



AN ERROR ANALYSIS OF EFL STUDENTS' USE OF SIMPLE PAST TENSE IN WRITING NARRATIVE TEXT

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Abstract

This study investigated the errors in the use of the simple past tense in narrative text written by tenth-grade students at SMA Negeri Taekas. Employing a descriptive quantitative approach, this research focused on identifying and analyzing errors using the surface strategy taxonomy. A total of 113 errors were identified and categorized into omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. The findings revealed that misformation were the most frequent errors (50%), followed by omission errors (32%). These results highlight the need for more targeted instruction in verb forms and tense usage, suggesting that more practice and explicit teaching of grammatical rules could significantly improve students' writing accuracy.

Keywords: Error Analysis, Simple Past Tense, Narrative Writing, EFL Students

INTRODUCTION

Globalization era brought significant effect to all levels in society and we as a society must prepare to encounter all of changes in all sectors, such as economy, education, technology, etc. Besides, the effect from the changes of globalization is a system that organize society's life (Marković, 2008). There are many institutions and companies use English as their language because English is one of international languages that becomes a standard to create communication in the world. Thus, English is very important to learn. If we want to understand about English language, we must master four skills. They are speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Moreover, many schools in Indonesia are implementing new systems in their schools facing global change. One of the systems in their school is how to master English by setting up an English day program or any methods. It's not just the system that the government has changed. However, the educational curriculum in Indonesia is also almost in line with students' needs. Schools in Indonesia implement the Merdeka Belajar curriculum or



Independent curriculum, and an expectation is it can fulfill this global challenges faced by all levels of society. Therefore, schools in Indonesia can create reliable graduates and students have high competitiveness to develop their country.

According to Hasan and Mukhlisa (2023), each level of education should set up learning planning, implementation of learning process, and assessment. The planning will establish the materials that will be taught, the media will be chosen, and the methods will be used in teaching learning process. In such way, the assessment procedures will be used to know the product of teaching learning process and student's achievement so that a teacher just becomes a facilitator for students and give attention in every student's skill. The teacher has to be aware of providing students with a lot of sources that could be utilized to learn and master English in its four skills.

This study is related with students' writing skill. Writing is one of four skills in English and important since one can express anything in a paper. Through writing, it can help him to keep the idea once an individual has read it. The most important is, one can share the information to other people. Writing requires thinking, and thinking is always complicated and hard. Writing is complicated also because the writer needs to do everything at once. The writer produces words, sentences, paragraphs, and extended compositions all at the same time; words must be spelled, sentences punctuated, and paragraphs unified (Gorell and Laird in Anwar, 2014). Therefore, one needs accuracy to make paragraph because the information that he delivers to readers can easily be to understood. Nowadays, there are many writing competitions to improve student's skill to write Scientifics work. Consequently, teachers are supposed to have their students practice writing a lot.

Not only expressing idea on the paper but also writing needs well knowledge and hard thinking when students produce words, sentences, paragraph at the same time with good English grammar. For some Indonesian students it is not easy to change the form, then combine the words into sentences. They seem to have a problem in mastering English grammar especially about tenses However, when students write something, they find many difficulties. On the other hand, students didn't know the meaning of words and the function of word, besides, they didn't know what the tenses that they used to make paragraph (Syarif, 2014).

Moreover, tenses is a part of grammar and the function of the tenses is to explain the accident in the story happened. According to Douglas (in Aminah, 2016), in learning in language we must know the grammatical rules to form correct



sentences. Unfortunately, for Indonesian students, English grammar is still difficult to master even though they have it as a compulsory subject in primary and high schools. In English writing, narrative text is one of the common genres taught in schools. A narrative text is a form of writing that tells a story or recounts events, either real or imagined. Its purpose is primarily to entertain or inform the readers. According to Anderson (1997), narrative texts follow a generic structure consisting of three main parts: orientation, complication, and resolution. Orientation introduces the characters, setting, and situation, providing context for the story. Complication presents the problem or conflict that the characters must face, driving the plot forward. Resolution concludes the story by resolving the problem or conflict. Narrative texts generally uses the simple past tense to recount past events, making it essential for students to master this tense to write coherent and accurate narratives. This becomes a significant challenge for students, as the use of the simple past tense often requires an understanding of both regular and irregular verb forms, as well as the proper use of "was" and "were."

