

ERRORS IN USING SIMPLE PAST TENSE IN NARRATIVE COMPOSITIONS MADE BY ENGLISH NON-NATIVE STUDENTS

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Abstract:

Errors or mistakes frequently occur when school students write English texts or sentences according to the correct grammatical rules of English. This research aims to identify the inaccuracies made by the eleventh-grade students of SMA N 1 Pasemah Air Keruh, Empat Lawang District, South Sumatra province in their narrative compositions. A descriptive quantitative research technique was employed in this study. Data were obtained through a writing task. The sample of this study consisted of 32 eleventh-grade students of the school selected using purposive sampling. The data were analyzed using a simple percentage formula. The results of the study showed that there are four categories of errors made by students containing 125 errors found in their narrative compositions. They were classified into four types of errors, they are misformation (45.6%), omission (42.4%), addition (10.4%), and misordering (1.6%). In conclusion, misarrangement, exclusion, and inclusion of grammatical features

were found in students' compositions.

Keywords:

Error Analysis;
Errors;
Narrative Composition;
Simple Past Tense.

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INTRODUCTION

Writing is a productive skill by which results of thinking are expressed. Students very often find it difficult to express their thoughts. Writing provides students with a platform to express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions and it is not easy to express them in written forms. Writing provides students with a platform to express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions (Mega, 2017). Writing a composition, in particular a narrative text, poses numerous difficulties for students. It involves describing past events and aims to entertain readers through real or imagined experiences (Haryadi & Putra, 2018). The fundamental structure of a narrative text comprises an introduction or orientation that establishes the main character, setting, and historical period; a complication that introduces plot issues; a resolution that outlines problem-solving steps; a re-orientation that signifies the end of the story; and a coda that provides moral values (Dewi, 2019). Unfortunately, using the simple past tense to describe past events is challenging for students (Parsodi dkk., 2019). Students are faced with errors in constructing a sentence in the English past forms and it leads to making a composition grammatically incorrect and losing its cohesiveness and coherence.

Writing in English needs much attention to the correct grammar or structure of every single sentence. Grammatically correct sentences support the unity of ideas in writing. The skill of arranging ideas cohesively and coherently is crucial when it comes to writing texts (Ramli, 2013). It is not enough to simply write texts without structuring and characterizing them using appropriate grammar, particularly in English. Narrative text writing required students to use correct forms of the simple past tense. The grammar rules surrounding the simple past tense can be confusing, leading to improper usage and comprehension. As a result, students also face errors when composing narrative text, often due to a lack of understanding or knowledge of language rules. Analyzing students' errors in constructing English sentences using past forms is interesting in an attempt to portrait their grammar knowledge of a foreign English such as English when composing a passage, particularly a narrative text. Errors occur when one lacks understanding of the rules of a second or a foreign language.

Making errors in constructing sentences are natural for those English non-native students because they do not yet possess sufficient grammatical knowledge and competence. As Brown (2007) suggests, errors result from systematic competence. According to Putri & Dewanti (2014), language learners who are still unfamiliar with the entire language system tend to make errors while learning a second or third language. Due to their unfamiliarity with English grammar, non native English learners are prone to errors. Studies

investigating error analysis in the context of English language acquisition have been carried out to find out how the language learners make grammatical inaccuracies. In their studies, Bedmar (2005), Shan-ling (2012), Wu and Garza (2014) investigated error analysis toward college students and their findings indicated the interlingual and intralingual errors performed in students' writing. Meanwhile, in a research conducted by Bennui (2016) it was found that the students under the investigation made errors in terms of literal translation from L1 (Thai language) to L2 (English) lexical interferences in the students' written English. Another study carried out by Taher (2011) investigating errors students' free writing and controlled writing showed that in different aspect both writings produced grammatical errors, free writings produce more prepositional errors and controlled writings produced more subject verb agreement errors. The previous studies are concerned with investigating errors students' writing performance. Type of errors and quantitative aspect are not specified in those studies in an attempt to highlight typical errors and their percentage student make. It is in this context

This present study attempts to analyze learners' errors in constructing simple past forms in their narative composition by formulating the following question: What types of errors and their percentages are made by the eleventh grade students of SMA N Empat Lawang, South Sumatra in using simple past tense in their narrative compositions?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Errors in English Grammar Use

Lack of knowledge of the second language's rules results in errors. Language learners who are studying a second or third language and have not yet mastered the full language system make errors (Brown, 2007). Because of different linguistic system, non-native English learners are therefore more likely to make mistakes because they are inexperienced with English grammar. Therefore, even though their writing is incorrect, the students still think it is. According to Dulay et al. (2011), there are four different sorts of errors: omission, misformation, addition, and misordering. Mistake, as contrast to error, involves language ability. Although the students are aware of the correct procedures, they are unable to put them into practice. When learners are not proficient in the target language, mistakes occur. Mistakes, however, do not signify incompetence. An error, which usually occurs when learning a second language, is a systemic error that cannot be self-corrected, unlike a mistake.

