

AN ANALYSIS OF GRAMMATICAL ERRORS IN STUDENTS' DESCRIPTIVE TEXT WRITING IN SEVENTH GRADE AT SMP NEGERI 3 PEMATANGSIANTAR

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ABSTRAK

This research aimed to analyze the types and factors of grammatical errors in descriptive texts written by seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 3 Pematangsiantar. This research used a qualitative descriptive method. The data were collected from descriptive texts written by 30 students and analyzed using the Surface Strategy Taxonomy by Dulay et al. and the theory of error factors by Ellis. The findings showed that 105 grammatical errors were identified. Misformation was the most dominant error type (60%), followed by omission (33.3%) and addition (6.7%), while misordering was not found. In addition, intralingual transfer was the dominant contributing factor (67.6%), especially incomplete application of rules. These findings indicate that students' grammatical errors were mainly caused by incomplete mastery of English grammar and the influence of their first language, Bahasa Indonesia.

Keywords: *Grammatical Errors, Descriptive Text, Surface Strategy Taxonomy, Error Analysis, EFL Students.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The introduction needs to be improved by strengthening the discussion on the importance of grammar mastery in EFL writing skills, since grammatical competence plays a crucial role in helping students express ideas accurately and effectively in written communication. In addition, the theoretical discussion on descriptive text writing and grammatical competence should be expanded in order to provide a stronger conceptual foundation for the study.

Furthermore, the research gap needs to be stated more explicitly to highlight the originality and contribution of this research compared to previous studies. The use of more recent international references related to grammatical error analysis in EFL contexts is also recommended to support the theoretical framework and strengthen the academic relevance of the study.

Moreover, the significance of focusing on seventh-grade students should be elaborated further, particularly because students at this level are still in the early stage of developing English grammatical competence and writing skills.

Moreover, the use of more recent international references related to grammatical error analysis in EFL contexts is strongly recommended. The inclusion of up-to-date international studies can strengthen the theoretical framework and demonstrate that the research is relevant to current developments in English language teaching and EFL writing studies. Recent references can also provide broader perspectives regarding grammatical difficulties faced by EFL learners in different educational contexts.

Finally, the significance of focusing on seventh-grade students should be elaborated further in the introduction. Seventh-grade students are still in the early stage of developing English grammatical competence and writing ability, making them an important group for investigating grammatical errors in EFL writing. At this stage, students are beginning to learn basic grammatical structures and apply them in written communication, particularly in descriptive texts. Understanding the grammatical difficulties experienced by students at this level can help teachers provide more appropriate instructional strategies and early intervention to improve students' writing competence. Therefore, the study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the improvement of English teaching and learning, especially in junior high school contexts.

Although several studies have investigated grammatical errors in students' writing, most of them focus only on identifying the types of errors. Limited studies analyze both the types of errors and the contributing factors, especially in the context of seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 3 Pematangsiantar. Therefore, it is essential to conduct a systematic analysis of the grammatical errors made by students in writing descriptive texts. This study aims to analyze the types of grammatical errors found in students' descriptive text writing using the Surface Strategy Taxonomy proposed by Dulay et al. (1982, as cited in Rizqullah et al., 2023). In addition to identifying the types of errors, this study also aims to identify the factors contributing to those errors. To obtain the required data, this study uses students' written descriptive texts as the main source of data. The analysis of these texts is used to identify the types of grammatical errors as well as the factors contributing to their occurrence. Through this analysis, the study is expected to provide deeper insights into the grammatical difficulties faced by students and contribute to the improvement of English teaching practices, specifically at SMP Negeri 3 Pematangsiantar. Furthermore, by understanding the root causes of these errors, the researcher hopes to provide practical recommendations for English teachers at the school to develop more effective remedial strategies in teaching descriptive writing.

2. METHOD

The qualitative descriptive method is appropriate for analyzing students' grammatical errors because it allows the researcher to identify, describe, and interpret the errors found in students' descriptive texts in detail. This method is suitable for the objectives of the study, which focus on

understanding the forms of grammatical errors and the factors contributing to those errors in students' writing.