The researchers conducted preliminary research at SMAN Taekas, and found out that students still had problems and difficulties in learning English, especially writing. Based on the result of the test given in the preliminary research, their writing skills were under the passing grade. The passing grade was 70 for English subject while the average score was below 70. It was because most of the problems encountered by students was less understanding of correct tense, so that they kept making errors in writing.

Based on the problem above, the researchers were interested in conducting research entitled "An Error Analysis of EFL Students' Use of Simple Past Tense in Writing Narrative Text"

There were previous studies had been carried out with the same focus. The first study was conducted by Kartini (2022) "*Error Analysis on the Use of Simple Past Tense in Narrative Texts*". The purpose of this research was to analyze students' errors in using the past tense in narrative texts, based on the issue that students struggled with using the past tense, especially in writing narrative texts. The research method was qualitative descriptive, and the subjects were eighth-grade students of MTs Darussalam, Cepu, in the academic year 2016/2017. The findings revealed four types of errors: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. The most frequent error was misformation, with 52% of the total errors. The study concluded that



students' confusion was primarily due to their difficulty in distinguishing between regular and irregular verbs, coupled with limited practice in writing paragraphs.

The second study was conducted by Monika (2019) “*An Error Analysis of Simple Past Tense in the Narrative Writing Produced by Grade Nine Junior High School Students*”. The objective of this study was to identify the types of errors made by ninth-grade students in using the simple past tense in narrative writing. The errors were classified into four categories: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. The subjects of this study were 17 ninth-grade students of SMPN 2 Sidoarjo, who were asked to produce narrative texts of over 100 words. The method used was descriptive analysis, with errors calculated using the formula: $P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100$, where P is the percentage, F is the frequency of errors, and N is the total number of errors. In the first test, students made 63 errors, with misformation being the most frequent (52%), followed by omission (24%), addition (19%), and misordering (5%). In the second test, students made only 9 errors, with omission being the most frequent (45%).

The third study was conducted by Aminah (2016) “*Error Analysis on the Use of Simple Past Tense in English Narrative Texts Written by the Students of SMKN 1 Tengarani in the Academic Year of 2016/2017*”. The objectives of the study were to identify the types of errors in the use of the simple past tense in English narrative texts and to describe the error patterns. The subjects were 34 students from class XII TB 1 at SMKN 1 Tengarani. The results revealed a total of 106 errors, with the most dominant type being misformation (65.09%), followed by addition (20.75%), omission (11.32%), and misordering (2.83%).

The relevance of these studies to the present research lies in their focus on analyzing errors in the use of the simple past tense in students' narrative writing. The similarities include identifying the types of errors students make in their writing. However, the differences lie in the scope, objectives, and subjects of the research.

METHOD

This study was a descriptive study. Researchers employed a descriptive quantitative approach to analyze errors in students' writing narrative text, focusing on the use of simple past tense.

Participants

The participants were 35 tenth-grade students of SMA Negeri Taekas in the academic year of 2024/2025. In determining the participants, the researchers applied random



sampling technique, meaning that every individual has an equal opportunity to participate in the study as a sample (Archaria, 2013).

Instruments

The primary instrument was a writing test in which students composed a narrative text on the topic 'Memorable Personal Experience.' The test was designed to elicit the use of simple past tense.

Procedures

The researchers administered the test, in which students composed a narrative text on the topic 'Memorable Personal Experience.' The test was designed to elicit the use of simple past tense. Then, students' results of the test were collected and analyzed.

Data analysis

Error analysis was the methodology used in analyzing the data, in this case, analyzing the students' ability on the use of simple past tense in their narrative text. The stage to analyze the data as follows:

a. Collection of Sample:

The researchers took 35 of tenth grade students of SMA Negeri Taekas as the sample. Then, they were given a writing test to gather data.

b. Identification of Errors:

The researchers identified the errors made by the students. They started to read students' narrative text and identified the errors in the use of simple past tense, especially the use of to be (was, were) and past verb (regular, irregular verb).

c. Description of Errors:

The researchers underlined the error items and classified the errors into the types based on surface strategy taxonomy: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering.

d. Explanation of Errors:

The researcher explains about students' error in using simple past tense. In analyzing the types of error, the researcher uses the percentage technique. The researcher uses formula by Sudjana (1997):

