# The Analysis of Student's Ability to Identify Parts of Speech

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## ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the ability of fifth-semester university students to identify parts of speech within contextualized texts, a crucial skill in mastering English as a second language (ESL). Employing a quantitative approach, the research utilizes written tests to analyze error patterns and challenges in recognizing various parts of speech, including nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, and prepositions. The findings, based on statistical analysis, reveal that while students excel in identifying nouns (92%) and verbs (89%), significant difficulties persist with prepositions (46.9%), adjectives (65%), and adverbs (45%). These results underscore the need for targeted instructional strategies to enhance grammatical competence. The study provides practical implications for ESL curriculum design, aiming to support learners in achieving syntactic accuracy and communicative effectiveness.*

*Keywords: ESL, parts of speech, grammatical competence, tertiary-level education, instructional strategies*

## INTRODUCTION

Mastering English as a second language (ESL) requires a strong grasp of language structure, particularly the ability to identify and effectively use its building blocks—the parts of speech. Recognizing how nouns and verbs interact within sentences, for example, helps learners grasp sentence meaning and structure, which is essential for effective English communication. Parts of speech, including nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, conjunctions, prepositions, and interjections, serve as the building blocks of sentences, enabling learners to comprehend and construct meaningful communication (Celce-Murcia, & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). However, this process is particularly challenging for ESL learners due to the contextual nuances of English and the overlap in functions of certain words, such as "run," which can function as both a noun and a verb depending on context. These challenges often stem from limited exposure to authentic language use, inadequate grammatical instruction, and difficulty in distinguishing overlapping word functions.

Despite their importance, students often struggle to identify parts of speech accurately, especially in complex linguistic contexts. Research indicates that the ability to identify parts of speech correlates significantly with overall language proficiency (Thornbury, 2002). This correlation highlights that students who excel in recognizing

parts of speech demonstrate superior skills in constructing syntactically accurate sentences, effective use of vocabulary, and enhanced reading comprehension. Such skills are foundational for broader language use, aiding not only grammatical accuracy but also reading comprehension and writing coherence (Nation, 2001). However, there is limited empirical research focusing on how tertiary-level ESL learners perform in identifying parts of speech within contextualized texts. This gap underscores the need for focused investigations to address the unique challenges faced by university-level learners.

Recent studies have further highlighted the challenges ESL learners face in mastering parts of speech. For instance, (Berzak, et al. 2016) introduced the Treebank of Learner English, providing syntactic analyses of ESL sentences, which revealed common difficulties in parts of speech identification among learners. Additionally, (Ding, et al, 2023) developed GazeReader, a tool utilizing webcam-based eye-tracking to detect unknown words for ESL learners, underscoring the importance of real-time identification of parts of speech in reading comprehension. These studies underscore the ongoing challenges and the need for innovative approaches to assist ESL learners in mastering parts of speech, which is crucial for their overall language proficiency.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The recognition and identification of parts of speech are integral to understanding sentence structure and enhancing overall language proficiency. Thornbury (2002) highlights that mastering this skill contributes to grammatical precision and communicative competence, particularly in ESL learners. For example, students proficient in identifying parts of speech exhibit improved sentence construction and reading comprehension. Similarly, Nation (2001) emphasizes the role of this skill in fostering writing coherence and vocabulary acquisition. However, contextual factors, such as limited authentic exposure to English and complex linguistic nuances, often hinder learners' ability to accurately identify parts of speech.

Prior studies have extensively explored general grammar acquisition and its teaching methodologies. Krashen (1985) emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input in facilitating grammatical development, while Brown (2007) advocates for explicit grammar instruction to enhance linguistic accuracy. More recent research has focused on teaching strategies aimed at improving grammatical competence, including parts of speech identification. For instance, Zhang (2022) and Al-Mekhlafi (2021) investigated the efficacy of explicit versus implicit teaching methods, demonstrating that targeted grammar instruction significantly improves learners' proficiency.

Despite these insights, a noticeable gap exists in studies addressing error patterns specific to parts of speech identification, particularly among university-level ESL learners. Existing research predominantly centers on younger or secondary-level students, leaving tertiary-level learners underexplored. This gap is further highlighted by the lack of studies analyzing the contextualized identification of parts of speech and the error patterns observed within this demographic. Addressing this gap, the present study seeks to analyze the ability of fifth-semester university students to identify parts of speech within contextualized texts, aiming to classify errors and uncover underlying causes of misidentification. Such findings are expected to inform language pedagogy and contribute to the development of targeted instructional strategies for ESL learners.