The sources of data and participant information are clearly stated in the study. The data were obtained from descriptive texts written by seventh-grade students of class VII-1 at SMP Negeri 3 Pematangsiantar. In addition, the number of participants and the criteria for selecting the participants have been explained to ensure the relevance of the data to the research objectives. Finally, ethical considerations related to students' participation should also be included in the study. The researcher should explain that permission to conduct the research was obtained from the school, the English teacher, and the participants. In addition, students' identities should remain confidential by using initials or codes instead of real names. These ethical considerations are important to ensure that the research was conducted responsibly and in accordance with academic research ethics.

Techniques of collecting data are the steps taken by the researcher to obtain the necessary data for the study. According to Creswell and Creswell (2023), data collection is the process of gathering information from various sources in order to answer the research questions. In this research, the data were collected by using a writing test as the research instrument. The procedures of data collection are as follows:

- a. The researcher arranged the research schedule and requested permission from the school principal to conduct the study.
- b. The researcher asked permission from the English teacher and informed that the research focused on analyzing students' grammatical errors in writing descriptive texts.
- c. After obtaining permission, the researcher arranged the time to administer the writing test.
- d. Before conducting the test, the researcher prepared the test materials in the form of a descriptive text writing task.
- e. The researcher greeted the students and created a comfortable learning atmosphere.
- f. The researcher briefly explained descriptive text, including its purpose and simple examples, to ensure that the students understood the task.
- g. The researcher distributed the task sheet and explained the instructions clearly. Students were asked to write a descriptive text about "My Best Friend" consisting of at least 10 sentences.
- h. The students were given 40 minutes to complete the writing task without any grammatical assistance, while the researcher monitored the process.
- i. After the students finished the task, the researcher collected all of the students' written texts.

According to Miles et al. (2020), data analysis in qualitative research consists of four interrelated components: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. In this research, these four components were applied systematically to analyze the grammatical errors found in students' descriptive texts. Each component is described as follows:

a) Data Collection

Data collection is the first stage in which the researcher gathered all written descriptive texts produced by the 30 student participants. Each participant was identified by their initials to maintain confidentiality throughout the data analysis process.

b) Data Reduction

Data reduction is the stage of selecting, focusing, and simplifying the data obtained from the collected written texts. In this stage, the researcher read each student's text carefully sentence by sentence to identify grammatical errors. The identified errors were then classified and recorded systematically. The following steps were carried out during data reduction:

- a) The researcher read all collected descriptive texts carefully to identify sentences containing grammatical errors.
- b) The identified errors were classified into four categories based on the Surface Strategy Taxonomy: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering.
- c) The classified errors were recorded in a classification table containing the participant's initials, the erroneous sentence, and the corresponding error type.
- d) The researcher identified the factors contributing to each error, determining whether it originated from interlingual transfer or intralingual transfer based on Ellis (2015, as cited in Laia et al., 2024).
- e) Data reduction was conducted to ensure that the data obtained were truly focused on the research problems and relevant to the needs of the study.

c) Data Display

After the data had been reduced, the next step was to display the data. In this research, the researcher categorized the data into four types of grammatical errors omission, addition, misformation, and misordering as well as the factors contributing to those errors, namely interlingual transfer and intralingual transfer. The results were presented in the form of tables as shown below:

Table 1 Classification of Grammatical Errors

No	Student	Error Sentence	Correct Form	Type
1	S1	She tall and friendly	She is tall and friendly	Omission
2	S2	She is always comes late	She always comes late	Addition

Table 3.2 Factors Contributing to Grammatical Errors

No	Student	Error Sentence	Factors	Explanation
1	S1	He very diligent student	Interlingual Transfer	L1 interference (Omission of "to be" and article "a")
2	S2	She does not knows English	Intralingual Transfer	Overgeneralization (double marking)

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

The findings are presented systematically and supported by quantitative frequency data, which helps clarify the distribution of grammatical errors found in students' descriptive texts. The use of percentages and frequencies makes the results more organized, understandable, and academically convincing. The dominance of misformation errors is explained clearly and meaningfully. The discussion successfully shows that students frequently used incorrect grammatical forms, particularly in subject-verb agreement, the use of "to be," and simple present tense forms. These findings indicate that students still experience difficulties in applying English grammatical rules consistently in descriptive writing.

