

Error Analysis of Using Simple Past Tense in Writing Sentences at the Third Semester of English Language Education Program in University of Batanghari

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the errors made by third-semester students in the English Language Education Program at the University of Batanghari when using Simple Past Tense. The research aims to identify the types of errors based on Dulay et al.'s Surface Strategy taxonomy and explore the causes of errors. The research used a Descriptive Qualitative design. Research instruments included a writing test and documentation of test results. The findings revealed that students made various errors in using Simple Past Tense, with the error of omission constituting 57 error items (26.6%), error of addition constituting 37 items (16.6%), the error of misformation constituting 123 items (55.2%), and error of misordering constituting 6 items (1,6%) of total errors. The total of errors is 223 error items. The most recurring error is misformation, while misordering is the least common. The causes of errors are identified as overgeneralization, insufficient grammatical knowledge, and insufficient vocabulary knowledge.

Keywords: *Error analysis, simple past tense, surface strategy taxonomy*

INTRODUCTION

Writing skill, as one of the four primary language skills in English, holds a crucial role in effective communication, particularly for the learners of English as a second language. Many researchers have consistently highlighted the importance of good writing skills in communication. According to Walsh (2010) in *The Importance of Writing Skill*, writing is not only important because it is used in writing an assignment, texting friends, or writing a personal diary. It is especially more important at higher education levels. If a student do not know how to write correctly, they will not be able to communicate properly with their lecturers, colleagues, employers or anyone. With this in mind, it can be concluded that writing skills are very important for proper communication. Understanding the importance of writing skills and working towards improving one's writing skills is very crucial in one's growth as a language learner.

This is especially important for English as a second language learners, as they navigate the challenges of expressing themselves in a language that may differ significantly from their native tongue. The

research in this subject has not only emphasized the importance of developing proficiency in writing but has also focused on uncovering the unique problems faced by English language learners in mastering this skill.

In writing, grammar plays a significant supporting role in ensuring clarity and coherence in expressing communication through written form. According to Majokorpi (2023), weak writing skill leads to less control of grammatically correct sentences. While having strong grammatical knowledge will lead to producing better text. As learners try to enhance their writing skills, a nuanced understanding of grammar becomes essential, providing them with the tools to construct grammatically correct and contextually appropriate sentences.

An important aspect of a good writing skill is the mastery of tenses. Tenses serve as a basic element of grammatical proficiency and are particularly fitting in the context of writing. (2021) Thakur argued that the act of learning English tenses is important for discourse and communication in the use of the English language, for it helps in constructing

sentences and communicating effectively. Past tense, in its various forms, is a crucial component that shapes the telling of past events in texts such as narratives and recounts. Researches underlined the significance of utilizing past tenses, especially the simple past tense, in crafting narratives and expressing ideas about completed actions. A deeper understanding of past tenses contributes not only to grammatical accuracy but also to the overall effectiveness of written communication, enabling writers to send messages to the readers about the events that happened in the past.

Through the researcher's informal observation in the form of conversation with the third-semester students of the University of Batanghari, the researcher found that the students of the third semester of the English Language Education Program of University of Batanghari often make errors in their use of Simple Past Tense. For example, some of the students still cannot distinguish the difference between nominal and verbal sentences. They still make errors by saying sentences like "they were liked the coffee", and putting the auxiliary verb in a verbal sentence. Based on the problems presented above, the researcher concluded that it is important for there to be thorough research about errors in using tenses among the university students of the University of Batanghari to find out about their level of proficiency.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Definitions of Error in Language Learning

When trying to learn and use a new language, errors and mistakes are bound to be committed by the language learners. It is not something to be ashamed of as everyone starts from zero, even the native speakers of the language in question. According to Abubakar (2015), in the

context of learning English as a foreign language, mistakes and errors being made are even more understandable considering that English is a language with a lot of inconsistencies. With that said, there are still important significances in analyzing such errors committed by the language learners, such as to further improve the ability of said learners.

Many experts have defined errors in language learning. According to Brown (2014), An error in language learning is defined as a detectable alteration from the accepted grammar rules of the language's native speaker, indicating the level of competence of said learner. Meaning that an error is something that can be seen, and it reflects the learner's level of proficiency.

