

## Inflectional forms in students' writing: A point of view from morphological analysis

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**Abstract:** The objective of this study was to determine the most difficult and dominant inflectional form in students' writing as well as the variables that affect how difficult it is for students to comprehend the function of inflectional forms. This study examined inflectional markings in regular and irregular forms of content words. The design of this study was quantitative descriptive with a population taken from the 3rd-semester students of the English Education Study Program of Tadulako University who have enrolled Grammar subject. The sample of this study was 154 students of the 3rd-semester students by using a simple random sampling technique. The instruments to collect the data were a test and a questionnaire. The results of the data analysis show that: (1) the most difficult form of inflectional forms used by the students was suffix -est as superlative degree, (2) the most dominant form of inflectional forms used by the students was the suffix -ing as progressive marker, (3) there were two factors influencing the students' difficulty in using the function of inflectional forms which were internal factors. The test results indicate that students lack sufficient knowledge of tenses, as they are unable to apply the present, past, or past participle tenses.

**Keywords:** Morphology; Inflectional Forms; Regular Form; Irregular Form

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### Introduction

Inflection is connected to sentence. Sentence always attached to word. Thus, word is the element of making sentence. Word is necessary for word form processing in a number of ways. The students' comprehension of the word gives them a solid understanding of writing and grammar. Students need to expand their vocabulary in order to write English sentences that adhere to proper grammar. Furthermore, writing, word, grammar, and vocabulary have relation to grammatical function which is defined as specific qualities that are associated with inflectional marking. Inflectional marking is connected to other morphemes. Morphemes are the simplest units of language, which the word forms can also be used to form a new word. There are two kinds of morphemes: free morpheme and bound morpheme. Furthermore, bound morphemes cannot stand alone without affixation, either prefix or suffix, as inflectional marking is related to affixation, particularly in suffix. In addition, this study on inflection examines how to alter a word form without altering its category. Nouns, verbs, adjectives,

adverbs, pronouns, and determiners can all be inflected; some of these forms are part of content words, yet. Consequently, there are two categories of inflection: regular and irregular forms.

Regular form is the form that follows a common pattern of a word. Some of regular forms in inflection consist of suffixation –'s, -ed, -ing, -s, -er, -est, -en while irregular form occurs on noun, verb, adjective, adverb, and all of them have process of changing the word form in ablaut, zero marking, and suppletion. Yet, ablaut in irregular form focuses on vowel change which occurs in irregular verb and irregular noun. The researchers noticed some issues with inflection faced by some students. For example, in regular verb especially suffix -s as plural marker in word "table-s", it becomes a plural from singular. Irregular verb especially suppletion in word "bad" becomes "worse", it shows the change of word form without having phonological relation. Considering those issues that arise, the problems of this study were: 1. What is the most difficult form of inflection found in students' writing? 2. What is the dominant forms of inflection found in students' writing? 3. Why is it difficult for the students to use inflectional forms in their writing?

This study is supported by some related studies that essentially used the same analysis. In particular, the functions of morpheme in the chosen news from Tempo.co are examined in the first study by Fitria (2020), "An analysis of Derivational and Inflectional Morpheme in selected news from Tempo.co." Document analysis was the method of data collection used in this study, which employed a qualitative approach. The information gathered came from Tempo.co's news. This research found that in news from Tempo.co, there are 357 words. Whereas inflectional has 260 data (72.83%), derivational process displays 97 data (27.17%). It demonstrates that derivational morphemes are less productive than inflectional morphemes.

The second study, an analysis of inflectional morphemes in Charles Dickens' short story "The child's story," was conducted by Ifadloh, Najerin, Nufus, & Ulum in 2022. The objective of this study was to determine how inflectional morphemes are realized in a short story. The research employed a qualitative method and document analysis as data collection techniques. Charles Dickens' short story "The Child's Story" served as the research material for this study. This research found that in "the child's story", there are 108 inflectional morphemes with the dominant "-s", "-es" with (32.5%), possessive noun "-'s", "-s'" and comparative adjective "-er" show (1.8%), superlative adjective "-est" presents (2.7%), 3rd person singular/present tense "-s" shows (3.7%), verb past tense "-ed"/"-d" exposes (26.9%), present participle "-ing" points (29.7%), and past participle verb "-en" highlights (0.9%).

