

MOST COMMON ERRORS IN STUDENTS' NARRATIVE WRITING: A STUDY OF FIRST-GRADE SMA 70 USE OF THE SIMPLE PAST TENSE

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Abstract

This study looks into the most common errors made by students in first grade at SMA 70 when writing narratives, mainly using the simple past tense. The study employs a qualitative descriptive methodology to examine and analyze the errors made by the students. Samples of first-grade students' narrative writing were used to gather data. The investigation found that 67% of all errors were caused by misformation through analysis. These grammatical mistakes reveal a lack of knowledge and expertise in employing the proper forms, especially with regular-irregular verbs of the simple past tense. The results of this study provide information about the precise areas in which students have difficulty when writing narratives, particularly when it comes to verb tenses. Teachers may develop unique instructional techniques to help students improve their narrative writing skills and mastery of the simple past tense by making them aware of these common errors.

Keywords: *Error; narrative; Simple Past Tense*

INTRODUCTION

The English language has developed into a common global language of communication. The ability to speak and write well in English is seen as an advantage and has several benefits. This universal tongue can be used for communication and in various other areas of life, including technology, business, education, and many others.

English is a foreign language that is taught in schools in Indonesia. One of the most crucial foreign languages that we must learn to make our daily lives more accessible is the English language. The importance of English in everyday life motivates teachers and students to work together to accomplish the objectives of teaching and English language instruction and learning. Every instructor needs to be committed to teaching English as effectively as possible, and students need to understand the teaching materials properly for language learning to be successful

Students' four skills to master are writing, reading, speaking, and listening (Nation, 2008; Newton & Nation, 2020; Richards, 2008). These four talents are the four components of skills students need to master. These four different skill sets present unique difficulties and demand careful consideration. Another among them is writing. Writing is putting ideas, opinions, thoughts, and feelings into words (Tarigan et al., 2021). Students' language abilities are greatly improved by narrative writing since it helps them to logically and interestingly describe their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Appropriate narrative writing in the context of English language learning depends on the correct usage of structure and tenses (Bardovi-Harlig, 1995; Ellis & Yuan, 2004). It has been noted that many students have trouble correctly applying the simple past tense in their narratives. This study looks into the most common errors that senior high school students make when writing narratives in the simple past tense.

As mentioned by Aminah (2016), Douglas asserts that understanding grammatical principles is essential to learning a language and creating proper sentences. Unfortunately, despite learning English in junior high school, English grammar is still challenging for Indonesian pupils to master. According to the researcher's observations, while attending Muhammadiyah University in Makassar, many students struggle to write in English, particularly when utilizing the simple past tense. For Indonesian pupils, correctly using the simple past tense is not straightforward.

The simple past tense is strongly related to narrative text since it is frequently used to represent previous acts, events, and chapters. Producers frequently use the simple past tense to give a sense of time and chronology in narrative material and make it easier for readers to follow the plot's development. Ali (2010) defines tenses as a description or explanation of when an event, occurrence, or action occurs in a sentence by the circumstances between the present, past, or future. Based on the description, the researcher concluded that tenses are a form of words that show time; different time descriptions can affect the verb form used in a sentence.

In his book, Michael Swan (2017) asserts that the simple past tense is frequently employed to discuss past events. It encompasses various types of actions and situations, including brief and rapidly completed actions, longer actions and ongoing conditions, and repeated events. The simple past tense is commonly paired with adverbial phrases denoting a specific time, such as yesterday, last year, or now. This tense describes actions that occurred and concluded in the past, highlighting their completion or repetition.

Language teachers must comprehend the character of those errors to fix the particular difficulties that students have when writing narratives. By doing an error analysis, teachers might enhance instructional methods and strategies that focus on helping students improve their writing abilities. They will also gain insights into the frequently occurring patterns and types of errors.

Students' language ability, communication skills, and capacity to effectively express their ideas and experiences through narrative writing are all study goals. By focusing on and pointing out the common errors that students regularly commit in their writing, they hope to accomplish this. The study aims to improve students' overall academic and personal growth in the study of narrative writing by crossing the gap between their current writing abilities and the level of proficiency they wish to achieve. The ultimate objective is to support students' advancement in both the academic and personal realms by assisting them in developing more vital writing skills.

In a previous study, Kusumaningsih et al. (2017) analyzed student writing with a concentration on finding and classifying mistakes. Two important kinds of mistakes came from the findings: (1) the syntax category and surface approach, and (2) the communicative taxonomy category. These results point out specific areas in writing where students frequently make errors, specifically in terms of grammar and surface-level techniques. In addition, the study contends that the overall communicative effectiveness of the student's work was mostly unchanged even if certain mistakes were there.