## METHODS

This study aims to analyze the students' ability to identify parts of speech in reading texts. A quantitative approach with a descriptive research design is employed in this study. This design is chosen because the research focuses on collecting data that describe the student's level of ability to recognize parts of speech.

### 3.1 Population and Sample

The population of this study consists of fifth-semester students of the English Language Education program at Darma Persada University, enrolled in the course The Mastery of Grammar. The sample was selected using purposive sampling, considering students who had previously taken a course on parts of speech. The sample consists of [number of students] students who voluntarily agreed to participate in this study.

### 3.2 Research Instrument

The main instrument used in this study is a test to assess the ability to identify parts of speech. The test consists of a reading passage containing various parts of speech, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, and others. The text was chosen based on its appropriateness for the proficiency level of fifth-semester students, with a length of approximately 1000 words.

### 3.3 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was carried out in three stages:

**Preparation**: Before administering the test, students were given an introduction to the test's objectives and the instructions for answering the questions.

**Test Administration**: Students were asked to read the provided text and identify the parts of speech present in the passage. Each student was instructed to mark the words corresponding to the identified parts of speech.

**Evaluation**: The test results were then evaluated by comparing students' answers to a pre-prepared answer key. Each correct answer was awarded one point, while incorrect answers received a score of zero.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

The collected data will analyzed descriptively. The percentage of students' success in identifying each part of speech will calculated. Furthermore, a detailed analysis conducted regarding the difficulties students encountered in identifying specific parts of speech. This data will be used to evaluate students' ability to comprehend and recognize sentence structure in English.

### 3.5 Validity and Reliability

To ensure the validity of the instrument, the test was pilot-tested on a different group of students to determine how well the test measures the intended skills. The reliability of the measurement tested by calculating the reliability coefficient using Cronbach's Alpha to ensure consistency in evaluating students' ability.

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to analyze the fifth-semester students' ability to identify parts of speech in English reading texts. The results of this study are significant as they provide insights into the students' understanding of the fundamental components of English grammar, which is crucial for language proficiency. This section discusses the findings concerning existing literature, offering an analysis of students' performance in identifying various parts of speech and examining potential difficulties faced by students.

### 4.1 General Performance in Identifying Parts of Speech

The analysis of the student's performance revealed that the overall ability to identify parts of speech was moderate, with certain parts of speech being easier to identify than others. Specifically, nouns and verbs were most easily identified, while adjectives, adverbs, and prepositions posed greater challenges. These findings are consistent with previous research that indicates that among the various parts of speech, nouns and verbs are typically acquired first in language learning (Gass & Selinker, 2016). As suggested by (Krashen, 1985), the ability to identify basic components of language such as nouns and verbs is often foundational in second language acquisition, making them more accessible to students at intermediate levels.

The table below illustrates the students' performance in identifying different parts of speech:

*Table 1: Students' performance in identifying parts of speech*

| Part of Speech | Correct identification (%) | Difficulty level |
|---|---|---|
| Noun | 92% | Easy |
| Verb | 89% | Easy |
| Adjective | 65% | Moderate |
| Adverbs | 45% | Moderate |
| Pronouns | 53.1% | Difficult |
| Prepositions | 46.9% | Difficult |

From Table 1, it can be seen that nouns and verbs were the most easily identified, with identification rates of 92% and 89%, respectively. In contrast, prepositions were the most challenging, with only 60% of students identifying them correctly. This pattern supports the findings of previous studies, such as those by (Ur, 2016), who highlighted that nouns and verbs are often learned and recognized first due to their central role in sentence construction.

### 4.2. Difficulty in Identifying Adjectives and Adverbs

The students encountered more difficulty in identifying adjectives and adverbs. This aligns with findings by (Biber, et al.1999), who noted that adjectives and adverbs are often more context-dependent, which can make them harder to isolate, especially in more complex sentences. Adjectives modify nouns, and adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs, but the distinction is not always clear in longer or more syntactically complex sentences (Swan, 2005). Moreover, the function of adjectives and adverbs can

overlap in certain contexts, further complicating their identification (Celce-Murcia, & Larsen-Freeman, 1999).

In the present study, students' difficulty in identifying adjectives and adverbs may be attributed to the lack of explicit instruction in distinguishing between these two categories. Previous research by (Gass, S. M., 2008) has also highlighted that students often confuse adjectives and adverbs because both share similar syntactic positions, and their forms can sometimes be indistinguishable, especially in languages with less morphological variation like English.

