

## **An Analysis of Grammatical Errors in Students' Descriptive Writing Using Surface Strategy Taxonomy**

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**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini pada dasarnya bertujuan untuk menganalisis kesalahan tata bahasa mahasiswa dalam menulis paragraf deskriptif menggunakan Surface Strategy Taxonomy. Partisipan penelitian kualitatif ini adalah mahasiswa semester pertama jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris STKIP Yapis Dompu yang mengambil kelas “Basic Writing” pada tahun ajaran 2023/2024. Peneliti menganalisis 12 tulisan deskriptif mahasiswa tentang “Guide Dogs” yang ditulis untuk memenuhi tugas mata kuliah “Basic Writing”. Data penelitian ini kemudian dianalisis dalam bentuk persentase. Temuan dari penelitian ini mengungkapkan bahwa kesalahan tata bahasa yang paling umum dilakukan oleh mahasiswa dalam penulisan deskriptif adalah mis-formation dengan jumlah 34 atau 45% dari total jumlah kesalahan yang menempati peringkat pertama. Diikuti oleh addition sebanyak 22 atau 28% yang menempati peringkat kedua, kesalahan mis-ordering sebanyak 12 atau 16% yang menempati peringkat ketiga, dan omission sebanyak 8 atau 11% yang menempati peringkat keempat. Temuan lain yang sangat penting adalah bahwa kesalahan tata bahasa yang paling umum berdasarkan sub kategori kesalahan adalah pada penggunaan kata kerja dengan persentase 60 atau 80% dari total 76. Hal ini menunjukkan bahwa hampir semua siswa tidak begitu memahami penggunaan kata kerja dalam present tense. Mereka sering kali membuat kalimat yang salah strukturnya. Hal ini harus menjadi perhatian khusus oleh seluruh dosen Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris STKIP Yapis Dompu untuk mencari solusinya. Kompetensi mahasiswa dalam menyusun kalimat bahasa Inggris yang benar pasti akan tercermin pada semua mata kuliah bahasa Inggris lainnya seperti, Academic Writing, Reading for Academic, TOEFL , Grammar for TOEFL, listening, dan banyak lagi matakuliah lainnya

**Kata Kunci:** Analisis, Kesalahan Grammar, Tulisan Deskriptif

**Abstract:** *This study basically aimed to explore students' grammatical errors in writing descriptive paragraph using surface strategy taxonomy. The participants of this qualitative research were first year students of English education department of STKIP Yapis Dompu who took basic writing class in academic year 2023/2024. The researcher analyzed 12 students' descriptive writings about "Guide Dog" written to meet assignment of "Basic Writing" course. The data of this research then analyzed in the form of percentage. The findings of this research revealed that the most common grammatical errors committed by the students in their descriptive writing were on misformation having number of 34 or 45% of the total numbers of errors that ranked first. This was followed by addition with 22 or 28% that ranked second, misordering with 12 or 16% that ranked third, and omission with 8 or 11% that ranked fourth. Another very important finding was that the most common grammatical errors based on sub category errors were on the usage of verb with 60 or 80% of the total 76. It indicated that almost all students do not really understand the usage of verb in present tense. They often made structurally incorrect sentences. This issue must be given a special attention by all lecturers of English education department of STKIP Yapis Dompu to find solution students' competence to construct correct English sentences will definitely reflect on almost all other English courses such as, academic writing, reading for academic, TOEFL, grammar for TOEFL, listening, and many more courses*

**Keywords:** Analysis, Grammatical Errors, Descriptive Writing

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Over time, students can hone their creative writing skills and become more adept at adhering to grammar rules, (Ismail, et al, (2023). Mayekti et al. (2022) claim that writing helps children improve their linguistic and critical thinking abilities. Classified as a productive skill, writing has been acknowledged as one of the most important parts of promoting language acquisition for students, (Novelia & Faisal, 2023). In contrast, Kitchen (2021) contends that writing combines an educational experience with a cognitive activity, enabling people to express their ideas and reply to those of others in written forms. Thus, writing may be understood as a process in which ideas are expressed through the arrangement of sentences.

