

An Error Analysis on The Use of Simple Past Tense on The Student's Narrative Writing Ability at Class XI.1 Madrasah Aliyah Nurul Falah Airmolek

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Abstract: A descriptive qualitative method was used to analyze grammatical errors in the use of the simple past tense in narrative writing by 25 students of class XI.1 at Madrasah Aliyah Nurul Falah Airmolek. The students were assigned to write a narrative text about "An Unforgettable Holiday," and their works were examined using the Surface Strategy Taxonomy by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen, covering omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. The analysis identified 157 total errors, with misformation (67.52%) as the most dominant, followed by omission (22.93%), misordering (6.37%), and addition (3.18%). These results indicate that students have difficulty with verb formation, auxiliary usage, and sentence structure. The causes of these errors include first language interference, overgeneralization of rules, limited exposure to correct written input, and insufficient feedback during learning activities. These findings demonstrate the crucial role of explicit grammar teaching, along with structured writing tasks that allow students to apply their understanding in meaningful contexts. Incorporating peer editing and teacher-led error correction is also essential in minimizing recurring mistakes. In addition, the importance of reinforcing regular and irregular verb patterns through focused instruction should be emphasized in classroom practice. These strategies are expected to help students internalize the appropriate use of past tense in written English. This study contributes to the field of language education by highlighting the persistent grammatical issues faced by learners and offering pedagogical recommendations for improvement. Future research may expand the scope by comparing grammatical errors across different text genres or proficiency levels.

Keywords: Error Analysis, Simple Past Tense, Narrative Text

Introduction

This study focuses on an error analysis of the usage of the simple past in narrative texts. It is related to students' writing skills because writing skills differ from other skills in the English learning process. Writing is one of the four essential language skills that every English learner needs to master, alongside listening, speaking, and reading (Brown & Lee, 2015; Richards & Renandya, 2013). Unlike speaking, which can rely on gestures or tone, writing demands clarity and precision because it has to stand on its own. Through writing, students can express their thoughts, share ideas, and develop their ability to organize information logically. However, writing is also one of the most challenging skills to learn. It

requires not just good grammar and vocabulary, but also the ability to generate ideas, structure them coherently, and revise for clarity and correctness (Gorrell & Laird, as cited in Anwar, 2014).

Writing is a process of exploring the writer's thoughts to manifest the graphological and grammatical system of language by using a visual medium in the form of sentences. Writing is very different from other skills because we need to fully concentrate to choose an interesting topic and write with correct grammar (Rosa, 2014: 79). This difficulty is not only generating and organizing ideas but also translating these ideas into readable text. Therefore, writing is typically introduced as the final language skill to be taught after listening, speaking, and reading skills.

Moreover, it could be said that tenses are a part of grammar, and their function is to explain the events in a story. Tenses are a tool used by English speakers to express time in their language, with the aim of helping learners to think like native speakers (Grain, 2006). Therefore, it is important for students to understand the role of tenses in writing paragraphs or essays. One of the tenses that students need to consider is the simple past, which is used to explain an event that occurred in the past.

Simple past is a tense that began and finished in the past (Anwar, 2014:14). It means that, simple past explains the accident that start and end in the past and the accident did not discuss again today. (Betty Schramfer Azar, 1989) says that the simple past tense shows that an activity or situation began and ended at a certain time in the past. We use the past tense (also as simple past tense) to express an action or event that happened in the past and has now been completed and is known exactly when these events occur or do (Suryadi Junaida, 2011).

The simple past tense is one of the tenses that students learn in school. The use of the simple past as a grammar rule can make it difficult for students to apply it to sentences. The effect is that the students cannot use and understand the simple past properly and make an error. Furthermore, an analysis of grammatical errors made by students in their writing of paragraphs is warranted. Errors are unique to the human condition, and error analysis is defined as the process of determining the incidence, nature, causes and consequences of unsuccessful language use (Sompong, 2008: 6). This idea aligns with Corder's (1967) claim that learners' errors provide valuable insight into the language learning process and should be considered a vital part of linguistic research.

Error analysis is an essential source of information for teachers. It provides information about students' errors, which in turn helps teachers to correct students' errors and also improves the effectiveness of their teaching (Hourani, 2008: 16). It means that, error analysis is very important because the researcher would like to determine the types of errors made by students of using past tense in writing narrative text and the factors that influence their errors. Based on theories, error analysis has four types. They are omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. Besides, this theory was taken based on surface structure taxonomy (Dulay and Krashen, 1982).

