

An Error Analysis of Using the Simple Past Tense in Writing Recount Text during Online Learning

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Abstrak

Menulis adalah proses mengungkapkan pikiran, perasaan, dan gagasan melalui simbol bahasa, dan tetap menjadi salah satu keterampilan yang paling menantang bagi pembelajar bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL) karena menuntut penguasaan aspek linguistik maupun mekanik. Penelitian kualitatif ini bertujuan mengidentifikasi kesalahan umum yang dilakukan siswa kelas VIII MTs Sunan Bonang Parengan, Tuban, dalam menulis teks recount selama pembelajaran daring, serta mengungkap faktor penyebabnya. Data dikumpulkan melalui tes menulis daring menggunakan Google Form dan wawancara semi-terstruktur satu per satu dengan sepuluh siswa yang dipilih dengan teknik convenience sampling. Data tes dianalisis menggunakan taksonomi strategi permukaan Dulay dkk. (1982), sedangkan data wawancara dianalisis secara tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa misformasi merupakan kesalahan gramatikal yang paling sering terjadi (73%), diikuti oleh omisi (24%) dan kesalahan urutan/misordering (3%). Pada kesalahan mekanik, tanda baca paling dominan (49%), diikuti oleh kapitalisasi (32%). Wawancara mengungkap bahwa kecerobohan, sebagai faktor internal, menjadi penyebab utama kesalahan siswa, tercermin dari kurangnya fokus, penguasaan tata bahasa, dan kosakata. Temuan ini menunjukkan perlunya pembelajaran tata bahasa dan mekanika penulisan yang lebih terstruktur dalam kelas menulis daring.

Kata Kunci: Analisis Kesalahan, Teks Recount, Pembelajaran Daring, Google Form

Abstract

Writing is the process of expressing thoughts, feelings, and ideas through language symbols, and it remains one of the most challenging skills for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners because it requires mastery of both linguistic and mechanical aspects. This qualitative study aims to identify the common errors made by eighth-grade students of MTs Sunan Bonang Parengan, Tuban, in writing recount texts during online learning, and to explore the factors underlying those errors. Data were collected through an online writing test administered via Google Forms and semi-structured one-on-one interviews involving ten students selected through convenience sampling. The writing test was analysed using Dulay et al.'s (1982) surface strategy taxonomy, while the interview data were analysed thematically. The findings show that misformation was the most frequent grammatical error, accounting for 73% of all errors, followed by omission (24%) and misordering (3%). Among the mechanical errors, punctuation was the most dominant (49%), followed by capitalization (32%). The interviews revealed that carelessness, an internal factor, was the main cause of students' errors, reflected in

limited focus, grammar mastery, and vocabulary. These findings suggest the need for more structured grammar and mechanics instruction in online writing classes.

Keywords: Error Analysis, Recount Text, Online Learning, Google Form

INTRODUCTION

Humans are social creatures who depend on interacting with one another to fulfil their many needs, and communication is the vehicle that drives this interaction. Language, whether spoken or written, is the primary means through which people express ideas, feelings, and information, making it one of the most significant factors shaping human life and civilization.

This research was inspired by the researcher's direct experience accompanying eighth-grade students (class VIII A) of MTs Sunan Bonang Parengan, Tuban, while they were studying recount texts and completing a writing assignment based on their personal experiences. During this process, the researcher observed that several students showed low enthusiasm for the task and made frequent errors in grammar and sentence structure. This first-hand observation motivated the researcher to investigate what kinds of errors students commonly make and what factors underlie them. The research was conducted on December 5, 2022, at the institution.

Writing is a complex activity that integrates hand, arm, eye, and cognitive coordination. It fosters thinking and learning, since putting thoughts into writing allows ideas to be reviewed, reevaluated, expanded, and revised before being shared with others. As an activity of expressing ideas, experiences, and knowledge through systematically arranged letters and symbols, writing enables communication that can be readily understood by its readers.

For Indonesian learners, the structural differences between Indonesian and English often make writing a particular struggle, and many students consider it the most demanding of the four language skills because it requires them to organize ideas while simultaneously applying correct grammar and mechanics. Consequently, students often overlook or unintentionally produce errors in their written texts.