In another perspective, Hubbard (1983) proposed that errors stem from the lack of grammatical knowledge about the L2's rules, or incorrect notions of grammatical rules owned by the learners. This means that errors are the result of inadequate knowledge or the knowledge of incorrect grammatical rules by the learners.

Plonsky et.al (2020) gave a similar perspective, saying that error tends to surface continuously and is not noticeable by the language learners, as such, means an error. They believe that error is something that is committed by the learners who do not think that they are making an error.

Based on the experts' definitions above, the researcher summarized that the definition of error in language learning is an act of incorrectly using grammar rules due to the learners' insufficient knowledge or the inability to perform such grammar rules correctly.

Errors vs Mistakes

Chomsky (1965) made a distinction between errors and mistakes, saying that an error happens when the learners do not know about a particular rule in the first place, while a mistake is a failure of performance. This means that error is the

result of inadequate knowledge of grammar and mistake is the result of not being able to perform one's existing knowledge, which in turn makes the learners fail in performing the correct grammar rules. Gefen (1979) defined the distinction between mistakes and errors where mistakes which failures in performance, meanwhile errors are a reflection of inadequate competence.

Examples of real-life cases of the differences between errors and mistakes can be seen below:

1. Example 1 (EFL learner): I was wanted to meet you tomorrow.
2. Example 2 (English native speaker): I wants to meet you tomorrow.
3. Example 1 (EFL learner): You have been done the test yesterday?
4. Example 2 (English native speaker: You done the test yesterday?

In example 1, the speaker made errors in their writing due to the lack of grammatical knowledge. The speaker intended to talk about plans, which use future tenses, but due to the speaker's lack of knowledge in future tenses, the speaker used past tenses instead (was, wanted). Additionally, more errors are made due to adding the past verb of 'to be' (was) before the action verb (wanted) which is also a type of error.

Meanwhile, in example 2, the speaker already knew the correct grammatical rules that must be used to talk about plans, which is by using future tenses. But due to external or internal factors such as being in a hurry, feeling stressed or other reasons.

In example 3, it is similar to example 1 where the speaker makes an error due to not knowing the correct grammar to construct an interrogative sentence. Meanwhile in example 4, the mistake happens due to the speaker making an ellipsis. According to Aelbrecht (2010:1), ellipsis is the omission of elements that are

inferable from the context and thus constitutes a mismatch between sound and meaning.

This research identified the distinction between the former and the latter through the data extracted from the sample and only focused on the data being presented while viewing it as the result of an error, not a mistake.

Types of Error

Dulay et al (1983) formulated Surface Strategy Taxonomy in classifying types of error. They are error of Omission, Addition, Misformation and Misordering. Below is the detailed explanations of each types.

1. Omission

Omission is an error of omitting or leaving out a necessary part of a grammar rule which makes the sentence grammatically incorrect. Certain types of morphemes are omitted more often than others. Language learners in their early stages of L2 acquisition are more likely to omit content morphemes due to insufficient vocabulary. The lack of vocabulary is often compensated by using gestures. For example: "Tom this chair. (tapping the seat of a chair)". This example may be used to suggest a person sit on a chair, without knowing the phrasal verb "sit down". On the other hand, the example above illustrates an error of content morpheme omission due to the lack of a clear action verb.

Another type of morpheme omission is grammatical omission which includes part of speech such as verb and noun inflections (example: -s in birds, dis-in dislike, -ing in looking, etc.), articles (an, a, the), auxiliary verbs (is, am, will, can) and prepositions (in, at, above, etc.). Below is a sentence example. For example: "I ran from a cat". This example illustrates the lack of a grammatical morpheme in a sentence. In this case, the lacking part is an article. The singular object "cat" lacks the

article “a” which makes the sentence grammatically incomplete.

2. Addition

Addition is the opposite of omission. It is the error of adding unnecessary components in a sentence, which makes it grammatically incorrect. Dulay et. al. further classified the error of Addition into 3 types:

- Double marking

Double marking is the error of using a syntactical marker more times than necessary. For example: “He does not goes to school”. Both the suffix -es in “does” and “goes” denote the same syntactical marker, which is the addition of -es after a verb.

