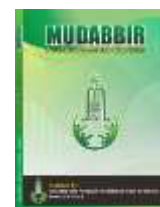




JURNAL MUDABBIR

(Journal Research and Education Studies)
Volume 5 Nomor 2 Tahun 2025

<http://jurnal.permapendis-sumut.org/index.php/mudabbir>



ISSN: 2774-8391

The “Grammar Police” Phenomenon in English Use: The Impact of Informal English Corrections on PBI UINSU Students’ Self-Confidence

Deasy Yunita Siregar¹, Syasi Aulya Harahap², Zawhara³, Denaida Hidayah Damanik⁴,
Diva Nahda Ariela⁵, Dea Sherina⁶

^{1,2,3,4,5,6} Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia

E-mail: deasyyunita@uinsu.ac.id¹, syasi0304241001@uinsu.ac.id²,
zawhara0304242069@uinsu.ac.id³, denaidadm@gmail.com⁴,
diva0304243124@uinsu.ac.id⁵, deasherina6@gmail.com⁶

ABSTRACT

The “Grammar Police” phenomenon, in which people fix grammar faults in casual communication without being asked, has emerged as a result of the widespread usage of English in informal contexts. Even while grammatical correction is a crucial component of learning a language, improper correction in casual settings can have an impact on students’ emotional states and self-esteem. This study looks into how students in the State Islamic University of North Sumatra (UINSU) English Education Study Program (PBI) feel about themselves after receiving informal grammar correction. 21 PBI students who were chosen by convenience sampling participated in a survey as part of a quantitative research design. A 13-item Likert-scale questionnaire was used to gather data, and descriptive statistics were used for analysis. The results demonstrate that students’ confidence and willingness to use English informally are negatively impacted by informal grammar corrections, which frequently cause emotions of unease, anxiety, and dread of making mistakes. Additionally, students favor personalized, courteous, and encouraging grammar feedback. The study comes to the conclusion that maintaining students’ confidence in casual English speaking requires sympathetic and context-appropriate grammar correction.

Keywords: EFL Students, Foreign Language Anxiety, Grammar Police Phenomenon, Informal Grammar Correction, Self-Confidence.

INTRODUCTION

Recent years have seen English evolve outside of traditional classrooms and into casual situations like social media, online chat, and everyday contacts. Directly fixing the grammatical mistakes of others in public venues, sometimes without being asked, phenomena called 'Grammar Police' has arisen in this context. While language correction is a crucial aspect of language learning, how and in what context it is given can influence the mental condition of EFL students.

Brown (2007) holds that mistakes in language are a common and essential part of the language learning process. Errors show students are actively building their linguistic system. Learners can feel psychological strain, however, particularly in informal and public settings when these errors are corrected wrongly. This is in line with the Affective Filter Hypothesis theory put forward by Krashen (1982), which claims that emotional elements like fear, anxiety, and poor self-confidence might impede language learning. Learners' ability to accept and interpret language intake worsens the more anxious they are.

For students' studying English Language Education (PBI) at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra (UINSU), English is required both academically and professionally. Still, informal corrections that come across as judgmental can set off foreign language anxiety, or the stress felt by those who must use a foreign language. Horwitz and Cope (1986) argue that foreign language anxiety usually stems from a fear of failing and being seen badly by others. Students may feel intimidated, embarrassed, or inadequate within the framework of the 'Grammar Police' phenomenon, which eventually reduces their confidence in speaking English.

Good language learning depends much on self-assurance. Through the idea of self-efficacy, Bandura (1997) underlines how much one's conviction in their own talents affects their will to act and keep going in the face of challenges. Low self-confident pupils often shun language practice speaking in particular out of worry of making errors. Hence, insensitive language modification in unofficial settings has the possibility of weakening EFL pupils' self-confidence.

Although there has been extensive investigation on corrective feedback in language acquisition, research especially examining how informal corrections by the 'Grammar Police' affect EFL students' confidence is yet sparse, particularly in the framework of Islamic institutions in Indonesia. Consequently, this paper tries to investigate how the 'Grammar Police' phenomenon affects PBI UINSU students' self-assurance in their use of English. Theoretically and practically, this study should help to establish a more kind, humanistic, and psychologically safe English language learning setting.

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research design using a survey method to investigate the impact of the “grammar police” phenomenon informal English language correction on the self-confidence of students in using English. The participants were 21 students from the English Education Study Program (PBI) at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra (UINSU).

The respondents were selected using convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling technique based on students’ availability and willingness to participate in the study. As a result, no specific inclusion criteria were applied, and any PBI student who agreed to take part in the study was eligible to participate.

Data were collected using a closed-ended questionnaire consisting of 13 statements related to students’ experiences with informal grammar correction and their self-confidence in using English in both academic and casual contexts. Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from *Strongly Disagree* (1) to *Strongly Agree* (5). Prior to distribution, the questionnaire underwent a basic content validation process to ensure the clarity and relevance of the items.

The questionnaire was distributed online after respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of the confidentiality of their responses. Participants completed the questionnaire independently, and each response was converted into numerical data based on the Likert scale. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, to identify patterns in students’ exposure to informal grammar correction and its perceived impact on their self-confidence in using English within the PBI UINSU context.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of research on the “Grammar Police” phenomenon and its effect on students’ confidence in using informal English are presented here. Data were collected from 21 students in the English Education Program (PBI) at UIN North Sumatra through a questionnaire consisting of 13 Likert scale statements and one open-ended question.