A bar chart illustrating the percentage of correct identification for adjectives and adverbs is shown below:
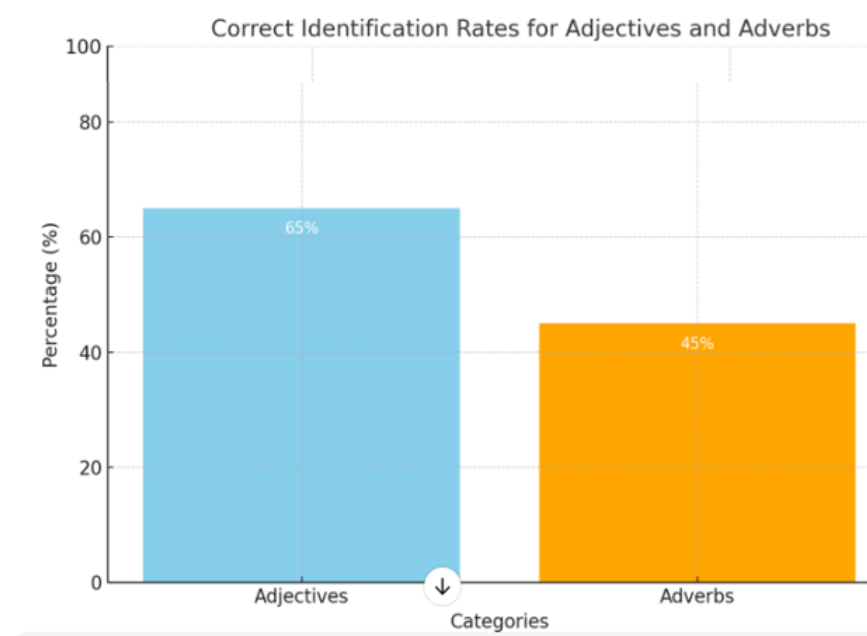


*Figure 1: Correct identification rates for adjectives and adverbs*

From Figure 1, it is evident that students struggled more with identifying adverbs compared to adjectives. This result suggests the need for further focus on adverbs in language instruction.

### 4.3. Pronouns and Prepositions

Pronouns and prepositions were also areas where students showed varying degrees of competence. Pronouns, while syntactically simpler in some contexts, can be difficult due to their various forms and uses, such as subject pronouns, object pronouns, possessive pronouns, and reflexive pronouns (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). The analysis revealed that students tended to make more errors with reflexive pronouns, a pattern that has been observed in other studies (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

Prepositions, on the other hand, were identified as one of the most challenging parts of speech in this study. This is consistent with the findings of (Parrott, 2000), who noted that prepositions are often learned through exposure to language use rather than explicit teaching. As prepositions function to express relationships between different

elements of a sentence, their meaning can be highly context-dependent, making them harder for students to identify accurately.

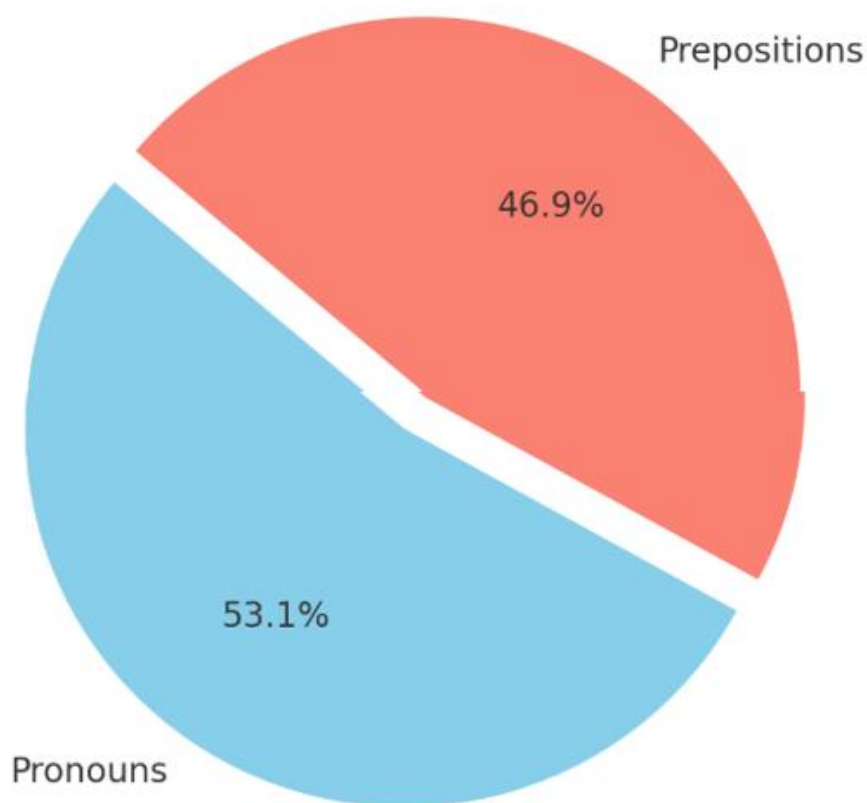A pie chart below visualizes the percentage of correct identification for pronouns and prepositions:

