ERROR ANALYSIS OF SIMPLE PRESENT TENSE USE IN DESCRIPTIVE TEXT WRITING AT SMA SWASTA MASEHI GBKP BERASTAGI

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify, classify, and describe the types and patterns of errors in the use of the simple present tense in descriptive texts written by tenth-grade students at SMA Swasta Masehi GBKP Berastagi, along with the underlying causes. A qualitative descriptive design was employed. Thirty students participated by writing descriptive paragraphs about a person and completing a questionnaire. Error analysis based on James and Tono's taxonomy revealed that omission errors, particularly the absence of the "-s/-es" suffix for third-person singular subjects and the linking verb "to be," were the most frequent. Misinformation errors involving incorrect verb forms and confusion between verbs and adjectives were also prevalent. Addition and misordering errors occurred less frequently. Questionnaire responses indicated that first language interference, difficulty distinguishing parts of speech, and limited writing practice contributed significantly to these errors. The findings suggest that pedagogical interventions should address contrastive analysis between Indonesian and English grammar and strengthen students' foundational understanding of verb identification.

Keywords: error analysis, simple present tense, descriptive text, EFL writing

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi, mengklasifikasikan, dan mendeskripsikan jenis serta pola kesalahan dalam penggunaan simple present tense pada teks deskriptif yang ditulis oleh siswa kelas X di SMA Swasta Masehi GBKP Berastagi, beserta faktor-faktor penyebabnya. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif. Sebanyak 30 siswa berpartisipasi dengan menulis paragraf deskriptif tentang seseorang dan mengisi kuesioner. Analisis kesalahan berdasarkan taksonomi James dan Tono mengungkapkan bahwa kesalahan penghilangan (omission) merupakan yang paling sering terjadi, terutama hilangnya akhiran "-s/-es" untuk subjek orang ketiga tunggal dan kata kerja bantu to be. Kesalahan informasi yang salah (misinformation) yang melibatkan bentuk kata kerja tidak tepat dan kebingungan antara kata kerja dan kata sifat juga banyak ditemukan. Kesalahan penambahan (addition) dan kesalahan susunan (misordering) lebih jarang terjadi. Respons kuesioner mengindikasikan bahwa interferensi bahasa ibu, kesulitan membedakan kelas kata, dan kurangnya latihan menulis berkontribusi secara signifikan terhadap kesalahan-kesalahan tersebut.

Temuan ini menyarankan bahwa intervensi pedagogis perlu difokuskan pada analisis kontrastif antara tata bahasa Indonesia dan Inggris serta penguatan pemahaman dasar siswa tentang identifikasi kata kerja.

Kata Kunci: analisis kesalahan, simple present tense, teks deskriptif,menulis EFL

A. Introduction

English occupies a strategic position as an international language used in global communication, education, and technology. In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language from elementary through university levels. The four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—must be mastered by learners. Among these four skills, writing is often considered the most complex because writers are required not only to master vocabulary but also grammar and correct sentence structure (Fitria, 2020).

Classroom reality reveals that many students still experience difficulties in writing English, particularly in applying correct grammar. One linguistic aspect that frequently becomes an obstacle is the use of the simple present tense. Yet the simple present tense is a fundamental verb form used to express facts, habits, and daily activities—making it an essential foundation for writing descriptive texts that depict the permanent characteristics of objects (Zul Astri et al., 2023).

Initial observations at SMA Swasta Masehi GBKP Berastagi revealed a gap between students' declarative knowledge about simple present tense rules and their procedural ability to apply these rules when writing full paragraphs. Students knew the rule about adding "-s/-es" for third-person singular subjects, but they often forgot to apply it in their writing. Examples of errors found included "My father go to office at seven" instead of "My father goes to office at seven." This phenomenon did not occur occasionally but formed a systematic pattern.

This gap between knowing and applying forms the core phenomenon driving this research. Several critical questions emerged: What types of errors do students make? Which error patterns are most dominant? What factors—whether from their first

language, learning environment, or teaching methods—contribute to this persistent problem?

Previous studies on error analysis have been conducted extensively in the context of teaching English as a foreign language. Mei Purnama Sari, Suwandi, and Dias Andris Susanto (2023) found that tenth-grade students at SMA N 1 Godong made four types of errors in using the simple present tense in descriptive texts: omission, addition, misinformation, and misordering. Hadi Prakoso (2024) reported that omission errors were the most dominant type (42.85%) among eighth-grade students at MTs Negeri Kota Sorong. Meanwhile, Zumrotul Muniroh et al. (2024) found that misinformation errors were the most common at SMA Kharismawita, South Jakarta.

This study occupies a distinct position from previous research because it was conducted in a specific location—SMA Swasta Masehi GBKP Berastagi—with its unique sociolinguistic context and student backgrounds. Furthermore, this study does not merely identify error types but also explores contributing factors through questionnaires to provide a more holistic understanding of the problems students face.

