

An Error Analysis Of Using Personal Pronoun In Writing Descriptive Text

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ABSTRACT

*The use of personal pronouns in descriptive writing is essential for clarity and cohesion, yet many EFL learners struggle with correct application due to grammatical differences between their first language and English. This study aimed to analyze the types of personal pronoun errors found in descriptive texts written by eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Berastagi and to describe the patterns of these errors. A qualitative content analysis design was employed. The data were collected from 30 descriptive texts written by students of class VIII-3 on the topics "My Best Friend" or "My Pet." Errors were identified and classified using Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's Surface Strategy Taxonomy. The analysis revealed 55 personal pronoun errors across four types: omission (14 errors, 25.4%), addition (7 errors, 12.7%), misordering (1 error, 1.8%), and misformation (33 errors, 60%). Misformation was the most dominant error type, indicating persistent difficulties with case confusion (subject/object/possessive) and gender mismatches. These findings suggest that L1 transfer from Indonesian, where the pronoun *dia* covers all third-person functions without case or gender marking, significantly contributes to students' errors. This study provides practical insights for EFL teachers to develop targeted instructional strategies for teaching personal pronouns in descriptive writing contexts.*

Keywords: error analysis, personal pronoun, descriptive text, surface strategy taxonomy

ABSTRAK

Penggunaan kata ganti orang dalam tulisan deskriptif sangat penting untuk kejelasan dan koherensi, namun banyak pelajar bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL) mengalami kesulitan dalam menerapkannya dengan benar karena perbedaan tata bahasa antara bahasa ibu mereka dan bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis jenis-jenis kesalahan penggunaan kata ganti orang yang ditemukan dalam teks deskriptif yang ditulis oleh siswa kelas VIII di SMP Negeri 1 Berastagi serta mendeskripsikan pola-pola kesalahan tersebut. Desain analisis isi kualitatif digunakan dalam penelitian ini. Data dikumpulkan dari 30 teks deskriptif yang ditulis oleh siswa kelas VIII-3 dengan topik "Sahabat Terbaikku" atau "Hewan Peliharaan Saya." Kesalahan diidentifikasi dan diklasifikasikan menggunakan Taksonomi Strategi Permukaan (Surface Strategy Taxonomy) karya Dulay, Burt, dan Krashen. Analisis menunjukkan adanya 55 kesalahan kata ganti orang yang terbagi ke dalam empat jenis: penghilangan (14 kesalahan, 25,4%), penambahan (7 kesalahan, 12,7%), urutan yang salah (1 kesalahan, 1,8%), dan bentuk yang salah (33 kesalahan, 60%). Kesalahan pembentukan merupakan jenis kesalahan yang paling dominan, yang mengindikasikan adanya kesulitan yang terus-menerus terkait kebingungan kasus (subjek/objek/posesif) dan ketidaksesuaian jenis kelamin. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa transfer bahasa pertama (L1) dari bahasa Indonesia, di mana kata ganti "dia" mencakup semua fungsi orang ketiga tanpa penanda kasus atau jenis kelamin, berkontribusi secara signifikan terhadap kesalahan yang dilakukan siswa. Penelitian ini memberikan wawasan praktis bagi guru bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL) untuk mengembangkan strategi pengajaran yang terarah dalam mengajarkan kata ganti orang dalam konteks penulisan deskriptif.

Kata kunci: analisis kesalahan, kata ganti orang, teks deskriptif, taksonomi strategi permukaan

A. INTRODUCTION

Writing in English as a foreign language presents considerable challenges for learners, particularly at the middle school level. Among the four language skills, writing is frequently regarded as the most demanding to master, as it requires not only vocabulary knowledge and idea generation but also a firm command of grammatical structures to produce coherent, accurate texts (Pohan, 2018). The ability to write effectively serves as a crucial marker of language proficiency, enabling students to communicate ideas, express opinions, and transfer knowledge in written form. However, the path to writing competence is fraught with difficulties, especially for learners whose first language operates under vastly different grammatical rules.

One persistent area of difficulty involves the correct deployment of personal pronouns in descriptive writing. Pronouns function as substitutes for nouns, preventing repetitive language and maintaining textual flow (Kaufman,

2021). Yet despite their apparent simplicity, personal pronouns introduce considerable complexity for Indonesian learners of English. The Indonesian language employs the single pronoun "dia" for all third-person references, regardless of gender or grammatical case. English, by contrast, requires speakers and writers to distinguish among subjective, objective, and possessive forms—he, him, his; she, her, hers; they, them, their—while simultaneously attending to gender agreement. This structural disparity frequently results in systematic errors that compromise both grammatical accuracy and textual clarity (Pratiwi et al., 2019).