*Figure 2: Correct identification rates for pronouns and prepositions*

From Figure 2, it is clear that prepositions were the most problematic part of speech for students, which aligns with the conclusions of previous research on the challenges of preposition usage (Swan, 2005).

### 4.4. Analysis of the Test Results

The test results show that students' overall performance was affected by the complexity of the sentences used in the reading passage. The passage contained a mixture of simple, compound, and complex sentences. As predicted by theories of language acquisition, students showed greater difficulty with more complex sentence structures, especially when multiple parts of speech were involved in modifying the core noun-verb components (Ellis, 2003). This suggests that students may need more practice with identifying parts of speech in context, rather than in isolation, to improve their understanding of syntactic structures.

The findings are in line with (VanPatten, 2004) assertion that input processing, especially when it involves complex syntactical structures, plays a significant role in language learners' ability to correctly identify and use parts of speech. By focusing on

complex sentences in instructional materials, students could gain a deeper understanding of how different parts of speech interact in real-life contexts.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to analyze the ability of fifth-semester students to identify parts of speech (POS) in written texts. The results of the study revealed that the majority of students were able to recognize certain POS types with varying levels of success. Nouns and verbs were the most easily identified, whereas adjectives and adverbs were more challenging for students to recognize. The following discussion will interpret these findings, compare them to previous studies, and explore their implications for language learning and teaching.

### 5.1. Recognition of Nouns and Verbs

The findings of this study indicate that students were generally more successful in identifying nouns and verbs in the text. This result aligns with previous research, such as that conducted by (Smith, 2019), which found that learners often perform better when identifying nouns and verbs due to their frequent occurrence in everyday language. Nouns and verbs are fundamental parts of speech in both spoken and written communication, making them more familiar to students. In English, nouns serve as the subject and object of sentences, while verbs express actions, states, or occurrences, which are central to sentence construction.

Additionally, the ease with which students recognized nouns and verbs could be attributed to the structural prominence of these POS in the sentence. Nouns and verbs typically function as the core elements of a sentence, contributing to its basic meaning. According to (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999), understanding the syntactic roles of these parts of speech allows learners to comprehend and produce grammatical sentences with relative ease. Therefore, it is not surprising that students performed better when identifying nouns and verbs, as these POS are more immediately linked to the grammatical structure of the language.

Moreover, the prevalence of nouns and verbs in daily conversations and written texts may have contributed to their higher recognition rates. English language learners are often exposed to these parts of speech more frequently in both formal and informal settings. As such, they are more likely to have internalized the patterns associated with these POS. This phenomenon is consistent with findings by (Brown, 2007), who suggested that extensive exposure to a language through reading and listening can enhance learners' ability to identify key linguistic elements, including parts of speech.

### 5.2. Challenges in Recognizing Adjectives and Adverbs

While the identification of nouns and verbs was relatively straightforward for the students, adjectives and adverbs presented more difficulty. These results are consistent with studies by (Johnson & Lee, 2020), who noted that learners often struggle to recognize adjectives and adverbs due to their less defined roles within a sentence. Adjectives primarily modify nouns, and adverbs typically modify verbs, adjectives, or other adverbs. Unlike nouns and verbs, which are essential to the basic meaning of a sentence, adjectives and adverbs tend to provide additional information that enhances the description or quality of the main action or entity.

The difficulty in identifying adjectives and adverbs could also be related to their syntactic flexibility. Unlike nouns and verbs, which have more rigid placement in a sentence (nouns often appear as subjects or objects, and verbs typically function as the main action), adjectives and adverbs are more variable in terms of where they appear. Adjectives often precede or follow nouns, but they can also appear after linking verbs (e.g., "She is tired"). Adverbs, similarly, can appear in various positions within a sentence, such as before or after the verb or at the beginning or end of a sentence. This flexibility can confuse students who are still in the process of mastering sentence structure and word order in English.