In the meantime, Nainggolan (2021) affirms that writing is crucial since it helps pupils construct coherent sentences. Writing is the most difficult one for all language learners whether the language is the first, second, or foreign language, (Sipayung & Benarita, 2023). Learning to write is challenging because it requires the use of a process that involves organizing, planning, and rewriting in order to convey meaning through words (Palmer, 1994, as cited in Sipayung & Benarita, 2023). On the one hand, postsecondary EFL students are urged to write across genres and construct proper sentences within paragraphs. However, pupils sometimes struggle to construct proper sentences that adhere to grammatical standards. In fact, during regular class sessions, teachers frequently discover that their pupils have made a few mistakes, (Rizqullah et al., 2023). According to Hyland (2002), writing is more than merely stringing words together to form phrases, sentences together to form paragraphs, and paragraphs together to form texts. One of reason why writing is challenging is writing requires a very understanding of grammar rules.

Grammar, according to Brown (2001, as cited in Walasari et al., 2021), is the set of rules dictating the typical placement and connection of words in a phrase. Since Indonesian students are non-native speakers attempting to acquire and comprehend a foreign language, this means that they must abide by the rules set forth by the English language. Undoubtedly, during the learning process, pupils are unable to handle the faults or errors they frequently make, whether they are spoken or written.

According to Ningthias and Mulyana (2018, as cited Walasari et al., 2021), one of the reasons why students struggled with writing English texts was that they did not comprehend basic grammar. When producing their English texts, they frequently use Indonesian grammar norms. Their results demonstrate that despite their strong retention of Indonesian grammar rules, Indonesian students still struggle while writing in English. Given this, learning grammar should be a must for speaking and writing in English.

According to Huda (2021), there is a connection between the ability to write descriptively and one's understanding of sentence structure. Writing scripts that clearly describe items requires the use of a variety of well-chosen words. Writing descriptions is the capacity to articulate concepts in the shape of objects. According to Nair and Hui (2018), phrase structure and grammar mistakes were the most prevalent in descriptive writing. Yani (2021) verified that grammatical errors were the most common among students. According to Ismayanti and Kholiq (2020 as cited in Ismail, et al, 2023), one of the challenges students have while describing and arranging the concepts effectively is the generic framework. According to Silawati (2019), students' writing abilities were positively impacted by their understanding of sentence structure. It's crucial to arrange concepts in complicated and compound-complex phrases in addition to basic and compound sentences when creating effective English paragraphs. Aside from that format, it's important to pinpoint the most typical mistakes made when composing paragraphs in

terms of addition, subtraction, distortion, and rearranging. A few similar studies support the current investigation.

Error analysis (EA), according to Divsar and Heydari (2017: 143, as cited in Panjaitan et al., 2023), is a method for gathering faults that are discovered in students' language, figuring out whether or not these errors are clear, and categorizing the reasons behind the mistakes that students make. This implies that the process of adding up all of the mistakes that pupils make is known as error analysis. Furthermore, error analysis is a technique used to determine if errors that occur are discovered in a systematic manner or not. Lastly, an error analysis that outlines the reasons for the mistakes the author discovered.

Surface strategy taxonomy was used by Dulay et al. (1982, as cited in Esmalde, 2020), to classify the different forms of errors. The surface strategy taxonomy highlights the modifications made to the surface structure. In this situation, students could add superfluous components and leave out necessary ones, or they might arrange or misform the objects. The surface strategy taxonomy divides errors into four categories; 1) Omission: A well-formed speech necessitates the inclusion of a certain element, which is absent in errors. 2) Addition: this is the reverse of omission and is shown by the inclusion of something that should not be in a coherent statement. In this lesson, there are three types of additions: regularization, basic addition, and double marking. 3) Misformation: typified by the incorrect morpheme or structure being used. Three categories of misformation exist: alternating form and regularization, archy, and 4) Misordering: Misordering errors are defined by a morpheme or collection of morphemes being positioned incorrectly within the utterance.