Previous studies have documented the pervasiveness of pronoun errors in various educational contexts. Holandiah et al. (2018) investigated personal pronoun errors among eighth graders at SMP Nurul Iman Palembang, discovering 128 error items across student writing, with misformation dominating at 72.65%. Pratiwi et al. (2019) examined eleventh-grade students' complaint letters at SMK Negeri 1

Cimahi, finding misinformation errors comprising 68% of total pronoun mistakes. These findings suggest that Indonesian students struggle consistently with selecting appropriate pronoun forms, a difficulty rooted in cross-linguistic differences.

At SMP Negeri 1 Berastagi, preliminary observations and discussions with English teachers revealed that eighth-grade students experience substantial difficulties with personal pronouns in descriptive writing tasks. Many students appeared confused when choosing between subject pronouns (he, she, they) and object pronouns (him, her, them), and frequently mixed up gender-specific forms such as his and her. This confusion not only leads to grammatical inaccuracies but also undermines the coherence and readability of their descriptive texts. Without targeted instructional intervention, such persistent errors risk hindering students' ability to express ideas clearly and limiting their overall writing proficiency development.

The present study addresses this gap by conducting a systematic

analysis of personal pronoun errors in descriptive texts written by eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Berastagi. Specifically, the research seeks to answer two questions: (1) What types of personal pronoun errors appear in the descriptive texts produced by these students? (2) How do these errors manifest, and what patterns can be identified in their occurrence? By documenting the nature and distribution of pronoun errors, this investigation aims to provide empirical evidence that can inform more effective teaching strategies and ultimately improve students' writing outcomes in English.

B. METHOD

Research Design

This qualitative study employed content analysis as its primary methodological approach. Qualitative research, as characterized by Ghanad (2023), focuses on understanding the quality of data, the explanations for actions, and how individuals perceive their experiences. Content analysis was selected because it enables systematic

examination of textual materials to identify patterns and draw meaningful interpretations (Jurna, 2018).

Participants and Setting

The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Berastagi during the odd semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The population consisted of all eighth-grade students across eight classes (VIII-1 through VIII-8). A purposive sampling technique was employed to select class VIII-3, comprising 30 students, based on the English teacher's recommendation. This class was chosen because students had received prior instruction in descriptive text writing and represented a range of English proficiency levels (low, medium, and high).

Instruments and Data Collection

Data were collected through a guided writing task, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Students were given 40-45 minutes to compose a descriptive text of at least two paragraphs on the topic "My Best Friend" or "My Pet." Instructions encouraged the

use of personal pronouns such as he, she, his, her, and they. Additionally, five students were selected for in-depth interviews based on error patterns identified in their written work. Classroom observations and teaching materials were also reviewed to contextualize the findings.

Data Analysis

The analysis followed the framework proposed by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982), which categorizes errors into four types: omission, addition, misinformation, and misordering. Student texts were transcribed and examined line by line to identify pronoun errors, which were then classified according to the surface strategy taxonomy. Error frequency was calculated using Heru Saputra's (2022) percentage formula: $P = (F/N) \times 100$, where P represents the error percentage, F the frequency of a particular error type, and N the total number of errors.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Analysis of the 30 descriptive texts revealed 55 instances of personal

pronoun errors distributed across the four surface strategy taxonomy categories. The distribution is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Personal Pronoun Errors in Students' Descriptive Texts

Types of Error	Frequency	Percentage
Omission	14	25.4%
Addition	7	12.7%
Misordering	1	1.8%
Misformation	33	60%
Total	55	100%

Omission errors accounted for 14 instances (25.4%). Students frequently omitted possessive pronouns preceding nouns, as in the following examples:

Incorrect: "She always wear hijab. _Favorite colour hijab is black."

Correct: "She always wears hijab. Her favorite colour hijab is black."

Incorrect: "_ favorite food is chicken."

Correct: "Her favorite food is chicken."

Incorrect: "I have the best friend _ is name is putra."

Correct: "I have a best friend. His name is Putra."

These omissions indicate that students recognized the need to refer to the subject but failed to supply the

appropriate possessive pronoun, likely because Indonesian does not require such marking in equivalent constructions. The error pattern suggests incomplete internalization of possessive pronoun forms, particularly her and his, which students appeared to treat as optional rather than obligatory.

Addition errors appeared 7 times (12.7%), characterized by unnecessary or redundant pronoun elements.

Incorrect: "Marilla likes singing and marilla Cooking."

Correct: "Marilla likes singing and cooking."

Incorrect: "My cat had my favorite food."

Correct: "My cat had favorite food."

Incorrect: "Because it we find his at night at grandfather's home."

Correct: "Because we find it at grandfather's home at night."

