

GRAMMATICAL ERROR ANALYSIS IN NARRATIVE TEXTS WRITTEN BY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study attempted to identify and analyze the grammatical errors committed by eleventh-grade students at SMA Al-Irsyad Tegal in their English narrative text writing, applying Surface Strategy Taxonomy. This research used a descriptive qualitative method. The participants of this research were 30 students in the eleventh grade. The data were narrative texts written by the eleventh-grade students. The results of analysis revealed that 14 students produced three of the four main types of errors—omission, addition, and misformation—while no instances of misordering errors were observed. The most prevalent error type identified was misformation, while misordering was the least frequent. Overall, the findings indicate that although students were generally able to arrange words into proper sentence structures, their main difficulty lay in selecting the correct word forms to fit the grammatical context. This was particularly evident in their application of verb tenses, where many students failed to use the appropriate past tense forms required for narrative writing.

Keywords: Error Analysis, Grammatical Error, Narrative Text, Surface Strategy.

1 INTRODUCTION

Writing in English is a productive language skill [8]. It is considered an active skill because it involves complex cognitive processes in generating and organizing ideas into coherent words, phrases, and paragraphs. As one of the core competencies in language learning, writing should receive significant emphasis in classroom instruction. In senior high school, students are frequently exposed to a variety of texts that serve as learning materials, which they must comprehend and respond to through written tasks assigned by teachers. One of the text types is narrative. According to [13], narrative text is a particular type of writing in English that requires the skill of writing such text. Narrative writing tells unreal or imaginary events, typically those that happened within the past or have already happened. In learning English writing, particularly in narrative texts, grammar plays an essential role in constructing correct sentences and is generally defined as the set of rules governing language use. According to the English teacher at SMA Al-Irsyad Tegal, students often make errors in grammar. When eleventh-grade students were assigned to write narrative texts in English, various grammatical errors were identified. Therefore, it is important to analyze the types of grammatical errors found in students' writing tasks.

A number of studies have been conducted to investigate grammatical errors in the writing of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, providing valuable insights into common patterns and underlying causes of errors. Collectively, these studies have contributed to the understanding of how learners' linguistic backgrounds and instructional contexts shape grammatical performance. [11], for example, analyzed the grammatical errors in university students' writing assignments in Basic Writing and Essay Writing courses. Her qualitative document analysis revealed that the most frequent error category was incorrect word form (25.2% of the 258 errors), suggesting that morphological accuracy remains a persistent challenge even among advanced learners. Focusing on a different context, [3] explored grammatical errors in the narrative writing of eleventh-grade male students in Saudi Arabia. Using the Surface Strategy Taxonomy, this study found that misformation was the most dominant error (45.45%), indicating students' struggles with the correct formation of words and grammatical structures.

Similarly, [10] investigated grammatical errors in English texts produced by Indonesian vocational high school students and identified eleven error categories, including incorrect verb usage, tense errors, and article misuse. Their findings reflect the wide range of grammatical difficulties faced by learners with limited exposure to authentic English input. In a more focused investigation, [14] analyzed grammatical errors in comparison and contrast paragraphs and determined that both interlingual (54.84%) and intralingual (45.16%) transfers were major sources of errors. This highlights that learners' native language interference and incomplete acquisition of target language rules jointly influence their writing accuracy.

More recent studies have reinforced these observations in different cultural contexts. [1] examined Iraqi EFL students' narrative writing and found misformation as the most frequent error type, followed by omission, particularly in subject-verb agreement and article usage. Likewise, [2] analyzed essays from Saudi preparatory students and reported that misformation accounted for 35.46% of 1,269 errors, confirming that incorrect word formation is a pervasive issue across proficiency levels. [9] also found misformation to be the most common error (131 of 308 instances) in narrative texts written by tenth-grade Indonesian students, attributing it to both interlingual and intralingual transfer as well as insufficient grammatical knowledge.

Taken together, these studies reveal several consistent patterns. Methodologically, many researchers have adopted the Surface Strategy Taxonomy (e.g., [3], [1], [2], [9], underscoring its reliability in categorizing grammatical errors. Empirically, the predominance of misformation errors across diverse EFL contexts suggests a universal challenge in morphological and syntactic accuracy. However, despite these commonalities, the reviewed studies differ in focus and scope. Some examined general writing tasks [11], [10], while others targeted specific genres such as comparison–contrast or narrative writing [14], [1]. Yet, few have considered how genre-specific features may shape grammatical accuracy among learners of similar educational levels.