Four categories of errors are identified by Dulay et al. (1982): omissions, additions, mis-formations, and mis-orderings. These categories include: 1) Additional, which is the presence of extraneous or undesired words in the phrase; 2) Omission, which is the absence of some words that belong in a statement or other words that should be in a sentence but are either ignored or forgotten to be added; Misordering is the use of words or morphemes that are not exactly correct, such as the wordorder in a sentence. Misformation is the use of inaccurate words or erroneous structure, such as subject, plural or singular nouns, prepositions, and verbs.

A descriptive text is one that lists and describes the traits of individuals, creatures, or objects in the environment. a descriptive phrase evokes an object's appearance, flavor, texture, feel, sound, and even emotions like fear, loneliness, or delight. Its purpose also includes providing a visual representation of people, animals, and surrounding objects so that readers can visualize the things being recounted. Descriptive writing is used in defining and describing. According to Simon (1998, as cited in Walasari et al., 2021), descriptive writing serves the following functions: 1) To amuse; 2) To convey emotion; 3) To relate story; 4) To enlighten (for a reader who is not acquainted with the topic); 5) To enlighten (to establish a new appreciation for the known); and 6) To persuade (to persuade the reader that some music videos denigrate women).

Based on the explanation above, this study aimed to explore students' grammatical errors in writing descriptive paragraph using four categories of errors are identified by Dulay et al. (1982): omissions, additions, mis-formations, and mis-orderings. The participants of this research were first year students of English education department of STKIP Yapis Dompu who took basic writing class in academic year 2023/2024.

## **2. METHOD**

### **Design and Samples**

Since this study aims to investigate or explore to explore students' grammatical errors in writing descriptive paragraph using four categories of errors, this study uses

descriptive qualitative research model. The goal of qualitative research, according to Vanderstoep and Johnston (2009, as cited in Walasari et al., 2021), is to produce a narrative or textual account of the phenomenon that is being studied. Consequently, the investigator. The participants of this research were 12 first year students of English education department of STKIP Yapris Dompus who took basic writing class in academic year 2023/2024. The four categories of errors in this study include omission, addition, misformation, and misordering errors, according to the Surface Strategy Taxonomy theory.

### Instrument and Procedure

To deal with the objectives of this research which investigate students' grammatical errors in writing descriptive paragraph, the researcher analyzed 12 students' descriptive writings about "Guide Dog". The descriptive writings were written to meet assignment in "Basic Writing" course at English education department of STKIP Yapris Dompus.

### Data Analysis

Researchers read and examined the students' papers after gathering the information required on their writing. The researchers employed Dulay's Surface Strategy Taxonomy of errors classifications (1982)—omissions, additions, misformation, and misordering—to analyze the various error types. Meanwhile, the researcher applied Ellis's theory (1999, as cited in Rizqullah et al., 2023), which identifies mistake collection, error identification, error description, and error explanation, to determine the errors that students make most frequently in their writing descriptive texts. The following are the specific steps involved in data analysis: 1) Error collection: Using the simple present tense, the researchers analyzed students' descriptive writing 2) Error identification: scholars distinguished between student work that adheres to the linguistic feature (simple present tense) and that which does not; 3) Error description: the purpose of this step is to provide an explanation of the mistakes that were made following the error identification phase. Additionally, categorizing the various kinds of errors that students make in their writing is part of the description of student errors; 4) Error explanation: In this stage, researchers described the possible causes of errors that students typically make while writing descriptive texts.

## 3. RESULTS

The 12 descriptive texts that the students wrote were examined by the researcher. There are numerous erroneous sentences in the entire texts that the students wrote. The following table shows how the researcher classified the errors that were discovered: 1) Additional, which is the presence of extraneous or undesired words in the phrase; 2) Omission, which is the absence of some words that belong in a statement or other words that should be in a sentence but are either ignored or forgotten to be added; Misordering is the use of words or morphemes that are not exactly correct, such as the wordorder in a sentence. Misformation is the use of inaccurate words or erroneous structure, such as subject, plural or singular nouns, prepositions, and verbs.

