

SURFACE-LEVEL ERRORS IN EFL WRITING: A TAXONOMIC STUDY OF JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' DESCRIPTIVE TEXTS IN GRADE IX - SMP NEGRI 23 MEDAN

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ABSTRAK

Studi ini mengkaji kesalahan tata bahasa dalam tulisan deskriptif di kalangan siswa kelas sembilan di SMP Negeri 23 Medan, dengan fokus pada tantangan yang mereka hadapi dalam belajar Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL). Penelitian ini menerapkan kerangka Taksonomi Strategi Permukaan yang dikembangkan oleh Dulay, Burt, dan Krashen (1982) untuk mengklasifikasikan kesalahan tata bahasa siswa ke dalam empat kategori: penghilangan, penambahan, kesalahan bentuk, dan kesalahan urutan. Menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, studi ini mengintegrasikan data numerik untuk menyoroti prevalensi masing-masing jenis kesalahan. Sampel tulisan dari 15 siswa yang dipilih secara acak diperiksa untuk mengidentifikasi pola umum dan kesulitan linguistik yang berulang. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa kesalahan bentuk adalah yang paling sering terjadi (36,1%), diikuti oleh penghilangan (28,8%), penambahan (23%), dan kesalahan urutan (12%). Hasil ini menekankan pentingnya pengajaran tata bahasa yang terstruktur dan umpan balik korektif dalam meningkatkan keterampilan menulis siswa. Studi ini menawarkan rekomendasi praktis bagi para guru untuk memperbaiki metode pengajaran mereka dan mendukung siswa dalam mengembangkan akurasi yang lebih besar dalam Bahasa Inggris tertulis.

Kata Kunci: Penghilangan, Penambahan, Kesalahan Pembentukan, Kesalahan Urutan, Menulis, Deskriptif.

ABSTRACT

This study examines grammatical errors in descriptive writing among ninth-grade students at SMP Negeri 23 Medan, focusing on their challenges in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This research applies the Surface Strategy Taxonomy framework by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) to classify students' grammatical errors into four categories: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive approach, the study integrates numerical data to highlight the prevalence of each error type. Writing samples from 15 randomly selected students were examined to identify common patterns and recurring linguistic difficulties. The results indicate that misformation errors are the most frequent (36.1%), followed by omission (28.8%), addition (23%), and misordering (12%). These results emphasize the importance of structured grammar instruction and corrective feedback in enhancing students' writing skills. The study offers practical recommendations for teachers to refine their instructional methods and support students in developing greater accuracy in written English.

Keywords: Ommision, Addition, Misformation, Misordering, Writing, Deskriptive.

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is an essential skill for junior high school students, allowing them to articulate their thoughts effectively and enhance their academic literacy. Among different types of texts, descriptive writing plays a vital role in helping students develop the ability to create detailed and well-structured descriptions of people, places, or objects. According to Indonesian National Curriculum, English is a compulsory subject starting from Primary School level to High School level. Moreover, the learning achievement in High School level, especially in Writing requires students to have the ability to create their own sentences in writing different types of texts. However, many students face difficulties in producing grammatically correct sentences, which affects their writing clarity.

At SMP Negeri 23 Medan, students in grade IX experience significant difficulties in writing English sentences, particularly in constructing descriptive texts. Their difficulties arise from a limited foundational understanding of English, resulting in frequent mistakes in word order and grammar. This issue is consistent with previous research showing that EFL learners often face difficulties with sentence structure, grammatical accuracy, and vocabulary choice when writing in English (Meta Keumala & Zahratul Idami, 2022). These challenges prevent students from constructing clear and grammatically accurate sentences, which ultimately impacts their overall writing proficiency.

Errors in writing are a natural part of the language learning process. However, frequent and consistent errors suggest underlying linguistic difficulties that need to be addressed through effective teaching strategies. According to (Fatimah Azzahra Siregar et al., 2023), Indonesian EFL students often make errors in morphological and syntactical

structures, such as subject-verb agreement, word order, and tense consistency. Similarly, (Nadya & Muthalib, 2021) found that students' frequent errors in descriptive writing stem from inadequate exposure to English writing conventions and limited practice. These results imply that without a structured approach to error analysis and targeted interventions, students will continue to face challenges in developing their writing skills. Understanding the nature of these errors is crucial for designing effective teaching strategies that address specific student needs.

One widely used framework for analyzing language errors is the Surface Strategy Taxonomy (SST), which classifies errors into omission, addition, misformation, and misordering (Saputra, 2022). This classification offers important insights into the way students form English sentences and the specific areas where they encounter the greatest difficulties. Previous studies utilizing the SST framework have found that omission and misformation errors are the most common among Indonesian EFL learners (Meta Keumala & Zahratul Idami, 2022). Research conducted by (Saputra, 2022) found that junior high school students often leave out auxiliary verbs and misuse verb tenses, resulting in grammatically incorrect sentences. These findings are particularly relevant to SMP Negeri 23 Medan, where students exhibit similar tendencies in their writing. Utilizing the SST framework to examine students' descriptive texts can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the linguistic aspects that need improvement.

