

Substitution and Misordering Errors in Indonesian Academic Writing: A Syntactic Analysis of Grammatical Deviations

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Abstract: This study aims to identify and analyze patterns of grammatical errors in Indonesian academic writing, focusing on substitution and misordering. The research employs a qualitative descriptive method, using data collected from students' written texts. The data consist of ungrammatical sentences that were selected and classified based on specific error types, particularly the misuse of prepositions, incorrect correlative pairings, and improper arrangement of sentence elements. The analysis reveals that substitution errors frequently occur in the use of correlative prepositions, such as the incorrect pairing of *antara ... dengan ...* and *antara ... terhadap ...*, as well as the misuse of *di* in temporal contexts instead of *pada*. In addition, misordering errors are found in phrase and sentence structures, especially in noun phrases that do not follow the standard head–modifier pattern. These errors result in reduced clarity and grammatical inaccuracy. The findings indicate that learners still have difficulties in applying fixed grammatical rules and appropriate syntactic structures in academic writing. This study highlights the importance of explicit grammar instruction to improve learners' writing accuracy and provides insights for educators in addressing common grammatical problems.

Keywords: Grammatical errors, substitution, misordering, Indonesian academic writing, syntax

I. INTRODUCTION

Language plays a crucial role in academic writing as a medium for expressing ideas clearly, logically, and systematically. In Indonesian academic contexts, grammatical accuracy is essential to ensure that meaning is conveyed effectively and without ambiguity (Kaharuddin et al., 2025; Said et al., 2021; Aswad et al., 2019). However, many learners still experience difficulties in applying correct grammatical structures, particularly in the use of prepositions, correlative forms, and phrase construction. These difficulties often result in errors such as inappropriate substitution of linguistic elements and incorrect ordering of sentence components, which can reduce clarity and coherence in writing (Kyeongjae et al., 2025; Adinda et al., 2025; Dalyan et al., 2022).

Ungrammatical sentences emerge when linguistic rules are not properly applied, leading to structures that are unclear, ambiguous, or unacceptable in formal writing. In Indonesian, this often occurs due to the misuse of prepositions, incorrect pairing of correlative forms, and improper arrangement of sentence elements. Such errors can distort meaning and weaken the effectiveness of communication. As stated by Alwi et al. (2014), grammatical accuracy is a fundamental requirement in Indonesian sentence construction because each linguistic element has specific functions and patterns that must be followed. When these rules are violated, the resulting sentences fail to meet standard grammatical conventions.

One common issue found in academic writing is the substitution of linguistic elements, where learners replace one form with another that appears similar but functions differently. This is particularly evident in the misuse of correlative prepositions, such as the incorrect pairing of *antara* with *dengan* or *terhadap*, instead of the appropriate form *antara ... dan ...*. Such substitutions indicate that learners have not fully understood the fixed nature of certain grammatical patterns. According to Sneddon (2010), Indonesian prepositions have distinct grammatical roles and cannot be

used interchangeably without affecting sentence correctness.

In addition to substitution errors, misordering also contributes significantly to ungrammatical constructions. Misordering occurs when sentence elements are arranged in a way that does not follow standard syntactic patterns, resulting in awkward or confusing expressions. This is commonly seen in noun phrases and complex sentence structures, where the relationship between elements becomes unclear. As explained by Kridalaksana (2008), Indonesian generally follows a head–modifier (DM) pattern, and deviations from this structure can lead to unnatural and less comprehensible sentences.