- Regularization

Regularization happens when a learner utilizes regular markers to irregular words. For example: adding the suffix -ed to an irregular verb in a past tense. Such as, runned instead of ran (the past verb of “run”) or hited instead of hit (the past verb of “hit”).

- Simple addition

Simple addition is addition of grammatical components other than double marking and regularization or has no special traits. For example: “They are worked very hard.” This example has an error of addition due to the addition of the to be “are” (present tense) in a sentence that indicates an action verb (woked, past tense verb). The incorrect addition of the auxiliary verb “are” is not considered a double marking because it does not mark the same syntactical rules as the verb “worked” which is a past verb.

3. Misformation

Misformation is the act of using the wrong part of speech or form of a word in a sentence, which makes the sentence have different meaning than intended or incorrect.

For example: “I need to information you about something.” The word “information” in this case is an error for it does not fit the context. The root of the word “information”

(noun) is “inform” (verb). The correct formation of word that has to be used in the sentence above is the verb form, “inform”.

- Regularization

Misformation regularization is marked by the use of regular marker in place of an irregular one. Such as saying runned instead of ran or geeses instead of geese.

- Archi-forms

Archi-forms error is an error caused by incorrectly using one member of a class of word forms in place of all other forms. Such as saying “that cats” and “that cat” simultaneously instead of using “those” for cats. In this case, “that” is the archi-form used in place of “those”.

- Alternating forms

Alternating errors is an extension of archi-forms error. This error happens when an L2 learners have acquired more vocabulary, which makes the error of alternating forms possible. Such as saying “that cats” in one occasion, but saying “those cat” in another. In this case, that and those are alternating forms that are used incorrectly.

4. Misordering

Misordering is an error of putting a morpheme or a group of morphemes in the wrong order. For example:

Incorrect order : I have a jacket blue.

Correct order : I have a blue jacket

The examples above show the use of incorrect order in writing a sentence. The correct order is to mention the adjectives first before the noun.

In conducting the research, the researcher used Surface Strategy Taxonomy by Dulay et al. (1983) which includes the classification of errors in the form of omission, addition, misformation and misordering.

Causes of Error

In order to prevent an error in using a grammar rule, it is important to find out

what causes such errors in the first place. By investigating the causes, the learners or the teachers will have an insight to what is preventing a learner from improving in their ability.

Hubbard (1983) theorized three possible causes of error: the first possible cause is Mother-tongue interference, second is overgeneralization of a grammar rule and the last one is due to errors encouraged by teaching materials or method.

1. Mother-tongue interference

This type of error is caused by confusing the grammar rules between the learner's first language and the target language. For example:

Correct form : I have a blue jacket

Incorrect form: I have a jacket blue

Instead of saying "I have a blue jacket", the learner might say something such as "I have a jacket blue". This is due to the difference in the word orders between Indonesian grammar rules and English grammar rules.

2. Overgeneralization

Overgeneralization happens when a learner incorrectly applies certain grammar rules that they have learned before into certain cases that do not require the same rules.

For example : She sees you yesterday

The learner incorrectly applies the rule of singular verb on a sentence that references an action in the past (yesterday). This is caused by the learner's lack of knowledge on how to construct a sentence using past tenses.

3. Errors encouraged by teaching materials or method

This source of error is due to incorrect or insufficient teaching materials. It could be caused by technical mistakes such as typographical errors or the teacher or tutor's own incorrect knowledge on the subject.

Other causes of errors include the influence of the learners' first language

(interlingual errors), lack of the target language knowledge (intralingual errors) and communication strategies, according to Mertoso et. al. (2023). In addition, Sermsook, Liamnimitr & Pochakorn (2017) concluded that other than interlingual and intralingual errors, lack of grammar knowledge, lack of vocabulary knowledge and students' recklessness are also possible causes of errors.

Based on the experts' opinions above, the researcher concluded that the possible causes of errors are: Mother-tongue interference, Overgeneralization, Errors encouraged by teaching materials or method, interlingual interference, intralingual interference, lack of vocabulary knowledge and lack of grammar knowledge.