**Table 1**  
The Classification of the Errors made by students

No.	Kinds of Errors	Sentences	Correction
1.	Omission		
	Preposition	They <b>learn help</b> people blind	They learn <b>to</b> help blind people
	Preposition	They <b>studied help</b> blind people	
	Preposition	They <b>study help</b> blind people	

	verb	The <b>trainers not use</b> food for reward	The trainers <b>do</b> not use food for reward
<b>2</b>	Addition		
	verb	The guide <b>dog</b> always <b>have</b> work hard	The guide dogs always work hard
		The guide dogs always <b>have</b> work hard	
		If they <b>are</b> graduate	If they graduate
		If they <b>are</b> pass	
		They <b>are</b> go to school for training	They go to school for training
		They <b>are</b> use verbal affection	They use verbal affection
		They <b>are</b> study to help blind people	They learn to help blind people
		They <b>are</b> use physical affection	They use physical affection
		They <b>are</b> eat and play	They eat and play
		They <b>are</b> helps	They help
		They <b>are</b> use physical and verbal affection	They use physical and verbal affection
<b>3</b>	Miss-formation		
	Noun (Subject)	<b>The training</b> use food as a reward	The trainers use food as a reward
		The <b>train</b> use food as a reward	
		<b>The trainer</b> use food as a reward	
		<b>Train</b> use food	
		The <b>trainer</b> do not use food	
	VERB	<b>The training use not</b> food	The trainers do not use food as a rewards
		The trainers <b>using</b> food as rewards	
		The <b>trainer didn't</b> use food as reward	
		The trainers <b>have not</b> use food as rewards	
		They <b>going</b> to school	
		They <b>got</b> a job	They get a job
		They <b>had</b> job	
		They <b>are eating, playing, and sleep</b>	The eat, play, and sleep
		They eat, <b>playing</b> , and sleep	
		The dogs <b>taken</b> a hard test	The dogs take a difficult test
	Gerund	They go to school for <b>train</b>	They go to school for training
	verb	They <b>are going</b> to school for training	
		They <b>are learning to</b> help	They learn to help
	adjective	They use <b>physic</b> and verbal affection	They use physical and verbal affection
	verb	If they <b>graduated</b>	If they graduate
	Noun (Subject)	<b>Guide dog</b> work hard	Guide dogs work hard
	verb	Guide dogs <b>worked</b> hard	
<b>4</b>	Miss-ordering		
	Verb	Guide dogs <b>hard work</b>	Guide dogs work hard
		The guide dogs <b>hard work</b>	
		<b>The training use not</b> food	The trainers do not use

		<b>Training use</b> not food as reward	food
		The trainers <b>use not</b> food	
	Noun (object)	They use <b>affection physical and verbal</b>	They use physical and verbal affection

Based on the table above, it can be seen that the grammatical errors made by the students on their descriptive writing cover omission (errors proposition and auxiliary verb; addition ( errors in the usage of auxiliary verb or be verb); misformation (errors in the usage of noun as a subject, Auxiliary verb, basic verb, gerund, and adjective); and misordering (errors in the usage of noun phrase, basic verb, and auxiliary verb). The total of the errors for each category can be seen in the table below:

**Table 2**  
Total of the Errors made by students based on Surface Strategy Taxonomy

No.	Types of errors	Total of errors	Percentage
1	Omission	8	11%
2	Addition	22	28%
3	Mis-formation	34	45%
4	Mis-ordering	12	16%
Total		76	100

Table 2 indicates that the highest percentage of grammatical errors made by students based on the Surface Strategy Taxonomy errors is mis-formation with 45%, and the least percentage is omission with 11 %.