Based on these issues, this study aims to identify and analyze patterns of substitution and misordering errors in Indonesian academic writing. Understanding these patterns is important for revealing the specific grammatical challenges faced by learners. The findings are expected to contribute to improving learners' grammatical competence and enhancing the quality of academic writing, as well as providing practical insights for educators in designing more effective teaching strategies.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Grammatical Errors in Academic Writing

Grammatical accuracy is a fundamental aspect of academic writing, as it ensures clarity, precision, and coherence in conveying ideas. Ungrammatical sentences occur when linguistic rules are not properly applied, resulting in structures that are unclear or unacceptable in formal contexts (Karubaba et al., 2024; Andini et al., 2026; Puspita et al., 2026). These errors often reflect learners' incomplete mastery of language systems. According to Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982), grammatical errors are a natural part of language learning and can provide insight into learners' developing competence. In the context of Indonesian, Alwi et al. (2014) emphasize that sentence construction must follow specific grammatical rules, including proper use of prepositions and syntactic structures. Failure to apply these rules leads to deviations from standard language norms, which can negatively affect the quality of academic texts.

B. Substitution Errors in Prepositions and Correlative Forms

Substitution errors occur when learners replace a correct linguistic element with an inappropriate one, often due to confusion about similar forms or functions. In Indonesian, this is commonly found in the misuse of prepositions and correlative structures, such as incorrect pairings like *antara ... dengan ...* or *antara ... terhadap ...* instead of *antara ... dan ...*. These errors indicate a lack of understanding of fixed grammatical pairings. Sneddon (2010) explains that Indonesian prepositions have distinct roles and must be used according to their specific functions, particularly in expressing relationships between elements. In addition, Kridalaksana (2008) notes that correlative structures in Indonesian require consistency and parallelism, meaning that both elements in the pair must align grammatically. Incorrect substitution disrupts this balance and results in ungrammatical constructions.

C. Misordering in Phrase and Sentence Structure

Misordering refers to the incorrect arrangement of elements within phrases or sentences, leading to awkward or unclear expressions. This type of error often occurs in noun phrases and complex sentence constructions, where learners fail to follow standard syntactic patterns. Indonesian typically follows a head–modifier (DM) structure, in which the main element precedes its modifier. As stated by Kridalaksana (2008), deviations from this pattern can produce unnatural phrases and reduce comprehensibility. Furthermore, Ramlan (2005) highlights that proper word order is essential for maintaining coherence and logical relationships within sentences. When elements are misordered, the intended meaning may become ambiguous or difficult to interpret (Anyanwu et al., 2024; Shudooh & Shudooh, 2026; Swandayani et al., 2026). Therefore, understanding correct phrase and sentence structure is crucial for producing effective and grammatically accurate academic writing.

III. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to analyze grammatical errors in Indonesian academic writing, particularly focusing on substitution and misordering patterns. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth examination of linguistic phenomena and provides detailed descriptions of error patterns found in the data.

The data of this study consisted of sentences containing grammatical errors collected from students' academic texts. The data were selected using purposive sampling, focusing specifically on sentences that exhibit substitution errors (e.g., misuse of prepositions and correlative forms) and misordering errors (e.g., incorrect arrangement of phrases and sentence elements). Each sentence was then categorized based on the type of error identified.

The data collection technique used in this study was documentation, in which written texts were carefully reviewed to identify ungrammatical sentences. After collecting the data, the analysis was conducted through several steps: (1) identifying and selecting sentences that contain grammatical errors, (2) classifying the errors into substitution and misordering categories, (3) comparing ungrammatical sentences with their corrected forms, and (4) describing the patterns and possible causes of the errors.

To ensure the validity of the data, the analysis was based on established Indonesian grammar references, such as standard grammar guidelines and linguistic theories. The results are presented in the form of tables and descriptive explanations to clearly illustrate the patterns of errors and their corrections.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

1 Substitution

This section discusses errors involving the incorrect replacement of one linguistic element with another, particularly in the use of correlative prepositions. Such errors occur when learners fail to apply the appropriate fixed pairings required in Indonesian grammatical structures. As a result, the sentences become less accurate and may lead to ambiguity. The following table presents several examples of this pattern, highlighting the differences between ungrammatical and corrected forms.