Writing

Writing, which tries to transmit concepts, ideas, experiences, and knowledge through notes, is one of the English language abilities. Everything, whether it be facts, data, or events, should be informed. Because the act of putting thoughts on paper converts them into words and gives them structure and coherence, Brown (2001) claims that writing is a thinking process.

For students, condensing their words and expressing their ideas on paper are the most crucial components of writing. In order to become proficient writers, they must frequently practice and work to enhance their abilities. Planning, drafting, editing, and producing the final product are the four essential steps in the writing process (Harmer, 2004).

Narrative Text

A narrative text is a style of writing that tells a story, whether it's fictional or factual, to provide the reader a richer experience. Stories, fables, myths, legends, folktales, fairytales, and other narrative texts fall under this category. These characters typically take the form of humans, plants, animals, and objects (Knapp and Watkins, 2005). Narrative writing aims to enlighten readers, entertain readers, express sentiments and recount experiences, and persuade readers. Anderson (2003) claims that the text narrative follows a conventional structure that comprises orientation, which is an introduction that includes introducing the main character, the setting, and the time the story takes place. Complication of the narrative, namely the appearance of issues. The final, which is Resolution

Simple Past Tense

Simple past tense, according to Fithriani (2020), refers to an action that took place in the past and is no longer occurring. When an action was completed in the past or was in progress in the past, the simple past tense was used to describe it. Writing narrative text requires careful attention to the past tense. In English, the verb tense might be challenging. This is how the verb is changed to a past communicative action. First, they frequently use multiple past tense markers, such as: Did you play football? "Did you play football?" should be used instead. After that, they use a temporal adverb like "Yesterday" to make an incorrect tense. As in: He arrived yesterday. He came yesterday should be used instead.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This investigation employed a descriptive quantitative approach to research. The study aimed to gather data about phenomena and depict the current state in the field. The study focused on a single variable. The research population comprised all eleventh-grade students of SMAN 1 Pasemah Air Keruh, Empat Lawang District, South Sumatra, consisting of 202 students distributed in six classes. Purposive sampling technique (Creswell et., 2012) is used to select the sample of 32 students based on the criterion of lower scores in daily writing tests as provided by their teacher. To obtain data, the researcher administered a writing test to identify students' writing errors using the generic framework of a narrative text. The error analysis procedures were used to identify the types of errors made by students in their narrative writing, including identification of errors, describing errors, explaining errors, and evaluating errors. The surface strategy taxonomy was utilized to categorize the types of errors, which included omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. The following formula was used to calculate the percentage of errors:

$$P = F \times 100\% / N$$

Where:

P = Percentage

F = Frequency of subcategory error

N = Total of all categories of errors

This percentage is required to elicit quantitative information about each type of errors made by the learners.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

FINDING

Based on the data collected from the result of students' composition, inaccuracies committed by the students when utilizing the simple past tense in composing narrative texts were found. A total of 125 errors were detected in the narrative writing of the students. Dulay's and Burt (1982) surface strategy taxonomy was employed to classify these inaccuracies which were categorized into omission, misformation, addition, and misordering. The omission group had 53 errors, while the misformation group had 57 errors.

Moreover, the addition group had 13 errors, and the misordering group had 2 errors. The table below presents the percentage of the errors.