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$$

Notes:

P = percentage of the error



F = frequency of the error

N= total sample

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

Kinds of Error on the Use of Simple Past Tense

The researchers classified the errors into the kinds of errors. The students' writing was identified and classified based on kinds of errors according to Dulay (1982). The result of the students' narrative text can be seen in the following table

Table 1. Kinds of Error in Narrative Text Made by the Students

Students No.	Omission	Addition	Misformation	Misordering	Total Errors	Level of Mastery
1	1	0	1	0	2	(Good)
2	3	0	4	0	7	(Fair)
3	1	0	1	0	2	(Good)
4	0	0	1	0	1	(Good)
5	2	1	0	0	3	(Good)
6	0	0	1	1	2	(Good)
7	0	0	1	0	1	(Good)
8	0	0	1	0	1	(Good)
9	1	0	1	1	3	(Good)
10	1	1	1	0	3	(Good)
11	1	0	3	1	5	(Good)
12	0	0	1	0	1	(Good)
13	1	0	1	1	3	(Good)
14	0	0	1	0	1	(Good)
15	1	1	1	0	3	(Good)
16	1	0	2	0	3	(Good)
17	1	1	1	0	3	(Good)
18	1	1	0	0	2	(Good)
19	2	0	0	1	3	(Good)
20	0	0	3	0	3	(Good)
21	1	0	1	1	3	(Good)
22	1	1	1	0	3	(Good)
23	3	0	2	0	5	(Good)
24	1	0	1	1	3	(Good)
25	0	0	1	0	1	(Good)
26	1	0	1	1	3	(Good)
27	0	0	2	0	2	(Good)



28	1	1	1	0	3	(Good)
29	1	1	1	0	3	(Good)
30	1	1	1	0	3	(Good)
31	1	0	1	1	3	(Good)
32	1	1	1	0	3	(Good)
33	6	0	11	0	17	(Poor)
34	0	0	6	0	6	(Fair)
35	1	1	1	0	3	(Good)
Total	36	11	57	9	113	

Rubric Interpretation:

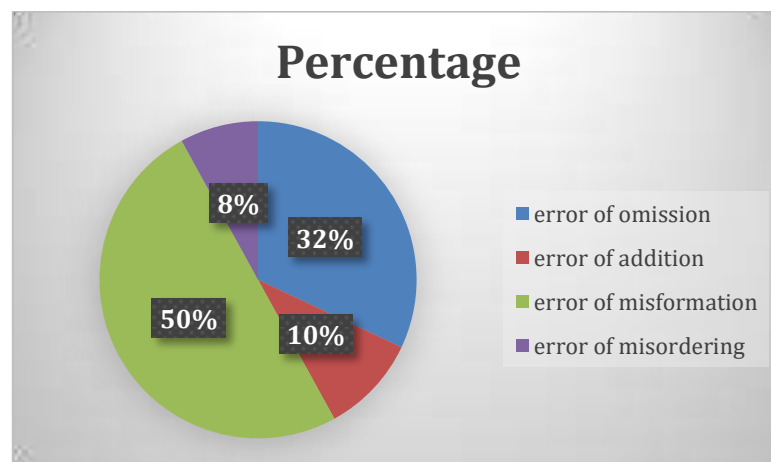
- 4 (Excellent): 0 error
- 3 (Good): 1-5 errors
- 2 (Fair): 6-10 errors
- 1 (Poor): More than 15 errors

Table 1 shows total errors of Tenth Grade Students of SMAN Taekas made in their narrative text focused on the use of simple past tense. According to the data, 113 errors were found. They are 36 errors of omission, 11 errors of addition, 57 errors of misformation and 9 errors of misordering.

2. The Dominant Error on the Use of Simple Past Tense

The chart below shows the percentage from each kind of errors on the use of simple past tense in narrative text made by students.