Definitions of Error Analysis

Many experts have defined error analysis. Brown (2014) defines error analysis as the result of evidence of learners' error. This means that those errors are observable, analyzable, classifiable and can be used to reveal something more detailed about a learner's process in learning a new language.

In simpler perspective, Plonsky (2020) defines error analysis as a kind of linguistic analysis focusing on the errors that learners commit in using a language. In other words, error analysis is a special type of analysis with no other focus except for finding students' errors.

Similarly, James (2013) defines error analysis as the process to determine the nature, incidence, causes and consequences of failure in using a language. Meaning that error analysis is the act of analyzing learners' failed attempt in using a language rule.

With the definitions above as the basis, the researcher concluded that error analysis is a kind of linguistic analysis that is made up of the process of observation, analysis and classification of errors

committed by students in their attempt to use a language. The purpose is to find out about the students shortcomings and with the end goal of fixing such errors.

Concept of Writing

Writing is one form of communication. The result of a writing can be used to convey messages or simply to relay information to others. In language learning, writing is one of the four skills of language. Writing skill involves knowing the correct ways to construct a grammatically correct sentences that will lead to a proper communication. When one writes, the result comes in the form of written messages. The type of messages that the write makes depends on the intention of the writers.

According to Byrne (1979), writing is the act of forming letters and turning them into sentences. It is an activity that requires the writer to spread their ideas into a surface media by using symbols, meaning letters. Combining and arranging sentences require mental effort. After writing, the writer will re-read their own writings which will result in further writing.

White (1986) defined writing as the process of expressing knowledge, ideas, experience or information, and the process of understanding the said writing in order to acquire the knowledge or information for it to be shared to others and learned by others.

The researcher drew the conclusion that writing is the act of transforming and putting ideas onto a surface media that can be read and used to share messages. The messages come in the form of text and the kind of messages shared depend on the writer's intention in writing said text. For examples, if the text contains recollection of past events, then the intention is to retell past events. If the intention is to relay information, then the text may come in the form of an announcement.

Simple Past Tenses

Partee (1984) describes tenses as a reference of time. This means that tenses, in English grammar, is used to indicate the timing of an action committed. It is used to make the distinction of whether an action is performed in the past, present or the future.

Meanwhile, Azar (1999) illustrates Simple Past Tense as a tense that indicate an action or situation that begins and ends at certain points in the past. This means that Simple Past Tense is used to describe an action of the past.

The researcher concluded that Simple Past Tense is one of the English tenses that is used to inform about an action or status that happened or was true in the past.

Examples of Simple Past Tense

Experts have given examples on the use of Simple Past Tense. Here are the examples given by Murphy in "English Grammar in Use" (2019):

Table 1.
Examples of Verbal Structure

Sentence Type	Examples
Positive Sentence	I liked She read They ran
Negative Sentence	I didn't like She didn't read they didn't run
Question Sentence	Did you like? Did she read? Did they run?

Here are the extended version of the examples above:

- I liked the meal a lot. Did you like it?
- How many times did you ring the bell?

- I didn't run because I didn't have any energy left.
- "Did you read the news?" - "No, I didn't"

Another examples are in the form of "be" (am/is/are). The past forms of be are was and were. Here are the examples of the use of was / were in sentences.

Table 2.
Examples of Nominal Structure

Sentence Type		
Positive Sentence	I/he/she/it	was
	we/you/the y	were
Negative Sentence	I/he/she/it	wasn't
	we/you/the y	weren't
Question Sentence	was/were	I/he/she/it?
	were	we/you/they ?

Here are the extended versions of the examples above:

- I was angry because they were lazy.
- Was the food delicious when you ate it?
- They weren't able to buy the ticket because they were too late.
- I wasn't sleepy, so I didn't sleep.

This research used the examples above as the basis for the structures of Simple Past Tense that are to be analyzed in this research. According to the examples by Murphy (2019) above, there are two voices form of Simple Past Tense. The active voice and the passive voice. There are also three sentence types according to their functions which are the positive statement, negative statement and question form.