Although numerous studies have investigated writing errors among Indonesian EFL learners, a significant research gap remains in examining these issues at the junior high school level, particularly in public schools like SMP Negeri 23 Medan. Earlier research has mainly concentrated on high school and university students (Elisa et al., 2022);

(Fatimah Azzahra Siregar et al., 2023) resulting in a gap in understanding the unique challenges faced by junior high school learners. Encountered by younger learners with a limited foundation in English proficiency. Additionally, while prior research has extensively documented grammatical errors, few studies have examined how these errors affect the overall coherence and readability of students' descriptive texts. By concentrating on junior high school students, this study fills a critical gap in the literature and offers insights that can guide pedagogical approaches at the foundational stages of English learning.

The novelty of this study lies in its specific investigation of writing errors among ninth-grade students at SMP Negeri 23 Medan, using the SST framework to systematically categorize and analyze their mistakes. Unlike previous studies that primarily examined high school and university students, this research focuses on a younger cohort whose English proficiency is still developing. Moreover, this study not only examines the most frequent types of errors but also investigates their possible causes and educational implications. By doing so, it contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how Indonesian junior high school students learn to write in English and what strategies can be employed to enhance their writing proficiency.

This study seeks to analyze the types of errors made by students of SMP Negeri 23 in writing English sentences, particularly in terms of word order and grammar.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a descriptive quantitative research design, concentrating on the analysis of students' writing errors through the Surface Strategy Taxonomy (SST) framework. The purpose of this research is to systematically identify and classify the

types of errors students make in writing descriptive texts, as well as to determine the most frequent error patterns. By using a quantitative approach, the study aims to provide measurable and objective data on students' writing proficiency and error distribution.

The primary data for this research consist of descriptive texts written by 15 randomly selected students from Grade IX at SMP Negeri 23. The total population comprised 35 students, from whom 9 male and 6 female students were randomly selected to ensure a representative sample. The students were asked to write a three-paragraph descriptive text, choosing from two given topics: "My Favorite Food" or "My Best Friend". These texts serve as the primary data source for error analysis.

To collect data, the following steps were undertaken:

1. Writing Task Assignment.

Students were instructed to write a descriptive text consisting of three paragraphs within a 30 -minute time frame under controlled classroom conditions.

2. Text Submission.

The handwritten texts were gathered immediately upon completion to maintain authenticity and prevent external assistance.

3. Error Identification and Categorization.

The students' written texts were examined for grammatical and syntactical errors using the Surface Strategy Taxonomy (SST), which classifies errors into omission, addition, misformation, and misordering, following the framework of Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) as cited in (Saputra, 2022).

The main research instrument used in this study was an error analysis chart based on the Surface Strategy Taxonomy (SST) framework. The rubric was developed following previous studies on

error classification (Saputra, 2022). The chart includes:

- 1) Types of errors, including omission, addition, misinformation, and misordering.
- 2) Frequency of each error type.
- 3) Sample errors taken from students' written texts.
- 4) Possible explanations for the errors based on linguistic theories.

The data collection process followed these structured steps:

1. Preparation Phase: The researcher developed the writing task and organized the data collection process.
2. Implementation Phase: Students were given instructions and completed their writing tasks in class under teacher supervision.
3. Data Compilation Phase: The collected texts were transcribed for analysis.
4. Initial Error Identification: Errors were identified, highlighted, and categorized based on the SST framework.
5. Validation of Expert: A second rater that is an English teacher, evaluated the error classification to confirm its accuracy and reliability.

The data were analyzed using the following steps:

1. Classification of Error: All the detected errors were grouped into four SST categories namely; omission, addition, misinformation, and misordering.
2. Frequency Count: The number of occurrences for each error type was calculated.
3. Descriptive Statistical Analysis: The percentage of each error type was measured to identify the most frequently occurring category.
4. Pedagogical Implications: Instructional strategies were recommended based on the error analysis to improve students' writing proficiency.

3. DISCUSSION

This section presents a detailed analysis of the surface-level errors found in students' descriptive texts, categorized according to the Surface Strategy Taxonomy by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982). Each error type—omission, addition, misinformation, and misordering—is examined with examples, underlying causes, and pedagogical implications. The results of the data analysis are also presented in a table, showing the frequency and percentage of each error type.