Table 1. Pattern of Substitution of One Element of Correlative Prepositions:

antara ... dan ... → antara ... dengan ...

No.	Data Code	Ungrammatical Sentence	Grammatical Sentence	Description
1	02.01	Pengukuran rasio tersebut dapat dilakukan dengan membandingkan antara penjualan dengan modal kerja maupun rata-rata dari modal kerja tersebut.	Pengukuran rasio tersebut dapat dilakukan dengan membandingkan antara penjualan dan modal kerja ataupun rata-rata dari modal kerja tersebut.	antara ... dengan ... → antara ... dan ...
2	02.92	Sumber daya manusia harus dikelola secara benar dan profesional karena terdapat keseimbangan antara kebutuhan karyawan dengan tuntutan dan kemampuan organisasi perusahaan.	Sumber daya manusia harus dikelola secara benar dan profesional karena terdapat keseimbangan antara kebutuhan karyawan dan tuntutan kemampuan organisasi perusahaan.	antara ... dengan ... → antara ... dan ...

3	02.03	Perbedaan dalam bidang perpajakan pada umumnya terjadi antara perusahaan dengan pemerintah dikarenakan adanya perbedaan kepentingan.	Perbedaan dalam bidang perpajakan pada umumnya dengan ... terjadi antara perusahaan dan pemerintah karena adanya ... perbedaan kepentingan.	... → ... dan
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The table indicates that the error lies in the inappropriate pairing of correlative prepositions, where *antara* is incorrectly followed by *dengan* instead of *dan*. This mismatch results in less precise and ungrammatical sentence structures. The corrected forms show consistent use of the proper pairing, which enhances clarity and structural accuracy. This pattern highlights learners' difficulty in applying fixed correlative forms correctly in academic writing.

Table 2. Pattern of Substitution of One Element of Correlative Prepositions:

antara ... dan ... → antara ... terhadap ...

No.	Data Code	Ungrammatical Sentence	Grammatical Sentence	Description
1	03.01	Pengaruh antara lingkungan kerja terhadap kinerja pegawai menunjukkan adanya pengaruh positif antara lingkungan kerja dan kinerja pegawai.	Pengaruh antara lingkungan kerja dan kinerja pegawai menunjukkan adanya pengaruh positif antara lingkungan kerja dan kinerja pegawai.	antara ... terhadap → antara ... dan ...
2	03.02	Sammy Firwish (2020) menyatakan bahwa disiplin memiliki pengaruh secara positif dan signifikan antara disiplin kerja terhadap kinerja karyawan.	Sammy Firwish (2020) menyatakan bahwa disiplin memiliki pengaruh secara positif dan signifikan antara disiplin kerja dan kinerja karyawan.	antara ... terhadap → antara ... dan ...
3	03.03	Reputasi KAP tidak mampu memoderasi hubungan antara Financial Distress terhadap Audit Delay.	Reputasi KAP tidak mampu memoderasi hubungan antara Financial Distress dan Audit Delay.	antara ... terhadap → antara ... dan ...

The table shows that the error occurs when the preposition *terhadap* is incorrectly used as part of a correlative structure with *antara*. In these cases, *antara* should be paired with *dan* to properly express a relationship between two elements. The use of *terhadap* disrupts the parallel structure and results in ungrammatical or less precise sentences. The corrected versions consistently apply *antara ... dan ...*, which improves clarity and ensures proper syntactic structure. This pattern indicates that learners tend to misuse prepositions without considering their fixed pairings in correlative forms.