In light of these gaps, the present study distinguishes itself by investigating grammatical errors specifically in narrative texts written by eleventh-grade students at SMA Al-Irsyad Tegal. This context has not been previously examined, and focusing on a single genre enables a more nuanced understanding of the grammatical challenges inherent to narrative writing. By addressing this unexplored population and genre, the study seeks to extend existing knowledge and provide pedagogically relevant insights into local learners' grammatical development.

The Error Analysis

Errors in writing that occur indicate that students have not mastered the rules of the foreign language that they are learning. [5] explains that errors analysis is overemphasis on production data. Error analysis is caused by second and foreign language learners. Error analysis can be conducted to (a) assess an individual's competency in a language, (b) investigate an individual's language learning process, and (c) get findings on frequent challenges in language learning, providing as a resource for instructional purposes or the development of teaching materials. This definition emphasizes the roles of mistake analysis.

Surface Strategy Taxonomy

According to [7], the surface strategy taxonomy is a descriptive classification commonly employed for identifying language errors, particularly grammatical and writing errors. This type of error has four subtypes: omission, addition, misinformation, and misordering.

Omission

Omission is ungrammatical or a word be lost. Omission indicates the absence of an element that should be present in a grammatically correct statement. They indicated that any word may be omitted, however certain categories of morphemes are more prone to omission than others. For example: *She my English private teacher*. The correct sentence is: *She **was** my English private teacher*.

Addition

Addition is the opposite of omission. This is defined by the existence of a part that should not be present in a properly constructed utterance. It indicates that it will not be crucial to the sentence's structure. For example: *The hero could **to** defeat the giant*. The correct sentence is: *The hero **could defeat** the giant*.

Misinformation

Misinformation errors are related to the utilization of an improper word structure. In omission errors, the item is completely missing, but in misinformation errors, the learner presents an incorrect item. For example: *The king gave the apple to **she***. The correct sentence is: *The king gave the apple to **her***.

Misordering

Misordering errors are characterized by the incorrect placement of a word or group of words in an utterance. The students often do misaddress on the group of words. Misordering error happens because of misplace of word in sentence. For example: *I didn't know why **was he** angry*. The correct sentence is: *I didn't know why **he was** angry*.

Therefore, this study utilized the Surface Strategy Taxonomy by [7] as the primary analytical framework

to identify, classify, and describe the specific types of grammatical errors found in the narrative texts written by the students.

2 METHODOLOGY

In conducting this study, the researchers applied a qualitative research design to analyze the grammatical errors found in students' English narrative writing. Qualitative research, as defined by [6], is a method for exploring and understanding meanings derived from learners' experiences, including the difficulties they encounter in language learning. The purpose of this study was to identify and describe the specific types of grammatical errors made by students when writing narrative texts in English. By focusing on students' writing, the study provides insights into the challenges they face in applying grammatical rules, which are essential for constructing accurate and meaningful sentences. The participants of this study were 30 students from class XI-1 at SMA Al-Irsyad Tegal, consisting of 16 females and 14 males. The data consisted of students' narrative compositions, which were collected as part of their English writing task and served as the primary data source. To analyze the students' work, the researchers employed document analysis, a method described by [4] as the systematic review and interpretation of written artifacts such as assignments, journals, or reports. Permission to access the students' compositions was obtained from their English teacher, ensuring the ethical collection and use of classroom-based data.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the researchers present the grammatical errors found in the English narrative texts written by eleventh-grade students of SMA Al-Irsyad Tegal. The analysis involved 30 students from class XI-1. Upon analysis of the collected tasks, it was identified that 14 of these students produced narrative texts containing one or more grammatical errors. These errors were then classified according to the Surface Strategy Taxonomy by [7].