The third study by Rezeki & Sagala (2019) presented "A Morphological analysis of Derivational and Inflectional Morphemes". The descriptive qualitative method was employed in this study. The purpose of this study was to examine how Christina Perri's song lyric "A thousand years" uses derivational and inflectional morphemes. The derivational morpheme -ly, which comprises two words, and the inflectional morphemes -s plural, -s third singular person present tense, -ed past tense, -ing progressive, and -er comparative, which comprise 57 words, are the findings of this study.

The fourth study from Masfufah (2022) did a research about inflectional and derivational analysis of affixes in Justin Bieber's album "purpose". The objective of this research was to identify the inflection and derivation found in Justin Bieber's album "purpose" by employing descriptive qualitative analysis and *teknik bagi unsur langsung* as data collection techniques. The study indicates that there are 121 inflectional forms in Justin Bieber's "purpose" album, comprising 82 verb forms, 20 noun forms, 9 adjective forms, 7 auxiliaries, and 3 pronouns. There are also 45 derivational forms found, including 2 verb forms, 4 adverb forms, and 20 noun forms. Four derivational and inflectional forms are also available; these comprise one noun derived from another noun and three nouns derived from verbs.

The preceding studies' conclusions point to the similarity of inflectional morphemes, particularly with regard to suffix -s and -es although this study differed in a few ways from the other four. The first difference is in the technique of collecting data, in which the previous studies used news from

Tempo.co, short story, and song lyric, Justin Bieber's album "purpose" while this study used students writing. The second difference relates to the method, both of the study from Tempo.co and short story used qualitative method, the study from song lyric and Justin Bieber's album "purpose" used descriptive qualitative method, but this study used descriptive quantitative method. Furthermore, the researchers' observations show that inflectional marking in English is consistently linked to suffixes that express grammatical categories, which enhances writing proficiency. For this reason, the issue of inflectional forms—which alter the word form—interests the researchers.

### Method

The researchers used quantitative descriptive method because the researchers require to find out the scope of this study. "Descriptive research involves the collection of data to answer specific questions about the current state of affairs under study," from Gay (1992) in Qadrie, Yuliana, Salam (2001). The method of collecting information that characterizes research results obtained through statistics is called quantitative descriptive data collection. Gay, Mills, & Airasian (2012) in Purba (2021) state that the goal of quantitative descriptive data is to use numerical or statistical data to explain, predict, control, or characterize the phenomenon being studied. In addition, quantitative descriptive data are the study dealing with statistic or numerical data as a means to answer the question. The researchers used two techniques of collecting the data which are fill-in-the-blank test and questionnaire by using Likert scale for the third semester students.

#### *The Population and Sample of the Research*

In this research, the researchers determined the population before collecting the sample. The subjects of this study were students in the third semester of the English education study at Tadulako University. The number of students in the third semester of the English education course was 250 from 6 parallel classes. Aiming to guarantee that every sample has the same probability of being chosen, simple random sampling is a statistical technique where each member of the population has an equal chance of being included in the sample. According to Fajar, Niku, Hardianti (2021), a technique for selecting population members at random that does not take the population strata into account is called simple random sampling. Because the sampling is done without taking into account the population current stratification, this study used simple random sampling. In a simple random sample, all individuals in the population have an equal chance of being selected (systematic or probability sample) (Creswell, 2009). Therefore, the sample of this study covered 154 students. In summary, simple random sampling is a random and purely random collection. This type of sampling is best suited for highly homogeneous populations (Bhardwaj, 2019). Thus, the researchers used Slovin's Formula to calculate the number of sample with standard error 5% or 0.05.

#### *Research Instrument*

Research instrument is a tool used to collect, measure, or analyze the data relevant to research study. The researchers used fill-in-the-blank test and questionnaire. For fill-in-the-blank test instrument, the researchers asked the students to fill a word based on the word in the brackets provided while the instrument for questionnaire, the researchers used Likert scale to measure the opinions or perceptions from the students. By using Likert scale, the answer of each instrument item (questionnaire) is ranged from very positive to very negative.

#### *Data Collection and Analysis*

Data collection is the technique that can be used by the researchers to collect the data. Technique of collecting data includes questionnaires, case studies, observation, and collecting information. Thus the researchers used two techniques of collecting the data, the first is to construct a test and the second is to design the questionnaires.

#### *Test*

First, the researchers constructed the test which was distributed to the students. Second, the researchers distributed the test to 154 students, and the last the researchers collected the students' answer. The accuracy of the students' answer was verified by the researchers.