**Table 3**  
Total of the Errors made by students based on sub category

No.	Types of errors	Total of errors	Percentage
1	verb	60	80%
3	Preposition	6	7.5 %
4	Adjective	2	2.5 %
5	Noun	6	7.5 %
7	Gerund	2	2.5 %
Total		76	100%

Table 2 indicates that the highest percentage of grammatical errors made by students based on the sub-category errors is the usage of verb with 80%, and the least percentage are the usage of gerund and the usage of adjective with 2.5 % respectively.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

This study basically aimed to explore students' grammatical errors in writing descriptive paragraph. The participants of this research were first year students of English education department of STKIP Yapis Dompnu who took basic writing class in academic year 2023/2024. Based on the result above, the common grammatical error committed by the students in their descriptive writing is presented in table 2. It can be described from the data that the most grammatical errors committed by the students were on misformation having number of 34 or 45% of the total numbers of errors that ranked first on the error types. This was followed by addition with 22 or 28%total number of errors that ranked second, misordering with 12 or 16% that ranked third, and omission with 8 or 11% that ranked fourth on the grammatical errors.

As descriptive writing basically uses simple present tense, the data implies that most grammatical errors committed by fist year students of English education department of STKIP Yapis Dompnu were on the usage of present tense. They generally

mis-formed the verb. Instead of using basic verb or be verb (am, is are), the students generally used simple past verb or past participle verb in writing descriptive paragraph, this in accordance with result of research of Esmalde, (2020) that most students do not really understand the use of present tense in writing descriptive paragraph. Moreover;

they generally did not really understand that in English sentence structure, subject of a sentence must agree with a verb meaning that if the subject is singular, the verb must be singular, vice versa.

Another very important finding in this study can be seen in table 3. Data in table 3 revealed that the most common grammatical errors based on sub category errors committed by the students in descriptive writing were on the usage of verb with 60 or 80% of the total 76. It indicated that almost all students do not really understand the usage of verb in present tense. They often made mistakes in constructing sentences in English or made structurally incorrect sentences. For instance, 'in the sentence "they are go to school for training". In that very simple sentence, 'are' is a be verb that in English structure cannot be followed by basic verb 'go'. Since the sentence describes about the guide dogs, present tense should be used to construct the sentences. So; the structurally correct sentence is "they go to school for training". The similar mistakes or errors were frequently committed by the students.

A correct sentence in English is a sentence that at least has a subject and a verb, then the subject and the verb must be agreed each other, meaning that if the subject is singular, the verb must be singular, vice versa. It is deeply regretted that almost all of first year English education students of STKIP Yapis Dompnu, participants of this research, did not really understand how to construct structurally correct English sentences using present tense in their descriptive writing; whereas correct sentence construction is the main lesson that must be understood and mastered by every language learner. Language is basically made up of sentences that convey meanings, (Ismail, et al, 2022). Lecturers must design learning processes that promote students' motivation in learning. By having favorable orientation or motivation toward learning English, learners will find the strategy that will guide them to solve the problems found in the learning process which will eventually lead to successful language learning, (Gardner, 1985 as cited in Ismail, 2022).

## 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study basically aimed to analyze students' grammatical errors in writing descriptive paragraph. The participants of this research were first year students of English education department of STKIP Yapis Dompnu. Based on the result and discussion above, the common grammatical error committed by the students in their descriptive writing were on misformation having number of 34 or 45% of the total numbers of errors that ranked first on the error types. This was followed by addition with 22 or 28% total number of errors that ranked second, misordering with 12 or 16% that ranked third, and omission with 8 or 11% that ranked fourth on the grammatical errors. Another very important finding of this research was that the most common grammatical errors based on sub category errors committed by the students in descriptive writing were on the usage of verb with 60 or 80% of the total 76. It indicated that almost all students do not really understand the usage of verb in present tense. They often made mistakes in constructing sentences in English or made structurally incorrect sentences. This issue must be given a special attention by all stakeholder, specifically all lecturers of English education department to find solution of the problems. Students' competence to construct correct English sentences will definitely influence almost all other English courses such as, academic writing, reading for academic, TOEFL, grammar for TOEFL, listening and many more courses

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