Table 3. Preposition Substitution Pattern: *di* → *pada*

No.	Data Code	Ungrammatical Sentence	Grammatical Sentence	Description
1	32.01	Untuk kasus di luar negeri, praktik kecurangan dilakukan oleh Xerox di tahun 2000.	Untuk kasus di luar negeri, praktik kecurangan dilakukan oleh Xerox pada tahun 2000.	di → pada
2	32.02	Di masa kemajuan teknologi sedang pesat seperti sekarang ini, hotel, restoran, dan pariwisata semakin banyak.	Pada masa kemajuan teknologi sedang pesat seperti sekarang ini, hotel, restoran, dan pariwisata semakin banyak.	di → pada
3	32.03	Dalam perkembangan zaman dan teknologi di era globalisasi saat ini keberhasilan suatu perusahaan	Dalam perkembangan zaman dan teknologi pada era globalisasi saat ini keberhasilan suatu perusahaan	di → pada

ditentukan oleh sumber daya ditentukan oleh sumber daya
manusia. manusia.

The table indicates that the error involves the inappropriate use of the preposition *di* in contexts that refer to time rather than place. In Indonesian, *di* is typically used to indicate location, while *pada* is used to express time or specific periods. The ungrammatical sentences show a tendency to use *di* interchangeably without considering its proper function. The corrected forms consistently replace *di* with *pada*, resulting in more accurate and contextually appropriate expressions. This pattern suggests that learners still experience difficulty in distinguishing the functional use of prepositions, particularly between locative and temporal contexts.

2. Misordering

This section discusses errors related to the incorrect arrangement of elements within phrases or sentences. These errors occur when learners fail to follow the standard word order rules in Indonesian, resulting in structures that sound unnatural or unclear. Misordering often affects the relationship between sentence elements, particularly in noun phrases and complex constructions. The following tables present examples of such errors along with their corrected forms to illustrate the proper arrangement.

Table 4. Sentence Pattern with Misordering of Phrases

No.	Data Code	Ungrammatical Sentence	Grammatical Sentence	Description
1	33.01	Pada era sekarang ini dapat dikatakan tidak bisa orang atau organisasi tidur di tengah hiruk-pikuknya perkembangan di segala bidang.	Pada era sekarang ini dapat dikatakan bahwa orang atau organisasi tidak bisa tidur di tengah hiruk-pikuknya perkembangan dalam segala bidang.	Frasa salah urut
2	33.02	Penyediaan lingkungan yang aman dan menyediakan fasilitas yang nyaman bagi karyawan dapat menunjang kinerja karyawan.	Penyediaan lingkungan yang aman dan fasilitas yang nyaman bagi karyawan dapat menunjang kinerja karyawan.	Frasa salah urut
3	33.03	Keberhasilan suatu perusahaan ditentukan oleh sumber daya manusia yang dimiliki oleh perusahaan atau tidak.	Keberhasilan suatu perusahaan ditentukan oleh sumber daya manusia yang dimiliki atau tidak dimiliki oleh perusahaan.	Frasa salah urut

The table shows that misordering errors occur when elements within a phrase or sentence are arranged in an incorrect or non-standard order, resulting in unclear or awkward structures. In the ungrammatical sentences, the placement of words or clauses disrupts the logical flow and weakens the relationship between sentence elements. For example, unnecessary repetition, misplaced modifiers, or incomplete parallel structures lead to ambiguity and reduced readability. In contrast, the corrected sentences present a more appropriate and natural arrangement, ensuring clarity and coherence. This pattern indicates that learners still struggle with organizing sentence elements effectively, particularly in maintaining proper structure and parallelism in complex phrases.

Table 5. Noun Phrase Pattern with MD (Head–Modifier)

No.	Data Code	Ungrammatical Sentence	Grammatical Sentence	Description
1	34.01	Hal ini menjelaskan beberapa kegiatan agenda yang belum	Hal ini menjelaskan beberapa agenda kegiatan yang belum	MD vs DM

		dilaksanakan dengan baik.	dilaksanakan dengan baik.	
2	34.02	Dalam penelitian ini, saya ingin mengkaji bagaimana fraud pentagon mendeteksi potensi terjadinya laporan kecurangan keuangan.	Dalam penelitian ini, saya ingin mengkaji bagaimana fraud pentagon mendeteksi potensi terjadinya kecurangan laporan keuangan.	MD vs DM
3	34.03	Hal ini dapat dilihat realisasi rata-rata pencapaian kinerja karyawan.	Hal ini dapat dilihat rata-rata realisasi pencapaian kinerja karyawan.	MD vs DM