In addition, the discussion appropriately relates the findings to the theories of interlingual and intralingual transfer. The analysis demonstrates that students' grammatical errors were influenced not only by interference from Bahasa Indonesia but also by incomplete mastery of English grammatical rules. The explanation of intralingual transfer, especially incomplete application of rules, provides a relevant interpretation of why many students produced systematic grammatical deviations in their writing.

After analyzing and categorizing the data into four types of grammatical errors based on the Surface Strategy Taxonomy proposed by Dulay et al. (1982, as cited in Rizqullah et al., 2023), namely omission, addition, misformation, and misordering, the researcher found that a total of 105 grammatical errors were identified in the descriptive texts written by 30 seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 3 Pematangsiantar. Misformation was the most dominant error type with 63 errors (60%), followed by omission with 35 errors (33.3%), and addition with 7 errors (6.7%). Misordering errors were not found in any of the students' texts.

Furthermore, each error type was further analyzed based on its sub-categories. Among misformation errors, archi-forms was the most dominant sub-category with 40 instances, followed by regularization with 12 instances, and alternating forms with 11 instances. Among omission errors, omission of the copula "to be" was the most dominant sub-category with 17 instances, followed by omission of articles with 11 instances, omission of possessive markers with 6 instances, and omission of other grammatical elements with 1 instances. Among addition errors, double marking was the most dominant sub-category with 4 instances, followed by simple addition with 3 instances. The frequency and percentage of each error type and its sub-categories are presented in the following table.

After analyzing and categorizing the data based on the theoretical framework of factors contributing to errors proposed by Rod Ellis (2015, as cited in Laia et al., 2024), the researcher found that the grammatical errors produced by the seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 3 Pematangsiantar were caused by two main factors, namely interlingual transfer and intralingual transfer. Intralingual transfer was further divided into four sub-types: overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of rules, and false concepts or hypotheses. A total of 105 instances of error-contributing factors were identified across all 30 students' descriptive texts. Interlingual transfer accounted for 34 instances (32.4%), while intralingual

transfer accounted for 71 instances (67.6%). Among the sub-types of intralingual transfer, incomplete application of rules was the most dominant with 38 instances (36.2%), followed by false concepts or hypotheses with 16 instances (15.2%), ignorance of rule restrictions with 13 instances (12.4%), and overgeneralization with 4 instances (3.8%). The frequency and percentage of each contributing factor and its sub-types are presented in the following table.

Tabel 3. The Frequency and Percentage of Factors Contributing to Grammatical Errors in Students' Descriptive Texts

No	Factors	Sub-type	Data Number	Frequency	Percentage
1	Interlingual Transfer	-	[1],[2],[3],[4],[5],[6],[7],[8],[9],[10],[11],[12],[13],[14],[15],[16],[18],[19],[20],[21],[22],[23],[24],[25],[26],[27],[28],[29],[30],[31],[32],[33],[34],[35]	34	32.4%
2	Intralingual	Overgeneralization	[36],[37],[38],[39]	4	3.8%
3		Ignorance of Rule Restrictions	[17],[55],[61],[62],[64],[71],[74],[75],[79],[81],[83],[94],[104]	13	12.4%
4		Incomplete Applications of Rules	[43],[44],[45],[46],[47],[48],[49],[50],[51],[52],[53],[54],[56],[57],[59],[60],[63],[66],[67],[68],[69],[72],[73],[76],[78],[80],[82],[84],[85],[86],[87],[88],[89],[90],[91],[92],[93],[99]	16	15.2%
5		False Concepts/Hypotheses	[40],[41],[42],[58],[65],[70],[77],[95],[96],[97],[98],[100],[101],[102],[103],[105]	16	15.2%
6		Subtotal Intralingual		71	67.6%
7		Total		105	100%

Furthermore, comparisons with previous studies should be expanded to enrich the discussion. Although the study already refers to several previous findings, deeper comparisons regarding similarities and differences in error types, dominant factors, and educational contexts would strengthen the academic contribution of the research. Such comparisons could also help position the findings within broader EFL grammatical error research.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this research showed that seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 3 Pematangsiantar produced various grammatical errors when writing descriptive texts in English. The analysis indicated that misformation was the most dominant error type, followed by omission, addition, and misordering. These findings confirm that grammatical errors are a persistent challenge for EFL learners, particularly in the context of descriptive text writing at the junior high school level.