Table 1
Percentage of Errors in Students Narrative Text

N	Types of errors	Number of errors	Percentage
1	Omission	53	42,4 %
2	Misformation	57	45,6 %
3	Addition	13	10,4 %
4	Misordering	2	1,6 %
Total		125	100 %

Based on the table presented above, it was discovered that in constructing a simple past tense in narrative text writing, the students committed a total of 125 errors. Among these errors, omission errors accounted for 53 (42.4%) of them, misformation errors accounted for 57 (45.6%) of them, addition errors accounted for 13 (10.4%) of them, and misordering errors accounted for 2 (1.6%) of them. The highest percentage of errors was attributed to misformation errors, while the lowest percentage was attributed to misordering errors. Upon further analysis of the errors categorized under omission, it was found that 47 of the 53 errors were related to the suffixes *-d* and *-ed*. The students made the most mistakes in the sentence “He push her mom” instead of “He pushed her mom”. Additionally, 6 errors were classified as omission errors due to the lack of auxiliary verbs such as “was, were, and did”. An example of this error can be seen in the sentence “But there a promise”, instead of “But there was a promise”. In terms of misformation errors, there was one category of error that occurred in this study, which was the alternating form. The students made mistakes in changing verbs, as they still used the first form of the verb or present tense, even though they were instructed to use the simple past tense. For instances, “He sell to local market” was used instead of “He sold to local market”. The addition errors, on the other hand, were all categorized as double marking errors, where the students added auxiliary verbs (was, were, or did) and other verbs in the sentences. An example of this error can be seen in the sentence “He is lived alone” instead of “He lived alone”. Lastly, the misordering errors were related to the placement of verbs in the sentences. All of the errors were due to the misordering of the verb, such as “One day was he fishing in the river” instead of “One day he was fishing in the river” and “was Toba angry and accidentally” instead of “Toba was angry and accidentally”.

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrated that the students made errors based on Dulay's surface strategy taxonomy, which identified four categories of errors: omission (53 or 42.4%), misformation (57 or 45.6%), addition (13 or 10.4%), and misordering (2 or 1.6%). The researcher observed that misformation was the most common type of error made by the students under the investigation. Misformation errors occurred when the wrong form of a structure was used, meaning that students used the wrong grammatical form of the language. Misformation accounted for 57 (45.6%) of the errors in this study and included only one category: alternating forms. These findings were similar to those of Dewi (Dewi, 2019), who found that the highest frequency of errors was misformation (139 or 64.65%). Meanwhile, Janah (2015) attributed this to students' confusion in using the simple past tense and constructing verbs. However, Fithriani's (2020) study found that the highest errors were irregular forms or omissions. In misformation, there were three types of errors, but this study only identified alternating forms. Students were still confused about determining alternative forms of words used in writing sentences, often making errors in constructing verbs. For examples, "Malin become a stone" instead of "Malin became a stone," "He keep harmony with his mother" instead of "He kept harmony with his mother," and "He come to Cinderella house" instead of "He came to Cinderella house," and "They are very poor" instead of "They were very poor." It suggested that the students were still struggling to write correct grammar, particularly in the simple past tense.

The second highest error was omission, with a percentage of 53 (42.4%). This error occurred when students forgot to include articles in their sentences or neglected to use the suffixes *-d/ed*, as well as auxiliary verbs (was, were, did), for instances, "He ask her to Marry" instead of "He asked her to Marry" and "But there a promise" instead of "But there was a promise." This mistake was similar to Haryadi's (2018) research, but differed from Hidayat's (2020) study, which found that capitalization errors were the second most common, accounting for 21% of mistakes. The third most frequent error was addition, with a percentage of 13 (10.4%). This mistake occurred when students added unnecessary words to their sentences, such as "She is changed object" instead of "She changed object." The least common mistake was misordering, with a percentage of 2 (1.6%). This indicates that students have a good grasp of word order. This error was also similar to Haryadi's (2018) research, but differed from Putri's (2014) study on narrative writing, which found that addition errors were the least common, accounting for only 4.85% of mistakes.

Misformation and omission were two types of error mostly made the students compared to other two types in this present study and the previous studies. It suggested that the learners lack grammatical knowledge in terms of

giving correct forms of past verb in narrating their past experiences, They also lack in adding correct inflectional items for the past forms. The source of these inaccuracies can be those of different system of forming English verbs in the past time in which English change the forms of the verbs, meanwhile Bahasa Indonesia does have such system of alternating verbs when they are used to express the past activities.

CONCLUSION

This present study has identified that the students demonstrated their errors in understanding and using the simple past tense in English in all types of errors with different percentages. Four variations of simple past tense errors when composing narrative texts encompassed misarrangement, exclusion, distortion, and inclusion. Misarranging, excluding, and including grammatical features for the past forms seems to be prominent most students created. Limited knowledge of grammatical rules of simple past construction and confusion might be the potensial causes of the errors. Different grammatical rules between English and Bahasa Indonesia, especially those of simple past tense forms, could be particular factors making students confused to create correct structure of the tense.

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