Based on a preliminary interview with the English teacher and observations of student writing tests, it was found that many students face difficulties in using the simple

past tense correctly. Some struggle to distinguish between regular and irregular verbs, while others tend to omit necessary elements such as the use of auxiliary verbs or time adverbials. These issues reflect a deeper grammatical problem that impacts their ability to construct accurate and coherent narrative texts.

Several studies have investigated students' errors in using the simple past tense in narrative writing. Islam, Rozak, and Ermawati (2022) reported that misformation was the most frequent error among eighth-grade students. Similar findings were noted by Triyuono (2022) and Kartini et al. (2022), who found that many students applied incorrect past verb forms, especially irregular ones. Suhartini and Nurlaili (2024) also observed that learners struggled to apply appropriate tense markers, while Seruni (2023) showed that misformation accounted for over 75% of all errors. Monika (2019) supported this trend by finding that misformation constituted more than half of the total errors in ninth-grade students' narrative texts. These studies indicate a consistent pattern of grammatical difficulties in past tense usage, highlighting the importance of further research in this area.

This study focuses on analyzing the errors based on the surface structure taxonomy by Dulay and Krashen. They are omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. According to James (1998), analyzing these error types not only helps identify learner difficulties but also informs the development of more effective teaching strategies. Therefore, the researcher is interested in analyzing errors of past tense done by students in class XI.1 of Madrasah Aliyah Nurul Falah Airmolek in writing narrative text. Based on the statement above, the researcher intended to conduct a study with the title "An Error Analysis on the Use of Simple Past Tense in Students' Narrative Writing." This study attempts to solve the problems which need positive solution, they are: To know the students in class XI.1 of Madrasah Aliyah Nurul Falah Airmolek perceptions on learning error analysis on the use past tense in writing narrative text.

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method to analyze students' grammatical errors in using the simple past tense in narrative texts. According to Sugiyono (2016), qualitative research is a method used to understand phenomena in a natural setting, with the researcher as the key instrument. A descriptive qualitative approach is suitable for this study because it allows the researcher to describe and interpret students' errors without manipulating variables (Creswell, 2012).

The participants of this study were 25 students labeled S1 to S25 from class XI.1 at Madrasah Aliyah Nurul Falah Airmolek. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, in which the subjects are selected based on specific criteria that align with the research objectives (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The main instrument for this study was a writing task in which students had to write narrative texts on the subject of "unforgettable vacation." Writing tasks are commonly used in language studies to grammatically evaluate students' actual language use and their grammatical evaluations (Brown, H. D., & Abeywickrama, P, 2019). Data was collected

during class writing sessions from April 14th to May 5th, 2025. Each student had 45 minutes to write a narrative text of 100-150 words without any assistance.

Data were analyzed based on the surface strategy taxonomy (Dulay, Burt, and Krashen, 1982), which categorizes grammatical errors into four types: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. This taxonomy helps reveal how learners manipulate linguistic structures during the language acquisition process.

The analysis involved several key steps: identifying grammatical errors related to the use of the simple past tense, classifying these errors into the four surface strategy categories, calculating the frequency and percentage of each type, and interpreting the underlying patterns and potential causes of the errors. Error analysis not only identifies what learners do incorrectly but also provides insight into their language development by revealing how and why such errors occur (Ellis,1997).

To ensure the reliability of data analysis, researchers worked with English teachers to review the classification and interpretation of errors. This triangulation aims to reduce the subjectivity of the analytical process and improve the reliability of the results.

Result and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study along with a discussion of identified errors in student narrative texts. The analysis focused on grammatical errors related to the use of simple past forms, classified by surface strategies proposed by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982). The errors identified are omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. The following table summarizes the frequency and percentages of each error type.

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage of Error Types		
Error Types	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Misformation	106	67.52%
Omission	36	22.93%
Misordering	10	6.37%
Addition	5	3.18%
Total	157	100%

As shown in Table 1, the most common error type was misformation, with 106 occurrences, or 67.52%. This was followed by omissions (36 errors, 22.93%), misordering (10 errors, 6.37%), and addition (5 errors, 3.18%). The dominance of misformation indicates that many students had difficulty selecting or forming correct past tense verbs.