In the first example, the student unnecessarily repeated the proper noun "Marilla" rather than using a pronoun, while in the second, the possessive pronoun "my" was applied to an object that did not require possession marking. The third example contains multiple additions that obscure the intended meaning,

suggesting confusion about pronoun placement and function. These errors likely stem from students' uncertainty about when pronouns are required and when they may be omitted.

Misordering appeared only once (1.8%), suggesting that students generally understood the syntactic position of pronouns in English sentences.

Incorrect: "Hobby my friend is volly ball."

Correct: "My friend's hobby is playing volleyball."

The single misordering error involved placement of the possessive modifier after rather than before the noun it modifies, reflecting word order transfer from Indonesian, where such structures are acceptable.

Misformation was by far the most frequent error type, comprising 33 instances (60%). These errors involved using the wrong pronoun form, including case confusion and gender mismatches.

Incorrect: "I have one friend he's name is Cristian."

Correct: "I have a friend. His name is Cristian."

Incorrect: "Her name is Marilla. Marilla live in keling."

Correct: "Her name is Marilla. She lives in Keling."

Incorrect: "He is birthday in 6 january."

Correct: "His birthday is January 6th."

These examples reveal systematic confusion between subject and possessive forms—students used he's (contraction of he is) for his (possessive), and applied he where his was required. Gender confusion also appeared, with students occasionally referring to female subjects with masculine pronouns or vice versa. This pattern reflects the influence of Indonesian, where "dia" serves all third-person functions without gender or case distinctions, leading students to transfer this undifferentiated system into English.

D. Discussion

The predominance of misformation errors (60%) aligns with findings from previous research. Holandyah et al. (2018) reported that misformation constituted 72.65% of personal pronoun errors among eighth graders in Palembang, while Pratiwi et al. (2019) found similar patterns in complaint letter writing. The consistency of these findings across contexts suggests that misformation

represents a core challenge for Indonesian EFL learners that requires targeted pedagogical attention.

The high frequency of omission errors (25.4%) further confirms that students struggle not only with selecting the correct form but also with recognizing when pronoun marking is obligatory. This pattern suggests that instruction may need to emphasize the functional necessity of possessive pronouns in English, particularly in descriptive writing where multiple references to subjects occur.

The causes of these errors can be understood through the lens of interlingual and intralingual transfer. Interlingual errors arise from interference from students' first language, Indonesian. Because Indonesian lacks grammatical gender and uses "dia" uniformly for he, she, him, and her, learners have difficulty internalizing English distinctions. This is particularly evident in the misformation of he's/his and she/her. Intralingual errors result from incomplete learning of the target language itself, such as overgeneralization of pronoun rules or incomplete application of

grammatical constraints (Heru Saputra, 2022).

The findings have several implications for instructional practice. First, explicit contrastive instruction that highlights differences between Indonesian and English pronoun systems may help students develop metalinguistic awareness. Second, contextualized practice—embedding pronoun exercises within descriptive writing tasks rather than presenting them in isolation—could enhance transfer of learning. Third, error awareness activities using anonymized samples of student work could normalize mistakes and provide safe opportunities for correction.

In conclusion, this study confirms that eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Berastagi experience systematic difficulty with personal pronouns in descriptive writing, with misformation errors predominating. These difficulties are largely attributable to differences between Indonesian and English pronoun systems. Addressing these challenges requires explicit instruction, meaningful practice, and increased learner awareness of pronoun functions and forms.

D. Conclusion

This investigation set out to identify and describe personal pronoun errors in descriptive texts written by eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 1 Berastagi. The analysis revealed that students produced 55 pronoun errors distributed across four types: omission (25.4%), addition (12.7%), misordering (1.8%), and misformation (60%). Misformation emerged as the most common error type, indicating that students struggle primarily with selecting appropriate pronoun forms—confusing subject and object cases or mismatching gender—rather than with omitting or misplacing pronouns. These patterns reflect the influence of students' first language, where the pronoun "dia" serves all third-person functions without case or gender distinctions, leading to transfer errors in English.

The findings suggest several practical recommendations. For teachers, explicit contrastive instruction that highlights differences between Indonesian and English pronoun systems is recommended, along with contextualized practice embedded in descriptive writing activities. Error awareness exercises

using anonymized student samples could normalize mistakes and foster self-correction skills. For students, regular practice with pronoun charts and peer-editing activities may enhance mastery. For future researchers, action research studies could test the effectiveness of specific instructional strategies, while broader investigations might explore pronoun errors in other text types or examine cognitive processes through think-aloud protocols.

By addressing these persistent errors through targeted instruction, educators can support students in developing greater grammatical accuracy and, consequently, more effective written communication in English. greater grammatical accuracy and, consequently, more effective written communication in English.

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