3.1.1 The Categories of Grammatical Errors Committed by Students

Based on the students' writing task sheets, the identified grammatical errors were categorized into four types according to [7]: omission (O), addition (A), misformation (MF), and misordering (MO). The distribution of these error types in students' narrative texts is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The Prevalence of Grammatical Errors in Students' Narrative Texts

No.	Student Initials	O	A	MF	MO
1.	ACB	-	1	3	-
2.	AR	2	-	2	-
3.	CRD	2	-	1	-
4.	DAA	-	-	1	-
5.	DN	1	-	2	-
6.	FAT	-	-	1	-
7.	HAM	2	1	7	-
8.	KNI	1	-	3	-
9.	MAA	2	-	6	-
10.	NAN	2	-	2	-
11.	NKI	1	-	2	-
12.	RMA	1	-	1	-
13.	RNHT	2	-	2	-
14.	Z	1	1	6	-
TOTAL		17	3	40	0
TOTAL ERRORS			60		

Table 1 shows four categories of students' errors: there are 17 omissions, 3 additions, and 40 misformations, with no instances of misordering errors were found in the data collected from the students' writing task.

The Highest Instance: Misformation

The highest number of grammatical errors found in the students' narrative texts falls under the category of misformation, with a total of 40 instances, accounting for 66.66% of all errors. A deeper qualitative

analysis of these errors reveals that the students' difficulties were concentrated in several key areas. A significant portion of these errors involved the incorrect formation of verb tenses. Students frequently applied the regular past tense rule (-ed) to irregular verbs, resulting in errors such as 'choosed' instead of 'chose' and 'flyed' instead of 'flew'. Errors in passive voice construction, like 'is know' for 'is known', were also identified. Another prevalent issue was spelling errors, which indicate a lack of mastery over English orthography. Examples from the data include 'verry' for 'very', 'gaint' for 'giant', and 'empety' for 'empty'. Furthermore, students demonstrated issues with the correct forms of nouns and pronouns, such as incorrect pluralization ('childs' for 'children') and the use of an incorrect pronoun case ('loved she' instead of 'loved her'). Finally, errors in capitalization for proper nouns, such as 'sunan kalijaga', also contributed to the high frequency of misformation.

The Lowest Instance: Misordering

In stark contrast, the lowest instance of error was found in the misordering category, for which zero instances (0%) were identified. This finding is significant as it indicates that the students have a solid grasp of the fundamental Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) word order of English. Throughout the 30 narrative texts that were analyzed, there were no errors related to the incorrect arrangement of words in their sentences. This competence may be attributed to positive transfer from the students' first language, Bahasa Indonesia, which also predominantly uses an SVO structure. This suggests that the students' challenges are not syntactic at the sentence-arrangement level, but are instead concentrated in the areas of morphology and orthography as detailed above.

Omission

An omission error indicates the lack of an element that should be present in a grammatically correct statement. The data indicate that the students missed one or more crucial grammatical units in their sentences. The following examples are among 17 omission errors that students made:

*My family and I prepared **our** day.*

In this sentence, the student omitted the preposition 'for' after the verb 'prepared'. This error likely resulted from direct translation from Indonesian, where the equivalent expression does not require a preposition. In English, however, the verb 'prepare' is typically followed by 'for' when referring to an activity or event. The correct sentence should be: *My family and I prepared **for** our day.*

... village is known as Salatiga.

The student missed a determiner, so the sentence is incorrect. The correct sentence is ***The** village is known as Salatiga.*

*He tried to cure the child until **the** child cured.*

The student missed a verb 'be' and it refers to Simple Past Tense (S+was/were+V3), so that the sentence was incorrect. The correct sentence is *He tried to cure the child until the child **was** cured.*

Addition

Addition error indicates the existence of a part that should not be present in a properly constructed utterance. The examples are among 3 addition errors that students made:

*Emma hesitated, but something about him **it** felt safe.*

The student did not need to add 'it' because unnecessary additional element and should be removed. The correct sentence is *Emma hesitated, but something about **him** felt safe.*

*... she was **be** invited to a writing workshop in Jakarta.*

The student did not need add 'be' because in the structure of the Past Tense passive voice, do not the word 'be' after was or were. The correct sentence is *... she **was** invited to a writing workshop in Jakarta.*

*... I found my confidence and **did** built strong friendships that I'll always remember.*

The student did not need to add 'did' because unnecessary extra word, and 'did' is not used to make a standard positive (affirmative) sentence. The correct sentence is *... I found my confidence **and** built strong friendships that I'll always remember.*

Misformation

Misformation error refers to the adoption of an incorrect form of the term structure. The examples are among 40 misformation errors that students made:

*Emma hesitated, but something **bout** him felt safe.*

The student adopted an incorrect word formed, because 'bout' is an incorrectly formed or spelled version of the word 'about'. The correct sentence is *Emma hesitated, but something **about** him felt safe.*

*The village is **know** as Salatiga.*

The student adopted an incorrect verb form, because the verb must be in past participle based on grammatical Simple Past Tense (S+was/were+past participle), and 'know' (know-knew-known). The correct sentence is *The village is **known** as Salatiga.*

*The widow, **not wanting** to lose her daughter.*

In this sentence, the student used an incorrect verb form, resulting in a sentence fragment. The construction lacks a main verb, as the student used a participial phrase instead of forming a complete verb phrase to serve as the predicate. The correct sentence should be: *The widow **did not want** to lose her daughter.*

Misordering

After a thorough analysis of all students' writing narrative task, no instances of misordering errors were found. This indicates that, within this data set, the students did not make errors related to the incorrect arrangement of words in their sentences.

3.1.2 The Highest and Lowest Instances of Grammatical Errors

Following the classification of grammatical problems, the analysis focused on identifying both the highest and lowest occurrences of grammatical errors found in the students' narrative texts. The percentage of each error type was calculated using the following formula proposed by [12]:

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

Remarks:

P = The error percentage

F = The error frequency

N = Total of error

Omission

There were 17 omission errors identified in students' writing tasks from a total of 60 errors. The percentage of omission errors committed by students was 28.33%.

Addition

Three (3) addition errors were found in students' writing task from a total of 60 errors. The percentage of addition errors committed by students was 16,66%.

Misformation

There were 40 misformation errors found in students' writing task from a total of 60 errors. The percentage of misformation errors committed by students was 66,66%.

The percentage of errors can be seen in Figure 1.

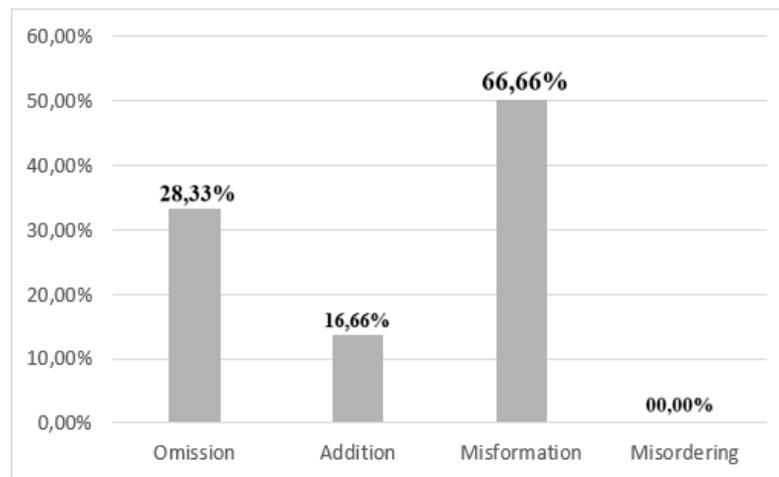


Figure 1. The Percentage of Errors Based on Surface Strategy Taxonomy

By seeing the Figure 1 about the percentages of each type of errors above, it can be inferred that the most common error type was misformation (66,66%) and the least one was misordering (00,00%).

Based on the results of analysis, the most significant finding of this study is the overwhelming dominance of misformation errors, which constituted a substantial 66.66% of all identified issues. This high percentage strongly indicates that the students' primary challenge is not a fundamental lack of grammatical concepts but rather a failure to produce the correct forms of English words and structures. This suggests that while students often understand that a particular grammatical slot needs to be filled (e.g., that a verb needs to be in the past tense), they have not yet mastered the specific morphological rules required to produce the correct form. This was evident across a wide range of categories, including frequent spelling errors (e.g., 'cheerfull' instead of 'cheerful'), the incorrect formation of past tense verbs (e.g., 'choosed' instead of 'chose'), improper noun and pronoun selection (e.g., 'who' for an animal), and incorrect capitalization of proper nouns. Essentially, the students' difficulties are heavily concentrated at the morphological level, revealing a significant struggle with the conventions of English word formation. The high incidence of misformation, particularly with irregular verbs, is a clear example of overgeneralization, a common learning strategy where learners apply a known rule—in this case, the regular past tense marker '-ed'—to all situations, including exceptions [5].