The researcher started with the background that the third-semester students of the English Language Education Program in University of Batanghari still

make errors in using Simple Past Tense. In Simple Past Tense, there are three types of sentences: Nominal, Active Voice Verbal and Passive Voice Verbal sentences. In order to test the students' abilities, a writing test are given to the students to determine the errors that they make. In this research, errors are classified based on Dulay et. al's Surface Strategy Taxonomy which classified errors into 4 major types: Error of Omission, Error of Addition, Error of Misformation and Error of Misordering. After the students' errors have been identified and classified, then the causes of errors were determined based on Hubbard's theories that there are 3 causes of errors: Overgeneralization, Mother-tongue interference and error encouraged by teaching materials or method; as well as theories by Sermsook et. al's that errors are caused by lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge.

METHODOLOGY

The design used in this research is Descriptive Qualitative research design. The researcher used qualitative data in the form of written test that was done by the subjects which have been analyzed to find out the errors committed, as well as the possible causes of such errors. Creswell et al (2007) defined qualitative research as a research design that uses descriptive data in written or oral forms and the result of observing individuals' behaviors. In this research, a written test was used as the data.

This research employed a descriptive analysis approach. Loeb et. al. (2017) described the descriptive analysis as something that characterizes the world or a phenomenon to answer questions about who, what, where, when, and to what extent. The goal may be to identify and describe trends and variations in populations or describe samples in studies aimed at identifying causal effects.

The setting of this research is the University of Batanghari. The researcher

took the third-semester students of the English Language Education Program of University of Batanghari of the academic year 2023/2024 as the subject of the study. The subject comprised of 9 students. The subjects of the research were 9 students in the third semester of the English Language Education Program of University of Batanghari. All of which were female students.

The writing test in this research was in the form of writing sentences using Simple Past Tense. According to Norrish (1995), this type of test is used as it makes the process of analyzing grammatical errors easier.

The data to be collected are in the form of writing test where the samples are required to write 15 sentences in the form of Simple Past Tense with the details as follows, Section A: The subjects are required to write 5 nominal sentences. Section B comprises of two parts: in part B1, the subjects are required to write 5 sentences by using the active voice of verbal tense in Simple Past Tense while in part B2 the subjects are required to write 5 sentences by using the passive voice of verbal tense in Simple Past Tense.

According to Arikunto (1992), documentation is a technique to obtain data from document and / or written materials. Documentation may be obtained in the form of recordings, written materials such as books, magazines and others.

In this research, the researcher used the result of the subjects' writing test in writing Simple Past Tense as the documentation data. The document data are going to be analyzed by using the surface strategy taxonomy and to find out the frequency of errors made frequencies according to the test results. Additionally, the test result is used to answer analyze and conclude the causes of the errors. Ellis & Barkhuizen (2005) proposed a set of procedure in conducting error analysis which are explained as below: (1)

Collecting Sample, this is the first step where the researcher collects data to be analyzed. The type of data gathered will affect the next steps of the study; (2) Identification of Error, the researcher carefully reads and marks parts where the data presents an error; (3) Description of Error, The data is classified into different categories. The categories are decided based on Dulay et al's Surface Strategy Taxonomy which includes: Error of Omission, Addition, Misformation and Misordering; (4) Explanation of Error, this part concerns the effort in explaining why the errors are made. The possible causes are concluded based on Hubbard's theory on the causes of errors (1983); (5) Error Evaluation, Summarizing the errors, the classification and the causes of the errors. This part is presented in the later part of the research.

The data collected come in the form of writing test result of the subjects. The errors made by the subjects are analyzed by using Surface Strategy Taxonomy formulated by Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1983). Dulay et al classified errors into 4 types: Omission, Addition, Misformation and Misordering.

In calculating the result of the research, the researcher used the following formula to calculate the percentage of errors of each types of error, based on Sudijono (2011). According to Miles and Huberman (1984), there are three steps in analyzing qualitative data, which are data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification. The steps of the data analysis technique are explained as follows:

1. Data Reduction

Data reduction involves summarization, selection of essential elements, focusing on the most important aspects, and identification of themes and patterns.

2. Data Display

The next step in qualitative analysis is Data Display, where the researcher

presents the collected data. This presentation can take various forms such as brief descriptions, charts, relationships between categories, flowcharts, and more.