Regarding the types of grammatical errors, misformation was found to be the most dominant error type in students' descriptive texts. This finding suggests that students were aware of the need to include grammatical elements in their sentences but had not yet fully acquired the correct forms. Many students used "is" instead of "has" when describing physical attributes, used incorrect pronoun forms, and applied incorrect verb forms in their sentences. This is consistent with the Surface Strategy Taxonomy proposed by Dulay et al. (1982, as cited in Rizqullah et al., 2023), which explains that misformation errors occur when a required grammatical element is present but appears in an incorrect form, reflecting the learner's attempt to apply grammatical rules that have not yet been fully acquired.

A closer examination of misformation errors revealed that archi-forms

Was the most dominant sub-category with 40 instances, suggesting that students frequently used one grammatical form to replace several different forms that serve different grammatical functions. The most common pattern was the consistent use of "is" in contexts where "has," "are," or other specific verb forms were required. Regularization was the second most frequent sub-category with 12 instances, as many students applied the base form of verbs consistently without applying the third-person singular "-s" rule, such as using "like" instead of "likes" and "make" instead of "makes." Alternating forms accounted for 11 instances, occurring when students used incorrect grammatical forms inconsistently, such as using "don't" instead of "doesn't" and using incorrect pronoun forms.

Omission was found to be the second most dominant error type. Many students omitted obligatory grammatical elements such as the copula "to be," possessive markers, and articles in their descriptive texts. This finding is consistent with the theory proposed by Dulay et al. (1982, as cited in Rizqullah et al., 2023), which states that omission errors occur when a grammatical element that is obligatorily required in the target language is absent from the learner's output. The frequent omission of the copula "to be" in particular reflects the influence of the students' first language, as Indonesian does not require a linking verb between a subject and its adjective complement. A closer examination of omission errors revealed that omission of the copula "to be" was the most dominant sub-category with 17 instances, followed by omission of articles with 11 instances, omission of possessive markers with 6 instances, and omission of other grammatical elements with 1 instance, reflecting the strong influence of students' first language on their English writing.

However, this study differs slightly from Erlangga et al. (2019) and Siregar et al. (2023), whose findings emphasized interlingual transfer as the more dominant factor. In the present study, intralingual transfer, particularly incomplete application of rules, was found to be more dominant than interlingual transfer. This difference may be attributed to the students' level of English proficiency and their exposure to English instruction, which may have led them to inconsistently apply grammatical rules that have been only partially acquired, rather than relying heavily on L1 interference patterns.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion of this research, the researcher concludes that seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 3 Pematangsiantar still produced various grammatical errors in writing descriptive texts. The grammatical errors identified in this study were classified based on the Surface Strategy Taxonomy proposed by Heidi Dulay et al., namely omission, addition, and misformation. Among those error types, misformation was the most dominant error found in students' descriptive texts. This indicates that students often attempted to apply English grammatical rules but still used incorrect grammatical forms, especially in subject-verb agreement, verb forms, and the use of "to be."

The findings also showed that omission errors frequently occurred in students' writing, particularly in omitting important grammatical elements such as "to be," articles, and plural markers. Addition errors were found in smaller numbers and mostly involved unnecessary use of auxiliary verbs or grammatical markers. Meanwhile, misordering errors were not found in the students' descriptive texts, indicating that students generally understood the basic arrangement of English sentence structure. In terms of the factors contributing to grammatical errors, this research found that intralingual transfer was the dominant factor influencing students' errors. This means that most errors were caused by students' incomplete understanding of English grammatical rules, including overgeneralization, incomplete application of rules, and false grammatical concepts. In addition, interlingual transfer also contributed to the occurrence of grammatical errors, particularly due to the influence of Bahasa Indonesia sentence patterns on students' English writing.

Overall, this research proves that grammatical mastery remains one of the major challenges faced by EFL students in writing descriptive texts. Therefore, improving students' understanding of grammar is necessary in order to help them produce more accurate and meaningful written texts in English.

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