The second most prevalent category was omission at 28.33%, which points to a different but equally significant set of challenges. Unlike misformation, where an incorrect form is supplied, omission signifies the complete absence of a required grammatical element. The analysis revealed that the most frequently omitted items were the verb 'be' (e.g., "the boy cheerful"), articles ('a/an/the') before singular countable nouns (e.g., "he met puppy"), and the past tense morpheme '-ed' on regular verbs. This pattern strongly suggests the influence of first language (L1) interference. Bahasa Indonesia, the students' native language, has structural rules that differ significantly from English in these areas. For instance, Bahasa Indonesia does not utilize a copula verb like 'be' to link a subject with an adjective or noun phrase ("Anak itu ceria"). Similarly, it does not have a comparable article system. This structural disparity likely leads students to perceive these English grammatical markers as redundant and, consequently, omit them from their writing. This finding aligns with numerous previous studies in the Indonesian context [9] that showed the result only English grammar and vocabularies were the most grammatical error made by students.

In stark contrast to the high frequency of misformation and omission, the complete absence of misordering errors (0%) is a noteworthy and telling result. This finding suggests that the students have a solid and stable grasp of the fundamental Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) word order of English. This competence can likely be attributed to positive L1 transfer, as the basic sentence structure of Bahasa Indonesia is also predominantly SVO. The learners do not struggle with the general architecture of an English sentence; they know where to place the subject, the verb, and the object. This result is significant because it allows for a more precise diagnosis of the students' needs. It reinforces the conclusion that their grammatical weaknesses are not primarily syntactic in nature (related to sentence arrangement) but are instead concentrated at the word and phrase level—specifically, with morphology (word forms) and the use of specific function words (articles, prepositions, auxiliaries).

Taken together, the overall error profile—overwhelmingly dominated by misformation, followed by omission, with a notable absence of misordering—paints a clear and specific picture of the eleventh-grade students' developing grammatical competence. Their interlanguage appears to be at a stage where the foundational syntactic framework is in place, but mastery over the intricate morphological rules and grammatical conventions of English is still lacking. The findings indicate that while students generally know that a word is needed in a particular slot, they struggle with which form of the word to use (misformation) and sometimes omit functional words that have no direct or salient equivalent in their L1 (omission). These results have direct pedagogical implications, suggesting that instructional focus should be strategically shifted from general sentence pattern drills to more targeted, contrastive practice on English morphology and the function of grammatical items that differ from the students' native language.

4 CONCLUSIONS

This study was conducted to identify, classify, and determine the most frequent types of grammatical errors in narrative texts written by the eleventh-grade students of SMA Al-Irsyad Tegal. The analysis, based on the Surface Strategy Taxonomy framework, revealed that students committed three of the four primary error types: omission, addition, and misformation, with a significant absence of misordering errors. The findings showed a clear hierarchy of error frequency, with misformation being the most dominant error type (66.66%), followed by omission (28.33%). This error profile indicates that the students' primary difficulties are not with the overall arrangement of words in a sentence but are instead concentrated at the word and phrase level, a pattern often attributed to first-language interference and incomplete mastery of English morphology. These findings have direct pedagogical implications for English teachers. The dominance of misformation suggests that instructional focus should be strategically shifted from general sentence pattern drills to more targeted, contrastive practice on word-level grammar, particularly verb tenses and irregular forms, which were significant sources of error. Furthermore, teachers should raise students' awareness of structural differences between English and Bahasa Indonesia to mitigate omission errors caused by L1 interference. For future research, this study highlights the need to move beyond identification to investigate the underlying causes of these errors. It is recommended that subsequent studies employ qualitative instruments such as interviews to explore the cognitive processes and learning strategies that lead to the high prevalence of misformation, as this was a question that arose from the current study's findings. Ultimately, this study contributes to the field of EFL writing by providing a detailed, empirical snapshot of the grammatical challenges faced by Indonesian senior high school students in a specific local context. By confirming that learners possess a stable grasp of basic sentence structure but struggle significantly with word-level accuracy, this research provides a clear directive for teachers and curriculum developers to design more effective, evidence-based interventions focused on improving morphological accuracy in the English language classroom.

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