The table shows that the errors occur due to incorrect ordering in noun phrases, particularly in the placement of the head and modifier elements. In Indonesian, the typical pattern follows a head–modifier (DM) structure, but the ungrammatical sentences reflect an inappropriate arrangement that resembles a modifier–head (MD) pattern or an unclear sequence. This misordering results in phrases that sound unnatural and reduce clarity. The corrected sentences rearrange the elements into the proper order, making the expressions more natural and easier to understand. This pattern indicates that learners still have difficulty in applying the correct noun phrase structure, especially in determining the appropriate position of the head and its modifiers.

B. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that learners experience persistent difficulties in several aspects of Indonesian grammar, particularly in substitution and misordering patterns. In terms of substitution, errors mainly occur in the misuse of correlative prepositions such as *antara ... dengan ...* and *antara ... terhadap ...*, which should correctly appear as *antara ... dan ...*. This indicates that learners have not fully mastered fixed correlative pairings and tend to generalize the use of prepositions without considering their syntactic constraints. This finding is in line with **Alwi et al. (2014)**, who state that Indonesian prepositions have specific pairings and functions that must be used consistently to maintain grammatical accuracy. Similarly, the incorrect use of *di* instead of *pada* shows that learners struggle to distinguish between locative and temporal prepositions. According to **Sneddon (2010)**, *di* is primarily used for location, while *pada* is used for time expressions, and confusion between the two often leads to grammatical errors.

Furthermore, misordering errors demonstrate that learners face challenges in arranging sentence elements appropriately, particularly in complex structures and noun phrases. The data show that incorrect word order results in ambiguity, redundancy, and reduced clarity. This supports the view of **Ramlan (2005)**, who emphasizes that proper word order is essential in Indonesian sentence construction to ensure coherence and meaning. In addition, errors in noun phrase structure, especially confusion between MD (modifier–head) and DM (head–modifier) patterns, indicate a lack of understanding of standard Indonesian phrase formation. As explained by **Kridalaksana (2008)**, Indonesian typically follows a DM pattern, and deviations from this structure can lead to unnatural expressions.

Moreover, these patterns of errors suggest that learners rely heavily on intuitive or habitual language use rather than applying formal grammatical rules, particularly in academic writing contexts. This tendency may also be influenced by interference from informal language use or limited exposure to well-structured written texts. As noted by **Brown (2007)**, learners often develop systematic errors due to overgeneralization and incomplete rule acquisition, especially when explicit instruction is insufficient. Therefore, improving learners' grammatical competence requires not only corrective feedback but also focused instruction on specific problem areas such as correlative structures and phrase organization. By strengthening awareness of these rules, learners are more likely to produce grammatically accurate and coherent sentences in formal writing.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that grammatical errors in Indonesian academic writing are primarily manifested in substitution and misordering patterns. Substitution errors occur due to the inappropriate selection of linguistic elements, particularly in the misuse of prepositions and correlative forms, which leads to incorrect pairings and ungrammatical constructions. Meanwhile, misordering errors arise from the improper arrangement of sentence elements, especially in phrases and noun structures that do not follow standard Indonesian syntactic rules. These patterns indicate that learners have not fully mastered the functional use of grammatical elements and tend to apply them interchangeably without considering their specific roles.

Furthermore, the study shows that such errors significantly affect the clarity, coherence, and overall quality of academic writing. Therefore, it is essential to provide more focused and explicit instruction on grammatical structures, particularly in the use of prepositions, correlative forms, and phrase organization. By improving learners' understanding of these aspects, it is expected that their ability to produce accurate and well-structured academic texts will also improve.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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