The shift to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic added further challenges to the development of students' English skills. (Agung et al. 2020). found that Indonesian EFL students experienced reduced engagement and limited feedback during online instruction. At the same time, Atmojo and Nugroho (2020) reported that teachers struggled to design effective online teaching activities during the pandemic, particularly for productive skills such as writing. (Assalahi., 2020). Similarly, they emphasized that the quality of emergency online education strongly affects the depth of students' learning

outcomes. These conditions, combined with learners' persistent difficulties in English language production reported in earlier Indonesian EFL research (Abrar et al., 2018; Alkan & Bümen, 2020), suggest that online writing instruction requires closer attention to the types of errors students make and the reasons behind them.

Previous studies have examined grammatical errors in students' recount-text writing (Fitria, 2020; Wu & Garza, 2014) and the challenges of EFL online learning during the pandemic (Agung et al., 2020; Atmojo & Nugroho, 2020), yet fewer studies have combined an error analysis of recount-text writing produced in an online learning setting with an in-depth exploration of the factors behind those errors through direct student interviews, particularly at the junior secondary level. This study addresses that gap by analyzing both the linguistic errors eighth-grade students produce when writing recount texts online and the internal and external factors that contribute to those errors. It is expected that the findings will contribute to more targeted grammar and mechanics instruction in online EFL writing classes.

Based on the explanation above, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. What are the common errors made by students in writing recount texts during online learning?
2. What are the factors underlying students' errors in writing recount texts during online learning?

LITERATURE REVIEW

During the language-learning process, learners can hardly avoid making errors. A methodology that focuses on identifying such errors is known as error analysis. Brown (2000) defines error analysis as a method of examining learners' errors so that they can be observed, analysed, and classified in order to reveal something about the linguistic system operating within the learner. Error analysis is essential for researchers and teachers to determine how well learners grasp the target language and what challenges they encounter throughout the learning process.

Error Analysis and the Surface Strategy Taxonomy

One of the most widely used frameworks in error analysis is the surface strategy taxonomy proposed by (Dulay et al. 1982), which classifies errors into four categories: omission (the absence of an item that should appear in a well-formed utterance), addition (the presence of an item that should not appear),

misformation (the use of the wrong form of a morpheme or structure), and misordering (the incorrect placement of a morpheme or group of morphemes). This taxonomy is widely applied because it allows researchers to describe surface-level patterns of learner errors systematically. (Wu and Garza, 2014) similarly found that misformation and omission were among the most frequent error types in EFL students' writing, particularly involving verb tenses, articles, and prepositions, which supports the relevance of this taxonomy for analyzing recount-text writing.

Writing as a Productive Skill

Among the four English skills that must be mastered, writing is often regarded as the most demanding. Writing is the process of producing notes, information, or stories using written characters, typically carried out with tools such as pens, pencils, or digital devices. (Oshima and Hogue, 2007) state that writing is a complex activity because it involves both linguistic elements and elements outside language that shape the content of a text; together, these elements produce coherent writing. For written communication to run smoothly, the writer must be able to convey ideas using language that is appropriate, orderly, and complete. Writing ability can generally be viewed from two perspectives: as a process, referring to the activity of composing, and as a product, referring to the resulting text.

Google Forms in Online Learning

Google Forms was first introduced in 2008 as a feature of Google Sheets before becoming a stand-alone, free application fully integrated with Google Drive, Docs, Sheets, and Slides. It allows users to create questionnaires, quizzes, polls, registration forms, and attendance logs with a simple and accessible interface, which has made it a popular tool for conducting online assessments, including writing tests, during distance learning. (Fitria; 2023) reports that Google Forms is an effective and practical tool for administering online English assessments, although it has limitations in capturing the writing process itself compared with collaborative platforms. In a related context, (Suwantarathip and Wichadee; 2014) found that online, cloud-based writing platforms can support students' collaborative writing activities and improve their overall writing ability, suggesting that the medium through which students write online can itself influence the quality of their output and the errors they produce.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design. Qualitative research is descriptive in nature and tends to emphasize process, meaning, and the subjects' perspectives rather than statistical generalization, which distinguishes it from quantitative research.

Research Setting and Participants

The research was conducted at MTs Sunan Bonang Parengan, Tuban. Determining the research location is an important step in qualitative research because it clarifies the object and purpose of the study and facilitates the data-collection process. The participants were students of class VIII A, a class known for being intellectually active and creative. Although the class consisted of 30 students, the researcher involved only 10 of them as participants through convenience sampling, a technique used to select subjects who are willing and available to take part in the study. Because of this sampling technique, the researcher does not claim that the ten participants are statistically representative of the entire population of class VIII A.