#### Questionnaire

First, the researchers searched the theory of influencing the students' difficulty in understanding and using inflectional forms. Second, the researchers listed the factors influencing the students' difficulty in understanding and using inflectional forms through fishbone diagram. Fishbone diagram introduced by Dr. Kaoru Ishikawa in 1968 means to show cause and effect for each variable. According to Tague (2005) in Kusnadi (2011), fishbone diagram is used to identify the potential cause of a problem particularly when a team is consistently deviating from its routine. Third, the researchers composed a form about the factors influencing the students difficulty in inflectional markings. Fourth, the researchers tested the validity of the questionnaire by distributing the questionnaire to 50 students. Fifth, the researchers examined the answers from 50 students to regulate the validity of the questionnaire by using SPSS 24. Last, the researchers revised the questionnaire and shared the questionnaire to the total sample. In which the questionnaire of this study has been distributed and developed by the researchers.

## Results

This section presents the data collected. It explains the result from data analysis. In order to address the research questions, the data are presented and explained here based on the test and questionnaire.

### The Analysis of the Data Collected from the Test

In this study, the researchers regulated the test in order to answer research questions number one and two which are to know the most difficult and dominant forms of inflection found in students' writing. The researchers utilized the data from the test. The researchers provide two figures to present the frequency of the most difficult form and the most dominant one used by the students.

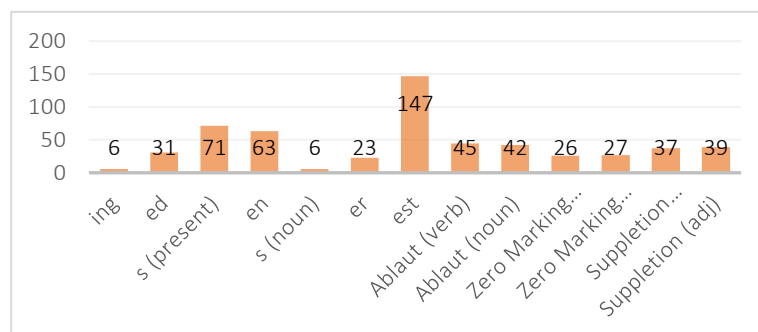


Figure 1: The Frequency of the Difficult Forms

The researchers establish Figure 1 which is about the most difficult inflectional form used by the students. It shows the researchers found that regular forms especially suffix -ing as progressive marker and suffix -s as plural marker are mostly used by the students while most of the students do not all the time use suffix -est. In addition, with a total of 147, the suffix -est is the most difficult form for students to use.

In contrast, to answer the research question number two which is the most dominant form in inflection used by the students, the researchers illustrate Figure 2 to demonstrate the dominant suffix in inflectional forms used by the students. The data indicate that suffix -ing as progressive marker with a total of 188 becomes the most dominant form used by the students.

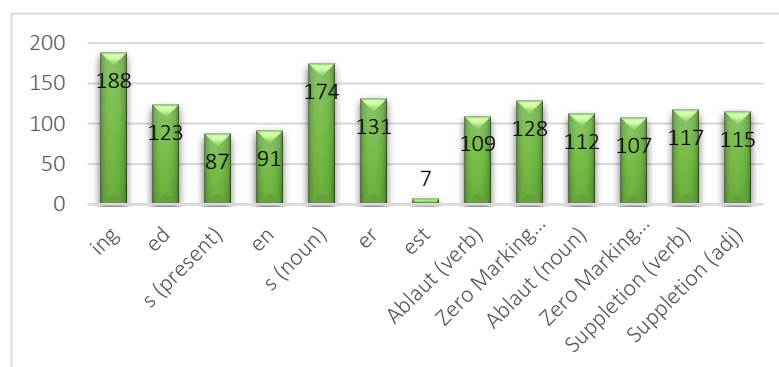


Figure 2: The Frequency of the Dominant Forms

### The Analysis of the Data Collected from the Questionnaire

The researchers designed a questionnaire, and distributed to all the samples. Next, the researchers checked the statements whether they were valid or invalid data by using the SPSS program, and then re-distributed the valid statements to all the samples by seeing total Pearson correlation. Based on the table, there are 11 valid statements from 52 statements.