Writing is communicating information, thoughts, and ideas through the written word (Flower, 1979; Syam & Sangkala, 2014). It is a method of communication that enables people to create an evident impression of other people. Writing is evaluated based on the outcome rather than the creation process (Harris, 2023; Yuan et al., 2022). It involves examining the substance of the text and deconstructing it into words, sentences, and paragraphs while also considering matters of style and language usage. Writing is a task in which the author communicates ideas to be understood by readers. To effectively convey information, the writer must possess the ability to communicate effectively. Ultimately, writing revolves around expressing an individual's perspective to assist readers in developing their own.

Sword (2012), particularly in academic situations, highlighted the communicative function of writing. She made the case that writing is a way to impart knowledge, research findings, and ideas to others. The objective is to interest readers and successfully convey difficult information. Persuasion, education, self-expression, contribution to intellectual dialogues, communication, and cognitive development are all possible writing goals. Writing can serve various purposes depending on the writer's objectives, the target audience, and the particular situation in which it is used.

In light of the previous statement, the researcher wants to carry out a study named "Most Common Errors in Students' Narrative Writing: A Study of First-Grade SMA 70 Use of the Simple Past Tense." Writing that tells a story or describes an ordered series of events can be called narrative text. It attempts to entertain readers through a mastery of narrative. Characters, a plot or series of events, a setting, and a narrative point of view are all common elements of narrative texts.

Teachers frequently discover a variety of language use errors produced by students during the learning process, which strives for students to have language abilities in both oral and written communication. These mistakes are related to certain abilities, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The teacher

has to implement a suitable approach to prevent students from making the same errors repeatedly. The strategy used is error analysis.

Errors are a sign of progress in the target language learning, and errors are an indication of linguistic development. The fact that pupils make mistakes is proof that they are learning. These mistakes show the student's degree of proficiency. Making errors cannot be isolated from the learning process. The following are the reasons for language errors, according to Tarigan (2011):

1) Interlanguage Errors

When second language learners generate linguistic forms influenced by their first language or their present stage of language development, interlanguage mistakes result. These mistakes result from the learners' attempts to translate words, phrases, or other elements of their original language into the target language they are learning. Grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, discourse, and other language components can all exhibit interlanguage faults.

2) Intra-language Errors

Errors that arise within the learner's second language system as it develops are intra-language, developmental, or stage errors. They result from limited or incorrect understanding of the target language rather than being impacted by the learner's first language.

Intra-language errors can be thought of as organized patterns of errors that learners make at some point in language education. The errors could be brought on by simplifying rules, a lack of exposure to the target language, or a lack of comprehension of language structures. For instance, a beginner English learner might say, "I goed to the store" instead of "I went to the store." This error reflects the learner's application of the regular past tense rule (adding "-ed" to form past tense) to an irregular verb.

Surface strategy taxonomy is one of the categories used to categorize linguistic mistakes. This taxonomy divides mistakes into categories based on how the structure of the structure is changed. Students may provide additional information or leave out critical ones. Omit required ones, incorrectly form, and

arrange the components. This surface approach taxonomy classifies mistakes based on their omission, addition, misformation, and misordering:

1. Omission is the act of omitting or failing to include an essential part in a sentence or other phrase, as applied to learning languages and grammar. Omission errors arise when students employ the wrong verb tenses or tense markers to express past acts or events when using the simple past tense. Example of omission error: I walk to the store yesterday → I walked to the store yesterday.
2. Addition in the context of language learning and grammar, the act of adding or superfluous element to a sentence or utterance is referred to as addition. Addition mistakes happen when students utilize the wrong verb tense or a tense marking that isn't necessary in the context of past acts or events when using the simple past tense. Example of addition error: They seed a movie last night → They saw a movie last night.
3. Misformation is the incorrect application of a verb form in a particular situation, as seen in language learning and grammar. When learners wrongly construct the verb form to express past acts or events in the simple past tense, misformation mistakes happen. The example: She dranked a cup of coffee this morning → She drank a cup of coffee this morning.
4. Misordering is the improper placing or ordering of parts inside a sentence or utterance. It is a term used in language learning and grammar. Misordering errors happen when students put the parts of a phrase in the wrong order, especially to the past acts or events being described, while using the simple past tense. The example: He two weeks ago went to the mall → He went to the mall two weeks ago.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative descriptive approach to investigate and analyze the phenomena related to the use of simple past tense in narrative writing by students. The qualitative descriptive approach was used to understand and

describe the characteristics, patterns, and variations in the use of the tense, as well as to identify common errors made by students.

This research method involves collecting data from students' narrative writing, either in the form of assignments or written work that they have completed. The data collected was then analyzed descriptively using qualitative content analysis techniques. The researcher used 30 narrative written data sources from the SMAN 70 Jakarta tenth-grade class in this study.

The analysis process began by identifying errors related to the use of simple past tense in narrative writing. These errors were then classified by type, such as omission, addition, misformation, or misordering. After that, the frequency of each type of error was analyzed to find out the level of tendency and common error patterns.