Data Collection

Data were collected through a writing test, observation, and interviews. The test was used to assess students' knowledge and writing ability; it was administered online through Google Forms, in which students chose one of several given themes and wrote a short recount text. After the test, the researcher analyzed and classified the errors found in the students' writing into three categories following the surface strategy taxonomy: omission, misinformation, and misordering. In addition to the test, semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted with the same ten participants to explore the factors underlying their errors. Document analysis of the students' written texts was also carried out to support and triangulate the findings from the test and interviews.

Data Analysis

The written data were analyzed by identifying, classifying, and calculating the percentage of each error type using the formula $P = (F/N) \times 100\%$, where F is the frequency of a given error type and N is the total number of errors. The interview data were transcribed, coded, and grouped into themes representing the internal and external factors underlying the students' errors, following Hasibuan's (2014) categorization of internal and external factors.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

Recapitulation of Students' Grammatical Errors

Based on the writing test, the researcher classified students' grammatical errors into three types following the surface strategy taxonomy: omission, misformation, and misordering. Omission refers to the absence of a required morpheme, phrase, clause, or sentence element. Misformation refers to the use of an incorrect grammatical form or structure. Misordering occurs when a morpheme, phrase, clause, or sentence element is placed in the wrong position within an utterance. The recapitulation of these errors is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Recapitulation of Students' Grammatical Errors

Students	Omission	Misformation	Misordering	Total (N)
Student 1	2	7	1	10
Student 2	1	6	-	7
Student 3	-	-	-	-
Student 4	1	1	-	2
Student 5	-	2	-	2
Student 6	1	2	-	3
Student 7	-	1	-	1
Student 8	-	-	-	-
Student 9	2	2	-	4
Student 10	1	3	-	4
TOTAL	8	24	1	33

Source: Researcher's data analysis, 2022.

As shown in Table 1, of the 33 grammatical errors identified, omission accounted for 8 occurrences, misformation for 24 occurrences, and misordering for 1 occurrence. The percentage of each error type was calculated using the formula $P = (F/N) \times 100\%$, where F is the frequency of a given error type and N is the total number of grammatical errors (33), as follows:

- Omission: $P = (8/33) \times 100\% = 24.24\%$
- Misformation: $P = (24/33) \times 100\% = 72.73\%$
- Misordering: $P = (1/33) \times 100\% = 3.03\%$

These results indicate that misformation was the most dominant grammatical error made by students in writing recount texts during online learning, followed by omission, while misordering occurred only rarely.

Recapitulation of Students' Mechanical (General) Errors

Besides grammatical errors, the researcher also analyzed students' mechanical or general errors, covering capitalization, spelling, conciseness, punctuation,

space, and abbreviation. The recapitulation of these errors is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Recapitulation of Students' Mechanical Errors

Students	Cap	Spe	Co	P	Spa	A	Total (N)
Student 1	2	2	1	-	-	-	5
Student 2	1	3	-	4	-	-	8
Student 3	1	-	-	2	-	-	3
Student 4	4	-	-	5	1	1	11
Student 5	4	-	-	5	-	-	9
Student 6	2	1	1	12	1	-	17
Student 7	6	-	1	3	-	-	10
Student 8	2	-	-	2	-	-	4
Student 9	2	1	-	2	1	-	6
Student 10	5	1	-	8	-	-	14
TOTAL	28	8	3	43	3	1	87

Source: Researcher's data analysis, 2022.

Note: Cap = Capitalization; Spe = Spelling; Co = Conciseness; P = Punctuation; Spa = Space; A = Abbreviation.

Using the same formula, $P = (F/N) \times 100\%$, with N referring to the total number of mechanical errors (87), the percentage of each error type was calculated as follows:

d. Capitalization: $P = (28/87) \times 100\% = 32.18\%$

e. Spelling: $P = (8/87) \times 100\% = 9.20\%$

f. Conciseness: $P = (3/87) \times 100\% = 3.45\%$

g. Punctuation: $P = (43/87) \times 100\% = 49.43\%$

h. Space: $P = (3/87) \times 100\% = 3.45\%$

i. Abbreviation: $P = (1/87) \times 100\% = 1.15\%$

These results show that punctuation was the most frequent mechanical error, followed by capitalization, while conciseness, space, and abbreviation errors occurred less frequently.