3. Conclusion Drawing / Verification

This step involves drawing conclusions and verifying data them based on strong, valid, and consistent evidence, ensuring that the conclusions made are credible.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

In collecting the data, the researcher used a writing test which was finished by the subjects of the study. At the day of data collection, 9 students were present during the data collection. The data obtained were the result of writing test done by the 9 students that were present during the data collection.

The aims of this research are to find out the kinds of error and the causes of errors that are made by the third semester students of English language education program in writing sentences using simple past tense. The sentences that were instructed for the subject of the study to write were five nominal sentences, five active voice verbal sentences and five passive voice verbal sentences. The errors are classified into four types of error according to Dulay et al's Surface Strategy Taxonomy. Below are the data that have been collected through the writing test instrument

Kinds of Errors

The researcher found that all four types of error are identified among the data. Below is the recapitulation of the numbers of errors that the subjects made. The error are classified into four types of error which are error of omission, addition, misformation and misordering.

Table 3.
Total Frequency and Percentage of Errors

No .	Kinds of Error	Frequency	Percentage of Errors
1	Omission	57	26.6%
2	Addition	37	16.6%
3	Misformation	123	55.2%
4	Misordering	6	1,6%
Total		223	100%

Details of each types of error are covered and explained in detail in the following sub-chapters.

Error of Omission

Errors of Omission found in the data can be classified into content morpheme omission and grammatical omission. Grammatical omission errors found in the data can be further classified into omission of article, auxiliary verbs, possessive determiner, preposition, punctuation, relative pronoun and letter omission. The following table shows the number of each errors.

Table 4.
Total Frequency of Omission Errors

No	Types of Omission	Number of Errors
1.	Content Morphemes	6
2.	Article	11
3.	Auxiliary Verb	15
4.	Possessive Determiner	3
5.	Preposition	2
6.	Punctuation	12
7.	Relative Pronoun	3
8.	Letters	5
Total		57

Error of Addition

Errors of Addition found in the data are simple addition and letter addition error. Based on the errors found in the data, simple additions are further classified into addition error of auxiliary verbs, article and quantifiers. The table below shows the number of each error.

Table 5.
Total Frequency of Addition Errors

No	Types of Addition	Number of Errors
1.	Article	2
2.	Auxiliary Verb	28
3.	Quantifier	2
4.	Double Marking	1
5.	Letters	4
Total		37

Error of Misformation

Errors of Misformation found in the data are misformation of alternating forms, regularization and collocation error, tense structure error and spelling misformation. The table below shows the number of each errors.

Table 6.
Total Frequency of Misformation Errors

No	Types of Misformation	Number of Errors
1.	Alternating Forms	62
2.	Regularization	3
3.	Collocation	9
4.	Tense Structure	36
5.	Spelling	13
Total		123

Error of Misordering

Errors of Misordering found in the data are identified and explained. Below is the total of misordering error found in the data.

Table 7.
Total Frequency of Misordering Errors

Types of Misordering	Number of Errors
Misordering	6
Total	6

Error of misordering is the least number of errors found in the subjects' writing test results of the third semester students of English language education program in University of Batanghari.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings and discussions in the previous chapters, the researchers drew the conclusions below to answer this research's research questions:

1. Based on the data that have been obtained and analyzed, it was found that there are 4 kinds of errors that the subjects made in writing sentences using simple past tense. They are error of omission which amounts to 57 error items or 26.6%, error of addition amounts to 37 error items or 16.6%, error of misformation amounts to 123 error items or 55.2% and error of misordering amount to 6 error items or 1,6%, each are calculated based on the total errors which is 223 items. The most reoccurring error is error of misformation and the least amount of error is error of misordering. The errors are classified based on Dulay et. al.'s Surface Strategy Taxonomy.
2. Based on the researcher's analysis, it was found that there are 3 causes of the errors made by the third subjects. The causes of errors that the subjects made

are overgeneralization of grammatical rules, insufficient grammatical knowledge and insufficient vocabulary knowledge. Overgeneralization as a cause of error is in line with Hubbard's theories on causes of errors, while the insufficient grammatical knowledge and insufficient vocabulary knowledge are in line with Sermsook et. al.'s theories on causes of error.

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