Chart 1. Percentage of Students' Error





The chart shows the percentage of error made by the students in their narrative text. The highest number of error was error of misformation with 50% of total errors. It was followed by omission with 32% of total errors, then, addition with 10% of total errors, and the lowest number of error was error of misordering with 8% of total errors. The researcher concluded that misformation was the dominant error on the use of simple past tense in narrative text made by Tenth grade students of SMAN Taekes

Discussion

1. *The kinds of Error on the Use of Simple Past Tense*

Data analysis reflected that tenth grade students of SMAN Taekas made errors in their writing as contained in surface strategy taxonomy that classified errors into omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. In line with Kartini (2022); Monika (2019); and Aminah (2016) in their studies, the focus on the errors are the forth components mentioned earlier. The first error was omission; this error occurred when the students did not produce an item that must appear in a well-formed utterance (Amanda, 2019). In this case, the students made errors by omitting some words and made an incomplete sentence in their narrative writing. There were 36 (32%) errors of omission made by students; those were 1) omission of verbs, 2) omission of to be, 3) regular past marker of –ed, 4) omission of be, 5) omission of not, 6) omission of letter of verbs. The students mostly omitted regular past marker of –ed.

For example: They promise

It should be: They promised

And play

It should be: And played

The second error was Addition. This error occurred when students produced an item which must not appear in a well-formed utterance. The students made error by adding some elements in one or several parts in the sentence which must not appear (Sari, et al., 2019). There were 11(10%) error of addition made by the students which were 1) addition of suffix “s” in past sentence which were considered as Regularizations addition, 2) addition of to be in verbal sentence, 3) addition of ed, 4) addition of verbs; these three types considered as double marking addition, 5)



addition of to, 6) addition letter of verbs; both these types considered as Simple addition. The students mostly made addition of double marking.

For example: The other one didn't knew.

It should be: *The other one didn't know*

"My father is clapped and cheered

It should be: *"My father clapped and cheered"*

In the example above, students marked two items (verbs) as past form where students only needs the word "didn't" as the mark of simple past tense.

The third error was misformation. This error occurred when the students used the wrong form of the morpheme or the structure. The students made errors by using inappropriate grammar in one or several parts of a sentence (Ma'mun, 2016). There were 57 (50%) error of misformation made by the students which were (1) to be: using to be in present form for past sentence, wrong form of to be, using to be in verbal sentence, (2) Verbs: regular past verbs and Irregular verbs, (3) Modals: using modals in present form for past tense, verb 2 after modals.

For example : The bear come near

It should be : *The bear came near*

"It is very boring"

It should be: *"It was very boring"*

In the example above, the students used infinitive verb where the verb should be in past tense. It is because mostly students did not know the movement of regular verb into past tense.

The fourth error was misordering. This error occurred when the students made incorrect placement of morpheme or a group of morphemes in the utterance (Amanda, 2019). It means that the sentence can be right in presented elements, but wrongly in sequence. There were 9 (8%) error of misordering found in students' narrative text which considered as misordering of Verb-Object, they were *He let go the weak creature* which should be *He let the weak creature go*, and *There are two best friends* which should be *There were two best friends*.

2. The Dominant Error on the Use of Simple Past Tense

In the findings, the researchers calculated the percentage from each kind of errors which found in students' narrative text in using simple past tense. Based on the percentage of kinds of error above, the dominant error on the use of simple past tense



in narrative text made by students was the error of misformation. They mostly made errors in the misformation of irregular verbs in simple past tense. Moreover, the result of findings and discussion showed that mostly students had difficulties in using simple past tense especially the past form of verb and to be. Students should use verb 2 in writing narrative text but they didn't. For example, "Memorable personal experience" mostly students wrote to be in the present form rather than in past form. It indicates that students didn't know how to use simple past tense and didn't understand well the rules of simple past tense.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussions in the previous chapter, the researchers can draw some conclusions. The kinds of error on the use of simple past tense in narrative text made by Tenth Grade Students of Taekas Senior High School are error of omission with 36 errors or 32%, error of addition with 11 errors or 10%, error of misformation with 57 errors or 50% and error of misordering with 9 errors or 8%. Students made such errors because they didn't know effectively the manner in using simple past tense. Based on the chart in findings, the dominant error that made by Tenth Grade Students of Taekas Senior High School is error of misformation with 57 or 50% of total errors. This error became the most difficult one for students because they didn't comprehend the change of verb and to be from infinitive into past tense. These errors highlight the need for targeted grammar instruction in the classroom, particularly in the use of regular and irregular verb forms.

Suggestion

As a suggestion, by providing more practice opportunities and focusing on common error patterns, educators can help students improve their narrative writing skills. Future research could explore similar challenges across different grade levels or focus on other grammatical aspects in narrative writing.

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