The writer analyzed students' errors in using the simple past tense in narrative writing by employing a surface taxonomy approach. The errors were identified, focusing specifically on the student's use of the simple past tense in narrative texts found in their worksheets. The data were analyzed by the writer using the descriptive analysis approach (percentage). The following is the formula:

$$\text{Percentage} = \text{Frequency/Number} \times 100\%$$

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After collecting the data, the researcher discovered some simple past tense errors that students had made in narrative writing. The table below lists these mistakes:

Table 1. Classification Error Made by Students of SMA 70

Worksheet Number	Omission	Addition	Misformation	Misordering
1	5	-	9	-
2	2	1	9	-
3	1	-	3	-
4	7	2	8	-
5	-	-	-	-
6	-	1	-	-
7	2	-	5	-
8	3	2	8	-

9	1	2	-	-
10	-	-	-	-
11	-	1	-	-
12	-	1	-	-
13	1	-	-	-
14	-	1	4	1
15	3	-	13	-
16	-	-	2	-
17	-	-	1	-
18	1	-	-	-
19	-	-	3	-
20	1	-	6	-
21	-	-	1	-
22	-	-	3	-
23	1	-	1	1
24	3	-	7	-
25	2	1	4	-
26	2	-	19	-
27	-	-	1	-
28	-	1	1	-
29	-	-	3	-
30	4	4	9	1
Total	17	39	120	3

Based on the collected data, the researcher identified a total of 39 errors of omission, 17 errors of addition, 120 errors of misinformation, 3 errors of misordering, and a total of 179 errors overall. These numbers represent the specific types of errors that were found and quantified by the researcher during the analysis of the students' narrative texts.

Table 2. Error Made by Students of SMA 70

No	Kinds of Error	Number of Errors by SMA 70	Percentage
1	Error of Omission	39	21%
2	Error of Addition	17	9%
3	Error of Misformation	120	67%
4	Error of Misordering	3	3%
Total Error		179	100%

Based on the table above we know that 67% of students are making the misinformation error. This error is primarily caused by students' misunderstanding of regular and irregular verb forms, as well as their incorrect use of modality in the past tense. Students frequently make errors by either omitting the suffix “-ed”

for regular verbs or by using the simple present form instead of the appropriate past tense form. Additionally, students often struggle with irregular verbs as they are not familiar with their irregular forms. Regarding modality, students tend to use the incorrect modal verbs (is, am, are) instead of the appropriate past tense modals (was, were), resulting in a change in meaning.

The text further describes specific examples of misinformation errors made by students in their narrative writing. For instance, using the base form "play" instead of the correct past tense form "played" when referring to past events. It emphasizes the importance of using the proper past tense form of verbs to accurately depict actions that occurred in the past. Similarly, the incorrect use of the base form "see" instead of the past tense form "saw" is highlighted. The text also mentions the incorrect use of the present tense form "have" instead of the past tense form "had," emphasizing the necessity of using the correct past tense forms to indicate actions in the past.

Additionally, it points out the error of using "are" instead of the proper past tense form "were" to describe a past situation involving children. It underscores the importance of using the correct past tense forms of the verb "to be" (is/am/are) when referring to past events. To accurately express the children's delight in the past tense, the correct form "were" should be used. According to the researcher's study, several reasons cause errors by students while using the simple past tense, including:

1. Students are rarely given practice using simple past tense. If often given simple past tense exercises, then students will easily master them.
2. Students still lack mastery of irregular verbs and regular verbs so there are many mistakes found in the essay.
3. Lack of interest in reading English and listening to English conversation English is also one of the causes of student's lack of ability in essay writing.
4. The teacher's teaching only emphasizes English patterns or formulas without understanding and application in daily activities this can reduce students' interest and motivation in learning English.

The author can determine that most of the errors concern the usage of verbs after carefully examining each one. There are several ways to reduce verb usage errors, one of which is to use a learning strategy that involves engaging students in teaching and learning activities so that they are inspired to comprehend and memorize irregular verbs and regular verbs. To help students become more proficient in English and decrease basic past tense use problems.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The descriptive analysis and the data identification in the table make it clear that students frequently make errors when writing English narrative essays. 67% of students applied the simple past tense improperly, wrongly applied the word *be*, and misunderstood the use of both regular and irregular verbs. The error of using *was* and *were* caused by the students' ignorance of the rule needing the use of *be* before adjectives and adverbs. '*Was*' and '*Were*' are the verbs to use in the simple past tense. The students' misunderstanding of the material may continue. Additionally, students make errors with word choice, writing, and word placement. This is important when applying the simple past tense to write an essay in English. This happens as a result of an ignorance of how the tenses shift.

The effective use of the simple past tense is crucial for students' narrative writing skills. By identifying and understanding the most common errors made by senior high school students, educators can develop targeted strategies to address these issues in the classroom. Providing explicit instruction, regular practice exercises, and individualized feedback can significantly improve students' ability to use the simple past tense accurately. Finally, by addressing these common errors, students can enhance their narrative writing skills and develop stronger language proficiency overall.

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