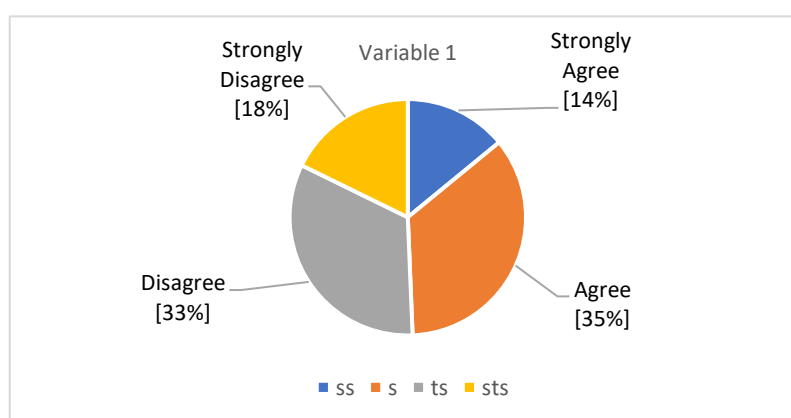
Table 1: The Valid Statements in Questionnaire

Variable	Valid Statements
<b>Variable 1</b> Students do not master enough about tenses whether a sentence should be in present or past forms.	1. Present tense indicates the upcoming time. 2. Past tense of the word "write" is "written". 3. When making the sentence, I always forget the second and third forms of that tense.
<b>Variable 2</b> Students still do not understand using past participle in sentence.	4. When writing a sentence, I always forget the third form of the word. 5. Past participle has two forms which are regular and irregular.
<b>Variable 3</b> Students lack understanding in applying comparative and superlative.	6. Comparative degree is marked when using suffix -est. 7. "Zayn is biggest than Ken", the sentence is an example of comparative degree.
<b>Variable 4</b> Students do not pay attention to the material described so they find it difficult to understand about inflectional markings.	8. "Writing is done by the woman". Suffix -ing in the sentence contains progressive marker.
<b>Variable 5</b> Lack of explanation from the lecturer about inflectional markings.	9. The lecturer explains further detail. 10. I understand when the material described is only the key points.
<b>Variable 6</b> No motivation to learn about inflectional markings.	11. I prefer it when the test is administered prior to the content being covered.

Table 1 consists of the valid statements of questionnaire about the factors influencing students' writing using inflectional forms. Thus, the researchers provided pie charts and tables about the variables becoming the factors influencing students' writing using inflectional forms in order to answer the third research question.

**Table 2: The Frequency of Students' Answer Based on Variable 1**

Students do not master enough about tenses whether a sentence should be in present or past forms.	Frequency	Percentage
a. Strongly agree	65	14%
b. Agree	163	35%
c. Disagree	152	33%
d. Strongly disagree	82	18%



**Figure 3: The Percentage of Students' Answer Based on Variable 1**

Table 2 and Figure 3 present the answer of variable 1 which is *students do not master enough about tenses whether a sentence should be in present or past forms*. This variable contains three negative statements, the purpose of which is to assess students' knowledge of how to use tense in a sentence. Of the three negative statements, students overwhelmingly select "agree," indicating that they do not comprehend the concept of tense in a sentence. Variable 1 signifies the frequency of the three statements that comprise this variable. This indicates that the total of 163 is derived from the three negative statements rather than from a single one. For this reason, the study's sample is 154 and the total frequency is 462 divided by 3. It can be seen in Figure 3, 14% chose *strongly agree*, 35% chose *agree*, 33% chose *disagree*, and 18% chose *strongly disagree*. Moreover, some of them do not understand about tense and the students' difficulty using tense in a sentence is included in the first variable.

**Table 3: The Frequency of Students' Answer Based on Variable 2**

Students still do not understand using past participle in sentence.	Frequency	Percentage
a. Strongly agree	61	20%
b. Agree	168	55%
c. Disagree	72	23%
d. Strongly disagree	7	2%

Students' responses to variable 2, which is that *students still do not understand how to use past participle in sentence*, are displayed in Table 3 and Figure 4. The majority of students selected "agree" with the 55% percentage, based on the figure. To see the students' understanding using past participle in a sentence, there are two statements in variable 2 in form of negative statement and positive statement. One negative and one positive statement contribute to the total frequency of variable 2, which is 308 in total. In the researchers' questionnaire, the majority of students chose



"agree." Additionally, dividing the total frequency by two produces a result of 154, which is the same as the study's sample. As in Figure 4, there were 20% students choosing *strongly agree*, 55% chose *agree*, 23% chose *disagree*, and 2% chose *strongly disagree*. Additionally, two statements address the entirety of variable 2, which is the students' continued confusion over the use of the past participle in sentences.