In addition to the overall distribution, the analysis examined how each student was performed in relation to four error categories. This information is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Student Error Distribution

No	Student	Omission	Addition	Misformation	Misordering	Total
1.	S1	0	1	5	0	6
2.	S2	2	1	3	0	6
3.	S3	1	0	1	0	2
4.	S4	2	1	4	1	8
5.	S5	2	0	8	1	11
6.	S6	0	0	4	0	4
7.	S7	1	0	5	0	6
8.	S8	1	1	5	0	7
9.	S9	2	0	3	0	5
10.	S10	2	0	3	0	5
11.	S11	2	0	3	0	5
12.	S12	0	0	6	0	6
13.	S13	0	0	4	0	4
14.	S14	3	1	2	1	7
15.	S15	5	0	7	2	14
16.	S16	0	0	3	1	4
17.	S17	2	0	4	0	6
18.	S18	0	0	7	1	8
19.	S19	3	0	4	1	8
20.	S20	2	0	5	0	7
21.	S21	1	0	4	0	5
22.	S22	2	0	4	0	6
23.	S23	3	0	6	0	9
24.	S24	0	0	3	1	4
25.	S25	0	0	3	1	4
Total		36	5	106	10	157

Detailed error distribution for each student is presented in Table 2. This shows that most students have made many types of errors. S15 has the largest number of errors (14), followed by S5 (11) and S23 (9). This breakdown helps to identify patterns across learners and demonstrates that misformation was consistently the most frequent type of error among nearly all participants.

Discussion

Richards (1974) categorizes learner errors into interlingual and intralingual sources. This framework helps explain why students often struggle with tense usage due to both native language interference and internalized generalizations. The findings of this study showed that misformation was the most frequent type of error, accounting for 67.52% of the total errors made by students in their narrative writing. This result was consistent with previous studies. Islam et al. (2022) reported that misformation reached 52% of the total errors among eighth-grade students. Triyuono (2022) found that misformation was also the dominant type, followed by omission, although specific percentages were not provided. Kartini et al. (2022) stated that misformation accounted for 47% of student errors. Similarly, Monika (2019) reported that over 50% of the total errors were misformations, and Seruni

(2023) observed that misinformation reached approximately 77.8% of all errors. These similarities supported the conclusion that misinformation remained a major challenge in students' understanding and use of the simple past tense.

Misinformation errors were the most frequently occurring, accounting for 106 of the 157 total errors (67.52%). These errors happen when students apply the wrong form of a linguistic item that is otherwise necessary. In this study, misinformation occurred primarily in verb usage, particularly when students used present tense verbs in contexts that required the simple past tense. Common examples include "go" instead of "went," "sleep" instead of "slept," and "can" instead of "could." In several cases, students incorrectly formed verb structures such as "decided to went," combining a correct verb pattern (decided to) with an inappropriate verb form ("went" instead of "go"). Another frequent error involved confusion between regular and irregular verbs, where students added -ed to irregular base forms (e.g., *buyed* instead of *bought*).

In addition to verb tense, modal constructions and subject-verb agreement, like "I can met" or "he don't went," also exhibited misinformation, indicating deeper grammatical confusion. Pronoun misinformation, such as "Me and my family went" rather than "My family and I went," was present in some cases, suggesting that informal spoken language was interfering. Spelling and capitalization mistakes (such as "bustiing" instead of "bustling" or "cuicine" instead of "cuisine") that affected the sentence's grammar or lexical meaning were also classified as misformations. The students' first language (Bahasa Indonesia) interferes, they lack mastery in verb conjugation rules, they overgeneralize English tense patterns, and they don't get enough exposure to appropriately modeled language input, particularly when it comes to irregular verbs. As Krashen (1985) proposed in his Input Hypothesis, adequate exposure to comprehensible input is essential for successful language acquisition.

The second most common type of error was omission, which happened 36 times (22.93%). When students left out parts of a sentence that are needed for grammar, these errors happened. The most common things that were left out were linking verbs and auxiliary verbs, especially "was" and "were." For instance, "we very happy" and "he at home" didn't have the right verb to show the past tense (we were very happy, he was at home). Other things that were left out were missing subjects, like "arrived at the destination..." and articles like "a" or "the" before singular countable nouns ("on speed boat instead of on a speed boat").

Omissions also extended to capitalization at the beginning of sentences and missing punctuation, which, while part of mechanics, were significant enough to affect grammatical structure and clarity. For instance, students wrote, "After that, we grilled satay" without a comma or clear clause separation, resulting in ambiguity. These errors might be caused by habits from casual speech, where these kinds of grammar rules are often ignored. Also, students may leave things out because they lack understanding of how to make complete sentences in English, especially when they translate ideas directly from Bahasa Indonesia, where such punctuation or auxiliaries are often implied or structured differently.

