group of students always follow another group and imitates the writings, and the main target of the students is not to learn the language and strengthen their vocabulary in English. The sole aim is to pass through the examination. The examiner does not care whether students write their answers in their own words. Although the beginning of each question paper instructs students to write in their own words as far as practicable, hardly any students follow this instruction.

5.4. Memorisation, Assessment, and the Illusion of Ability: Students who excel at memorisation and reproduce their memorised notes in the example hall are given good marks and praised as top performers, while those who cannot write the memorised answers are treated as the worst and failed students. This type of assessment does not encourage any original thinking. Therefore, to improve learners' writing quality, teachers need to encourage students to write in their own words rather than rewarding them for memorised, and for the reproduced notes in exams.

5.5. Handwriting and Readability Problems: Clear and neat handwriting assists in good communication. It has been observed that many students have handwriting that is completely incomprehensible, whether due to mistakes in inflectional or derivational morphology or to other grammatical errors. Hence, it is recommended that, instead of focusing solely on content words, teachers emphasise neat, precise handwriting to improve students' written communication.

5.6. Lack of Grammatical Foundation: Many students lack basic knowledge of subject–verb agreement, person, number, and appropriate verb forms. This grammatical gap prevents them from making correct sentences and undermines confidence in written expression. Systematic instruction in these foundational grammar rules is necessary to build accurate sentence construction.



6.0. Conclusion: To improve the standard of the English writing of the vernacular medium background students among the UG (Undergraduate) learners in Tripura, teachers need to intervene at multiple levels: (i) introduction of the phonetic training in the primary schools, (ii) strengthen the phonetics and morphological instructions at the academic level, (iii) classroom practices that priorities original thinking writing and thinking over rote memorisation, (v) explicit teaching of grammar and subject verb agreement rules besides attention of legible handwriting, etc. if these efforts and initiatives are implemented along with the active word formation and communicative practice, there will be an effect lasting improvement in writing skills among the undergraduate students in Tripura.

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