Error Frequency and Percentage

The following table summarizes the errors made by each student, categorized by error type, along with their total errors and percentage:

The types of Error	Total for type	Error each type	Error percentage for each type
Omission	55		28.8%
Addition	44		23.0%
Misinformation	69		36.1%
Misordering	23		12.0%
Total error	100		100%

According to the table, by far the most frequent errors are misinformation (36.1%), followed by omission (28.8%), addition (23.0%), and misordering (12.0%). It shows that incorrect word or verb forms prove most difficult for students, which calls for more focused grammar instruction. Some examples from the data analysis for each error type are as follow:

1. Omission Errors

Omission is basically when the students miss grammar elements necessary for completing sentences, or sometimes, even rendering a sentence, as a whole, grammatically incorrect.

Example 1: "I love fried rice because is very delicious."

- 1) **Error:** Missing subject-verb agreement (auxiliary verb "is").
- 2) **Correction:** "I love fried rice because **it is** very delicious."

Example 2: "She very kind and always helps me."

- 1) **Error:** Missing auxiliary verb "is."
- 2) **Correction:** "She **is** very kind and always helps me."

2. Addition Errors

Addition errors involve unnecessary words or morphemes that disrupt sentence clarity.

Example 1: "The pizza is my the favorite food."

- 1) **Error:** Extra determiner "the" before "favorite food."
- 2) **Correction:** "The pizza is my favorite food."

Example 2: "We play the football every day."

- 1) **Error:** The word "the" before "football" is unnecessary.
- 2) **Correction:** "We play football every day."

3. Misformation Errors

Misformation errors occur when students use incorrect grammatical forms, affecting subject-verb agreement, verb tense, and pluralization.

Example 1: "Daniel always study hard and gets good grade."

- 1) **Error:** Incorrect verb form ("study" should be "studies") and incorrect noun form ("grade" should be "grades").
- 2) **Correction:** "Daniel always **studies** hard and gets good **grades**."

Example 2: "She have a long black hair."

- 3) **Error:** Incorrect verb form "have" (should be "has") and incorrect phrase "a long black hair" (should be "long black hair").
- 4) **Correction:** "She **has** long black hair."

4. Misordering Errors

Misordering errors involve incorrect word order, impacting sentence clarity and coherence.

- 1) **Example 1:** "Love I to eat fried rice every morning."

- 2) **Error:** Incorrect word order.

- 3) **Correction:** "I love to eat fried rice every morning."

Example 2: "Together we school go every day."

- 4) **Error:** Incorrect placement of words.
- 5) **Correction:** "We go to school together every day."

The results of this current investigation can be consistent with previous research focusing on errors analysis on EFL writing. Just like (Fatimah Azzahra Siregar et al., 2023), this study confirmed that misinformation errors are among the highest frequency, followed by omission, addition, and misordering. This is, moreover, supported by Nadya & Muthalib (2021) indicating a common type of grammatical error due to lack of exposure to English structures. Yet, while according to Meta Keumala & Zahratul Idami (2022), omission errors dominate, this research showed misinformation errors to be more frequent besides the need for stronger instruction in grammar. Based on the findings, several strategies are recommended to improve students' writing proficiency:

- 1) **Explicit Grammar Instruction:** Teachers should focus on verb conjugations, article usage, and word order through targeted lessons. Using digital tools like grammar checkers can reinforce correct grammatical structures.
- 2) **Corrective Feedback:** Providing immediate feedback through teacher comments or peer review can help students identify and correct errors.
- 3) **Language Exposure:** Encouraging extensive reading and structured writing tasks will help students internalize correct grammar structures.
- 4) **Translation Awareness:** Contrastive analysis exercises can help students understand differences between English and Bahasa Indonesia to reduce direct translation errors.

- 5) **Process-Based Writing Approach:**
Teaching students to revise and edit their writing systematically can improve accuracy over time.

4. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the persistent grammatical difficulties faced by junior high school students in writing descriptive texts. The analysis shows that misformation errors were the most common, accounting for 36.1%, which indicates ongoing struggles with subject-verb agreement, verb tense consistency, and noun usage. Omission errors made up 28.8% of the total, revealing that students frequently omit necessary grammatical components such as auxiliary verbs and articles. Furthermore, addition errors represented 23.0%, suggesting a tendency to overapply grammatical rules, while misordering errors (12.0%) indicate challenges in word arrangement, often influenced by native language structures.

The findings emphasize the necessity of structured grammar instruction to address these recurring errors. Educators should integrate explicit grammar teaching, guided writing exercises, and immediate corrective feedback to assist students in developing accurate sentence structures. Additionally, exposing learners to well-structured reading materials can help reinforce their understanding of proper grammar usage and improve their writing fluency.

Future studies should consider longitudinal research to track students' writing progress over time and assess the effectiveness of various instructional approaches. Further investigation into the relationship between error types and proficiency levels could provide deeper insights into language acquisition. By addressing these challenges, students will be better equipped to express their thoughts clearly and accurately in English, thereby enhancing their overall communication skills in an EFL context.

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