The objectives of this study were: (1) to identify and classify the types of errors students make in using the simple present tense in descriptive writing; (2) to describe and illustrate the most common error patterns; and (3) to explain the factors causing students to make errors in using the simple present tense in descriptive writing assignments. The findings are expected to provide theoretical contributions to error analysis theory and practical benefits for teachers in designing more effective grammar teaching strategies.

B. Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach. The aim was to provide an in-depth narrative analysis of the types and patterns of errors students made, to understand the nature of these errors, and to explore the underlying causes. This approach aligns with Fitria's (2021) recommendation that qualitative descriptive methods enable researchers to systematically identify, classify, and interpret errors

to uncover not just what errors occur but also why they happen.

The research was conducted at SMA Swasta Masehi GBKP Berastagi, located in Karo Regency, North Sumatra, during the odd semester of the 2025-2026 academic year. Participants were 30 tenth-grade students selected through purposive sampling. The tenth grade was chosen because students had already studied the simple present tense and descriptive texts according to the national curriculum.

Two types of instruments were used. The primary instrument was students' descriptive writing documents—paragraphs about their best friend describing appearance and daily activities using the simple present tense. The supporting instrument was a questionnaire designed to explore students' perceptions, difficulties, and learning habits related to the simple present tense. This questionnaire combined Likert-scale items and open-ended questions to obtain both quantitative trends and qualitative depth.

Data collection proceeded through several stages. First, the researcher obtained permission from the English teacher and selected the appropriate class. Second, the researcher introduced herself and explained the research purpose to students. Third, students were given 30 minutes to write one descriptive paragraph about their best friend. Fourth, after writing, students completed the provided questionnaire. Finally, all data were collected and coded to protect student identity.

Data analysis was adapted from the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2018) model, which includes three concurrent activities: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Operationally, analysis proceeded through three steps: (1) error identification by carefully reading each text to find all errors in simple present tense usage; (2) error classification into four categories—omission, addition, misinformation, and misordering—based on James and Tono's taxonomy (as cited in Betti Widianingsih, 2018); and (3) pattern description and cause interpretation based on questionnaire data.

C.Findings and Discussion

1. Findings

1. Types of Errors

Analysis of students' descriptive texts revealed that errors in simple present tense usage fell into two main categories: omission and misinformation. Both error types appeared consistently across almost all student texts, indicating systematic patterns rather than random mistakes.

a. Omission Errors

The most frequent omission errors involved the absence of the "-s/-es" suffix for third-person singular subjects (he, she, it). This pattern appeared in nearly all texts analyzed, suggesting widespread difficulty with this fundamental rule.

Examples of errors found:

"She live in doulu kuta village." (Should be: "She lives in doulu kuta village.")

"She like karoness music." (Should be: "She likes karoness music.")

Another common type of omission was the absence of auxiliary verbs in positive constructions:

"I have a friend, his name dave." (Should be: "I have a friend, his name is dave.")

"She smart, she populer, she kind." (Should be: "She is smart, she is popular, she is kind.")

b. Misinformation Errors

Misinformation errors were characterized by the use of incorrect verb forms and confusion between different grammatical elements. These errors suggested not merely forgetting rules but actively misunderstanding grammatical structures.

Examples of errors found:

"He don't like girl." (Should be: "He doesn't like girl.")

"She have a short body." (Should be: "She has a short body.")

"She was beautiful and she is short." (Should be: "She is beautiful and she is short.")

A notable pattern within misinformation errors involved confusion between verbal and non-verbal elements, particularly the misuse of adjectives as verbs.

c. Other Error Types

Addition and misordering errors were observed but with significantly lower frequency.

Addition: "She is always gives her smile to everyone." (Unnecessary "is")

Misordering: "my best friend named Naura long hair, small body, skin white" (Should be: "my best friend is named Naura, she has long hair, a small body, and white skin")

2. Dominant Error Patterns

Analysis revealed three interconnected dominant patterns:

Pattern 1: Systematic Omission of Third-Person Singular Markers

The most consistent pattern was the failure to add "-s/-es" to verbs when subjects were he, she, or it. This was not an occasional oversight but a systematic pattern affecting multiple sentences within individual texts.

Pattern 2: Verb-Non-Verb Confusion

Students demonstrated persistent difficulty distinguishing between verbs and other sentence elements, particularly adjectives. This confusion led to sentences missing essential verbal components, creating incomplete grammatical structures.

Pattern 3: Inconsistent Rule Application

Even when students correctly used the simple present tense in some sentences, they often failed to maintain consistency throughout their texts, suggesting fragile rather than absent understanding.