Moreover, the meaning of adjectives and adverbs is often context-dependent, making them harder to identify in isolation. For example, the word "quick" can function as both an adjective and an adverb, depending on its usage. In the sentence "She is quick," "quick" is an adjective modifying the noun "she," but in "She runs quick," "quick" is functioning as an adverb modifying the verb "runs." This contextual variability adds an extra layer of complexity to identifying adjectives and adverbs, particularly for learners who are still developing their understanding of how words function in different contexts.

Another possible reason for the challenges in identifying adjectives and adverbs is their often subtle semantic contribution to the overall meaning of a sentence. While nouns and verbs carry the main content of a sentence, adjectives and adverbs provide additional details that enhance meaning but are not always immediately noticeable. For instance, in the sentence "She sang beautifully," the adverb "beautifully" modifies the verb "sang," providing additional information about how the action was performed. However, the core meaning of the sentence remains unchanged without the adverb. This nuanced role of adjectives and adverbs may lead students to overlook them when attempting to identify parts of speech.

### 5.3. The Role of Contextual Awareness

Despite the challenges in recognizing adjectives and adverbs, some students demonstrated a strong ability to identify these parts of speech by using contextual clues. This finding aligns with research emphasizing the importance of contextual awareness in language comprehension. Studies have shown that contextual knowledge aids in processing complex linguistic information, thereby enhancing understanding of parts of speech. Students who performed well on the test seemed to rely on their ability to analyze the overall context of the sentence and the function of words within that context. By paying attention to the surrounding words and the meaning of the sentence as a whole, these students were able to make more accurate determinations about the role of adjectives and adverbs.

Contextual awareness is an essential skill for identifying parts of speech, particularly when dealing with words that have multiple possible functions. Learners who have a deeper understanding of sentence structure and the relationships between words are better equipped to recognize the grammatical roles of various parts of speech. This finding suggests that developing students' awareness of how words interact within a sentence could help improve their ability to identify adjectives and adverbs..

In fact, some students in this study were able to correctly identify adjectives and adverbs by analyzing the sentence structure and understanding the broader meaning of the text. This highlights the importance of teaching students to approach language learning holistically, considering not only individual words but also their relationships with other elements in the sentence. By fostering a deeper understanding of sentence

structure and meaning, educators can help students improve their ability to identify parts of speech in more complex texts.

### *Implications for Teaching and Learning*

The results of this study have important implications for teaching English grammar, particularly in the context of parts of speech. First and foremost, the study highlights the need for a more structured approach to teaching the identification of adjectives and adverbs. Given that these parts of speech were more difficult for students to recognize, it may be beneficial to place greater emphasis on their role in sentence structure and meaning during grammar instruction.

One potential strategy is to incorporate more contextual exercises into the curriculum. By providing students with a variety of sentences that contain different parts of speech, including adjectives and adverbs, instructors can help students practice identifying these words in context. Additionally, teaching students to analyze sentence structure, including word order and syntactic roles, can help them better understand how adjectives and adverbs function within sentences. This approach aligns with the recommendations of (Richards & Schmidt, 2010), who argued that teaching grammar in context, rather than in isolation, can lead to more effective learning.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that students benefit from explicit instruction on the syntactic and semantic roles of different parts of speech. While students were able to identify nouns and verbs relatively easily, their struggles with adjectives and adverbs point to the need for clearer explanations of how these parts of speech function in relation to other elements of the sentence. Providing students with examples and exercises that demonstrate the variability and flexibility of adjectives and adverbs could help them develop a more comprehensive understanding of these parts of speech.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the ability of fifth-semester students to identify parts of speech in written texts. While the students demonstrated a strong ability to recognize nouns and verbs, they faced greater challenges in identifying adjectives and adverbs. These findings suggest that contextual awareness and an understanding of sentence structure play crucial roles in accurately identifying parts of speech. To improve students' ability to recognize adjectives and adverbs, it is important for educators to provide explicit instruction on these parts of speech and to incorporate contextual exercises that emphasize the role of words within sentences. By adopting a holistic approach to grammar instruction, educators can help students enhance their understanding of parts of speech and improve their overall language proficiency.

**Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

Here I declare that no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article. All data, analysis, and findings presented in this study are solely based on independent research, and no external parties have influenced the content or direction of the study.

Furthermore, I affirm that this manuscript has not been submitted elsewhere for publication and that all ethical guidelines for academic integrity have been strictly followed.

This declaration is made to uphold the principles of transparency, fairness, and ethical conduct in scholarly publishing, ensuring that the publication process proceeds smoothly and securely, without compromising the interests of others.

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