Interview Findings

Because most interviewees did not fully grasp the English interview questions, the researcher translated the questions into Indonesian and later translated the participants' responses back into English for reporting. The results are presented below in three parts.

Feeling during Learning English

Most participants reported mixed feelings toward learning English online. Several students said they enjoyed English lessons but felt less confident writing without their teacher's direct guidance, while others felt bored or less motivated because online writing tasks were completed independently through Google Forms without immediate feedback.

Struggle during Learning English

When asked about the difficulties they faced, participants most frequently mentioned a lack of grammar mastery, particularly in using the simple past tense correctly, followed by a lack of vocabulary and difficulty maintaining focus while studying online. Several students also mentioned that the absence of face-to-face correction made it harder for them to notice and fix their own mistakes.

Solution of the Struggle

To cope with these struggles, participants reported several strategies: studying the material more intensively before writing, asking the teacher or classmates for clarification, and studying together with friends outside class hours. Students who used these strategies generally felt that their understanding of grammar and vocabulary improved and that they made fewer errors in subsequent writing tasks.

DISCUSSION

Based on the findings, three types of grammatical errors were found in students' recount-text writing: omission, misformation, and misordering. After calculating the percentage of each type, misformation was found to be the most common error, at 72.73%, which is consistent with Wu and Garza (2014), who also found misformation to be one of the most frequent error types in EFL students' writing. In addition to grammatical errors, the researcher analyzed mechanical errors such as space, capitalization, spelling, conciseness, punctuation, and abbreviation. Punctuation was the most frequent mechanical error at 49.43%, followed by capitalization at 32.18%. In English, proper nouns and the first word of a sentence must be capitalized, and capitalization rules also apply after certain punctuation marks such as commas and quotation marks; students' frequent errors in this area suggest that mechanical conventions were not yet fully internalized, possibly because online instruction offered fewer opportunities for direct, in-the-moment correction.

The interview data were obtained through structured, one-on-one interviews. After the interviews were conducted, the researcher transcribed the responses, organized them into a table, and classified them into themes or codes, following

Hasibuan's (2014) classification of internal and external factors. Internal factors originate within the individual and are typically reflected in personal attitudes and characteristics, such as being slow to learn, lacking concern or empathy, failing to follow instructions, or giving up easily. External factors, by contrast, originate outside the individual and involve the immediate environment, such as family, peers, and broader social or economic conditions.

Based on the interview results and the second research question, the researcher found that students' struggles in learning English online were mainly related to a lack of grammar mastery, limited focus, and limited vocabulary. These findings point predominantly to internal factors, specifically carelessness, defined here as a lack of attentiveness that results in reduced focus, weaker grasp of grammar, and limited vocabulary retention during independent online study. In addition to identifying these obstacles, participants also described strategies they used to overcome them, such as studying the material more thoroughly, asking teachers or peers for help, and studying together with friends. These strategies appear to help reduce the frequency of errors and support students in managing the challenges of online writing instruction, which aligns with Suwantarathip and Wichadee's (2014) observation that collaborative and peer-supported writing activities can improve students' overall writing outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to answer two research questions concerning the common errors students make when writing recount texts during online learning and the factors underlying those errors. Data were collected from ten students of MTs Sunan Bonang Parengan, Tuban, through an online writing test administered via Google Forms and one-on-one interviews.

Regarding the first research question, misinformation was found to be the most common grammatical error in students' recount-text writing, accounting for 72.73% of all grammatical errors, followed by omission (24.24%) and misordering (3.03%). Among the mechanical errors, punctuation was the most frequent at 49.43%, followed by capitalization at 32.18%.

Regarding the second research question, the interview findings indicate that the students' errors were mainly caused by an internal factor, namely carelessness, which manifested as limited focus, weak grammar mastery, and limited vocabulary during independent online study. Students who applied strategies such as intensive review, peer discussion, and consulting the teacher tended to report fewer difficulties. These findings suggest that online writing instruction for recount texts would benefit from more structured grammar and

punctuation practice, along with strategies that encourage sustained focus and peer support during independent study.

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