3. Factors Contributing to Errors

Analysis of questionnaire responses from 30 students revealed several thematic factors:

a. Difficulty Understanding Simple Present Tense Rules

A significant majority of students expressed confusion about simple present tense rules despite previous instruction. "I know the rule about adding -s, but I don't understand when to use it," one student stated. "The rules seem complicated with many exceptions," added another.

b. Challenge Distinguishing Between Verbs and Non-Verbs

Many students specifically mentioned difficulty identifying verbs and distinguishing them from other parts of speech. "I can't tell which

words are verbs and which are not because they look similar," explained one student. "Sometimes I think a word is a verb, but it's actually an adjective," added another.

c. Persistent Forgetting of "-s/-es" Suffix

The questionnaire confirmed that students recognized this rule but struggled with application. Sixty percent of respondents admitted "always forgetting to add -s for he, she, it."

d. First Language Interference

Students acknowledged that Indonesian language structure influences their English writing. Sixty-seven percent of respondents admitted "thinking in Indonesian first, then translating." Others stated "having trouble translating it."

e. Limited Writing Practice

Most students reported minimal practice outside class assignments. Eighty percent of respondents only wrote English for school assignments, and 20% never practiced writing at home.

2. Discussion

The dominance of omission errors, particularly the missing "-s/-es" suffix, aligns with Contrastive Analysis theory. Indonesian grammar does not require verb conjugation for subject agreement, creating a significant linguistic gap for learners. This structural difference explains why students consistently omit grammatical markers they perceive as "unnecessary."

Misinformation errors, especially verb-non-verb confusion, suggest deeper cognitive challenges. Students appeared to struggle with categorical thinking about parts of speech. This difficulty may stem from differences between English and Indonesian in how sentences are constructed, particularly regarding the obligatory presence of verbs in English clauses.

The questionnaire findings provide crucial context for interpreting the error patterns. Students' reported difficulty understanding simple present tense rules despite previous instruction suggests a failure in concept internalization. This aligns with Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development—students may recognize correct forms when

presented but cannot produce them independently.

The specific challenge of distinguishing verbs from non-verbs represents a fundamental metalinguistic awareness deficit. Without clear understanding of what constitutes a verb, students cannot reliably apply tense rules. This finding has significant pedagogical implications, suggesting that grammar instruction must address basic parts of speech before tense rules.

The consistent omission of third-person singular markers despite student awareness of the rule suggests this is not mere forgetfulness but systematic avoidance. This pattern may represent a learning strategy—simplifying English grammar to match Indonesian patterns. Such simplification reduces cognitive load during writing but produces grammatically incorrect output. This finding supports Interlanguage Theory, which posits that learners develop intermediate grammatical systems between their first and target languages.

The interconnected patterns of omission, misinformation, and conceptual confusion suggest that current teaching approaches may be insufficient. Traditional rule-based instruction appeared ineffective for many students, particularly regarding: internalizing grammatical markers absent in their first language, distinguishing between grammatical categories that differ cross-linguistically, and applying rules consistently during complex tasks like paragraph writing.

D. Conclusion

Based on the qualitative analysis of student texts and questionnaire responses, this study reached three main conclusions.

First, students made two primary types of errors in using the simple present tense in descriptive texts: omission and misinformation. Omission errors were the most frequent, particularly the absence of the "-s/-es" suffix for third-person singular subjects and the linking verb "to be." Misinformation errors involved using incorrect verb forms, such as 'don't' instead of 'doesn't' and 'have' instead of 'has,' as well as confusion between verbs and adjectives. Addition and misordering errors occurred less frequently.

Second, the three most common error patterns were: (1) forgetting "-s/-es"—students consistently failed to add the suffix for subjects he, she, it; (2) confusing verbs and adjectives—students struggled to identify verbs, often missing verbs or using adjectives incorrectly; and (3) inconsistent use—students sometimes used the tense correctly but made mistakes in other sentences, showing unstable understanding. These patterns were caused by first language interference and lack of writing practice.

Third, the factors causing students to make present tense errors in descriptive writing assignments included: (a) first language interference—students thought in Indonesian first then translated, and Indonesian does not use "-s/-es," so they often forgot to add it; (b) difficulty understanding grammar—students were confused about basic concepts, especially how to identify verbs and distinguish them from adjectives; (c) forgetting rules when writing—students knew the rules but forgot to apply them when writing full paragraphs because the task was more complex; and (d) lack of practice—most students only wrote English for school assignments and rarely practiced at home.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that English teachers implement contrastive analysis activities that explicitly compare English and Indonesian sentence structures, use visual aids highlighting grammar differences, and develop focused practice on third-person singular forms through games and repetition. Students are advised to practice identifying verbs in sentences regularly, create personal grammar notes, and develop the habit of keeping a simple English journal. Future researchers are encouraged to conduct action research on methods for teaching third-person singular markers and explore multisensory approaches to grammar instruction.

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