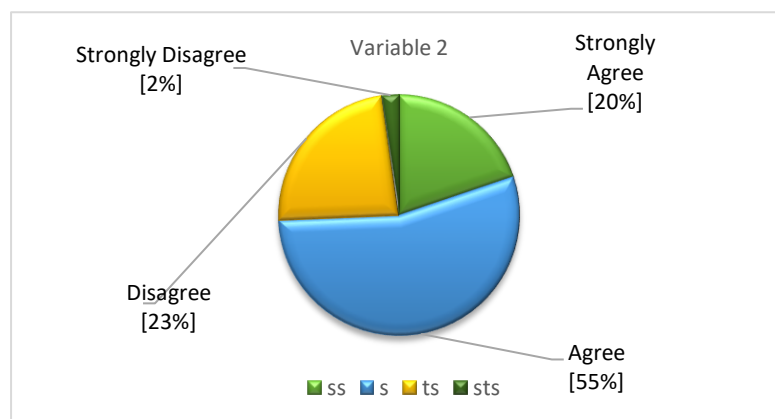


Figure 4: The Percentage of Students' Answer Based on Variable 2

## Discussions

According to the test results, the majority of students chose to use regular rather than irregular forms of inflection. Regular form contains nouns (-s), verbs (-ing, -ed, -s, and -en), adjectives, and adverbs (-er and -est). Students most commonly use the regular form of the suffix -ing. The primary reason for this phenomenon is their incapacity to differentiate between various tenses, which affects their tendency to use the suffix -ing on verbs. Subsequently, the adjectival suffix -est becomes the most difficult in this situation when compared to the most frequently used suffix because it is difficult for students to distinguish between the suffixes -er and -est, which depend on the word syllable count and whether or not two things are being compared. Novzalia & Sari's (2022) analysis of students' abilities in the use of comparative degrees of adjectives and adverbs in the UNP English language teaching program provides validity to the above explanation. It shows the students have difficulty mastering the degree of comparison. They misplace the superlative form of an article, neglect to put it after a comparative adjective, are unsure of how to use a word ending in -y, change it to -i instead of -er/-est, and are ignorant of the usage of irregular format. Correspondingly, they are unsure whether to use the adverbs of degree 'more' for comparatives and 'most' for superlatives, or the suffix -er for comparatives and -st/-est for superlatives. According to Shusantie (2011) in Novzalia & Sari's (2022), students typically struggle to choose which words to add the suffixes -er or -est and the adverb of degree "more" or "most." The inability to fully master the degree of comparison stems primarily from this. According to the researchers' summary, superlative degree, which is suffix -est, is the most challenging form that students use, and suffix -ing is the most frequent one.

The results of the questionnaire indicated that only two variables have an impact on the students' use of inflection when writing, despite the fact that the researchers have included six variables. As mentioned by Wahyuningtyas & Bram's (2018), the first issue is that students struggle to remember the formula for each tense. Because of this, the two variables are used as the stimulus: most students find it difficult to determine the tense used in sentences and to change base forms (V1) into past participle ones (V3); as a result, they prefer to use suffix -ing for verbs. They acknowledge that they do not regularly study the fundamental tenses of English grammar. As a result, learning new tenses is challenging and it is simple to forget tense formulas. The most difficult tenses for them are present

perfect and present perfect continuous. Adam & Eljack (2020) look into the morphological issues EFL university students faced when utilizing inflectional morphemes and find that the students have trouble with it. Most of the difficulty involve the use of tense in irregular verb, adjective, pluralization of irregular nouns. The majority of instructors are unaware of the challenges that students faced while using inflectional morphemes. Additionally, a lot of errors are frequently discovered in student work, which may result from insufficient attention (Sunandar, 2022).

### Conclusion

After conducting the research and doing the data analysis, the researchers conclude that the most difficult forms in inflection used by the students is suffix -est as superlative degree. The frequency of the most difficult form is 147. It means that the students do not understand more about comparison especially in superlative degree. Furthermore, the researchers found that the most dominant form used by the students is suffix -ing and its frequency is 188. According to the data, the students still struggle to write sentences correctly by understanding how grammatical structure works. Additionally, there are two factors that make it harder for the students to write sentences correctly. The test results indicate that students lack sufficient knowledge of tenses, as they are unable to apply the present, past, or past participle tenses. It is difficult for the students to learn about tenses, and it is simple for them to disregard the formulas. As a result of this, one of the things influencing students' use of inflection in their writing is their lack of understanding of tenses.

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