The 13 questionnaire statements were categorized into four thematic groups based on conceptual similarities and research focus to ensure clarity and prevent repeated reporting per item. These themes include:

1. Frequency and context of informal grammar changes,
2. Emotional reactions to grammar corrections,
3. Impact on student confidence; and
4. Student preferences for useful grammar comments.

Table 1. Summary of Students' Responses to the "Grammar Police" Phenomenon

No.	Research Theme	Questionnaire Items	Dominant Response	Key Findings
1.	Frequency and Context of Informal Grammar Corrections	Statements 1-3	Agree/Neutral	Informal grammar corrections frequently occur in casual interactions, both offline and online.
2.	Emotional Responses to Grammar Corrections	Statements 4-7	Agree	Informal grammar corrections tend to cause discomfort, anxiety, and fear of making mistakes.
3.	Impact on Students' Self-Confidence	Statements 8-10	Agree / Neutral	Grammar correction influences students' confidence, making them more cautious in using English casually.
4.	Preferences for Constructive Grammar Feedback	Statements 11-13	Strongly Agree / Agree	Students prefer grammar feedback that is supportive, respectful, and delivered privately.

The results of this study indicate that the "Grammar Police" phenomenon is not limited to formal learning environments, but has also penetrated informal English usage among PBI UINSU students. The interpretation of these results refers to four main theoretical frameworks: accuracy-fluency balance (Brown, 2007), Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982), Foreign Language Anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986), and Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1997).

Accuracy-Fluency Imbalance in Informal Contexts

The repeated appearance of grammatical corrections in everyday conversation indicates an excessive emphasis on linguistic accuracy in situations where communication fluency should be the priority. Brown (2007) argues that while accuracy-based criticism is appropriate in formal learning situations, fluency-oriented interactions are more beneficial in informal communication. Similarly, Ellis (2009) emphasizes that corrective feedback is most effective when delivered in appropriate instructional contexts and may become counterproductive when applied in non-pedagogical or informal interactions. When corrections disrupt everyday conversation, they can shift the focus away from meaning-making and hinder natural language use. When corrections disrupt everyday conversation, they can shift the focus away from meaning-making and hinder natural language use.

Emotional Difficulties and Language Anxiety

The finding that many students feel uncomfortable with casual grammar correction aligns with Horwitz et al.'s (1986) definition of foreign language anxiety, particularly the fear of negative evaluation. Being corrected by classmates especially in virtual or public settings can make students more aware of evaluation, thereby increasing self-consciousness and anxiety when using the language. From Krashen's (1982) perspective, this emotional pain increases students' affective filters, thereby reducing their readiness to participate in spontaneous communication. Students may avoid informal English usage to reduce the risk of embarrassment and correction.

Vicarious Experiences and Self-Confidence

Notably, the impact of the Grammar Police Movement extends beyond those who are directly corrected. Many students report seeing classmates corrected on social media. Observing others' negative experiences, according to Bandura (1997), can undermine vicarious learning and thus lower self-confidence. Students may anticipate similar judgments of their own language use when they see public corrections, even if they themselves have not been corrected. By inducing anticipatory anxiety and lowering the confidence of groups of students, informal grammar corrections can affect the overall learning environment. This mechanism helps explain this.

Implications for informal language use

Overall, the results of the study indicate an environment in which students become overly cautious and reluctant to speak English informally due to informal grammar corrections. Although corrections are intended to be beneficial, their informal use can inadvertently undermine students' confidence and willingness to communicate. Rather than rejecting corrections entirely, these findings suggest the need for sensitive and empathetic feedback methods, especially among English language education students who will become language teachers in the future.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the extent to which the "Grammar Police" phenomenon affects self-confidence in English Education Study Program students at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra (UINSU). Results reveal that unsolicited grammar correction is common in both formal and informal communication, including online environments. Such efforts, while well-intentioned and aimed at enhancing linguistic accuracy, tend to produce negative emotional states like feelings of discomfort, anxiety, and fear of making mistakes.

These feelings can be seen to have the following effects on the confidence levels of the students as well as their desire to speak in English in informal settings. Most of the

students seem to restrict the use of English or hesitate in order to prevent possible criticism. The above observation fits well with the theories of foreign language anxiety, affective filters, and self-efficacy. Additionally, the study shows that the students are in favor of grammar feedback that is delivered in a polite, supportive, and private manner as opposed to being in the open.

In conclusion, even as grammar correction is a very important aspect to learn in English language studies in general, its implementation in informal settings should be done with caution and consideration. Interventions need to be empathetically and context-focused in creating a positive learning environment to Boost students' confidence. For future English language teachers like the PBI students, it is necessary to adopt positive feeds to help in positive language growth and psychology of learners as well.

REFERENCES

- Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York, NY: W. H. Freeman.
- Brown, H. D. (2007). *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. Pearson.
- Ellis, R. (2009). Corrective feedback and teacher development. *L2 Journal*, 1(1), 3-18.
- Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety*. *The Modern Language Journal*.
- Krashen, S. D. (1981). *Second Language Acquisition and Learning*. USC Press.
- Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Pergamon.
- Liu, N.-F., & Carless, D. (2006). Peer feedback: The learning element of peer assessment. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 11(3), 279-290.
- Lyster, R., & Ranta, L. (1997). Corrective feedback and learner uptake. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 19(1), 37-66.
- MacIntyre, P. D., Clément, R., Dörnyei, Z., & Noels, K. A. (1998). Conceptualizing willingness to communicate in a second language: A situational model of L2 confidence and affiliation. *The Modern Language Journal*, 82(4), 545-562.