There were 10 cases (6.37%) of misordering errors, which aren't as common as the others. These mistakes were caused by putting sentence parts in the wrong order, which

made the sentences less clear and less grammatically correct. The phrase "to from Padang" is a common example. It should be changed to "from Padang." Me and my friends' holiday for one full month as another example. The way the words are put together does not follow standard English grammar. It should say, "My friends and I had a holiday for a full month." There were also some mistakes in the order of prepositional phrases or time adverbials that were placed in a way that made the sentence sound awkward. In some cases, these mistakes were due to directly translating from Indonesian, where word order can be more flexible.

Furthermore, run-on sentences without the proper punctuation, like "Our vacation was unforgettable we enjoy sunset," were also considered misordering because they changed the sentence's structure and meaning.

Addition errors were the least common, occurring in just 5 cases (3.18%), but are also revealing of students' grammatical uncertainty. These involved the addition of elements unnecessary or redundant and interfered with grammatically well-formed sentence structure. One of the most common patterns was the use of double verb constructions, e.g., "decided to went," where "went" must be replaced by the bare infinitive "go." The other common error was redundant repetition, such as "to visit my uncle's to visit and maintain it," where the second "to visit" is unnecessary.

Addition errors also found their way in the form of modifiers or prepositions, such as "to go to home," which simply needs to be "go home." These errors show overcompensation and overgeneralization; students may have learned some rules in a broad sense but applied them in irrelevant contexts, possibly due to a lack of confidence or a lack of understanding of English grammar rules.

Sources of Difficulty

The errors that are identified in this research can be explained through a number of underlying linguistic and pedagogical reasons. Firstly, one of the primary contributors is Bahasa Indonesian native language interference. Because verbs in Bahasa Indonesian do not inflect to express tense, students might neglect to utilize appropriate past tense markers in English. This L1 transfer most commonly causes such errors as the omission of auxiliary verbs (we very happy instead of we were very happy) or the use of incorrect present tense verbs (go instead of went) since the students are used to not marking verbs for time reference in their native language.

A second frequent source of error is overgeneralization, in which learners apply a current rule too broadly. Learners, for instance, may overgeneralize that all verbs form the past tense by adding -ed and produce erroneous forms like "buyed" or "slepted." This tendency indicates a partial grasp of grammatical rules, especially irregular verb forms, and is characteristic of early phases of second language learning (Ellis, 1997). In the same way, the employment of redundant words (decided to go to home) can be explained as trying to use memorized syntax without fully comprehending the grammatical structure.

In addition, many errors seem to be caused by a lack of exposure to accurate language input, especially in writing. Norrish (1983) explains that errors may also arise from internal factors such as anxiety, low motivation, and poor self-monitoring during language

production. Since students may be more accustomed to spoken or informal English, they tend to overlook important elements such as subjects, verbs, or punctuation in their written texts. This unfamiliarity with formal narrative structures in English contributes to errors in sentence misformation and omission of elements, particularly in sentence construction and verb tense usage.

A further consideration is the lack of corrective feedback students receive while learning. Bitchener and Ferris (2012) argue that sustained and focused written corrective feedback can significantly reduce learners' grammatical errors over time and foster greater linguistic accuracy in writing. In writing-poor or writing-superficial classrooms, students are not necessarily conscious of error patterns. Without explicit teaching and individualized feedback, errors like "me and my family" or "can met" are likely to be reinforced, particularly where these are supported by oral contact or uncorrected written work.

Lastly, the influences of informal speech habits are present in the majority of writing. Students carry over their speaking habits to writing, which results in auxiliary words being omitted, pronouns confused, or sentences incomplete. The analogy helps to demonstrate that more classroom time needs to be spent on formal and orderly writing activities in which students can soak up good models of English grammar and narrative style.

Taken together, these sources of challenge suggest that students need not just overt grammar teaching but also regular chances for practice, feedback, and reflection. Focusing on the use of past tense in meaningful writing assignments, buttressed by scaffolded grammar instruction and error correction, may help students overcome these persistent challenges.

Conclusion

The current research identified that the majority of grammatical errors of the students in narrative writing in the simple past tense were misformation errors, followed by omission, misordering, and addition. These were mainly caused by first language interference, overgeneralization, lack of writing exposure, and insufficient feedback. The findings imply that effective grammar instruction must go beyond rule explanation; it should involve meaningful writing activities, targeted feedback, and contextualized practice. Teachers are encouraged to use error analysis results to adapt instruction based on learners' needs and common error patterns.

For future research, it is recommended to conduct longitudinal studies to observe changes in grammatical accuracy over time or comparative studies involving different text types or tenses. Experimental designs may also be applied to measure the impact of specific interventions (e.g., grammar games, peer feedback) on students' writing performance.

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