

## **An error analysis of students' descriptive writing at Khadijah Islamic boarding school**

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### **Abstract**

The purposes of this research are to find out the types of grammatical errors in students' descriptive writing and to find out the most frequent type of errors in students' descriptive writing. The method of this research is a descriptive qualitative method. The data were collected from 22 descriptive writings which were written by the students. The researcher used the writings as the instrument. In this research, all types of grammatical errors were classified and described based on surface strategy taxonomy by Dulay Burt, and Krashen (1982). Based on the result of the analysis, there were 670 grammatical errors found in the students' descriptive writing. Misformation error occupies the first rank with 286 errors. Then following closely is omission error with 260 errors, next is addition error with 90 errors, and the last one is disorder error with 34 errors.

**Keywords:** *Error Analysis, Surface Strategy Taxonomy, Writing, Second Language*

### **I. Introduction**

Language skills could be grouped into two categories: receptive and productive. There are two skills that are under the productive skill category. They are speaking and writing. However, both skills are different in various ways. The most obvious difference is how a learner masters the skill. Speaking is acquired naturally for first and second-language learners because a learner needs the skill to communicate using the target language on day to day basis (Peng, 2011). Meanwhile, writing is a culturally specific learned behavior. A language learner learns to write if he/she is a member of a literate society and usually if someone teaches him/her (Özdemir and Aydın, 2015). From here, we could see that writing has different levels of difficulty.

According to Akbar and Lio (2019), writing is the hardest skill for students because they need to know the grammar, vocabulary, coherence cohesion, semantics, and syntactic. In the case of Indonesian students, many EFL learners face some difficulties in mastering writing since there are some differences between Indonesian and English such as structural and grammatical terms and styles (Husin and Nurbayani, 2017). The other common obstacle that students always face is vocabulary limitations. Students often could not voice out their thoughts because they lack adequate stock of vocabulary (Al-Khasawneh, 2010). All these challenges and difficulties often cause the students to make errors when they write.

Making errors is a natural occurrence in the process of second language acquisition. According to Corder (1981), we live in an imperfect world and consequently, errors would always happen despite our best effort. However, it is different from the meaning of mistakes; an error has resulted from incomplete knowledge. A mistake in writing is made by a learner when they lack attention, fatigue, carelessness, or some other aspect of performance. When learners did some mistakes, they normally would be aware of them and could correct them with more or less complete assurance.

There is a couple of classifications for analysing errors, and surface strategy taxonomy is one of them. Surface strategy taxonomy is the way of analysing errors made by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982). There are four types of errors in this taxonomy:

- (1) Omission: The absence of an item that must appear in a well-formed utterance,  
 Example: Frank from Australia (X)  
 Frank *is* from Australia (✓)
  
- (2) Additions: The presence of an item that must not appear in a well-formed utterance,
  - Double Marking: Two items are marked for the same feature.  
 Example: His teacher's is Frank (X)  
 His teacher is Franks (✓)
  - Simple addition: The use of an item that should not appear in a well-formed utterance.  
 Example: I can't meet *with* him (X)  
 I can't meet him (✓)
  
- (3) Misformation: The use of the wrong form of the morpheme or structure,  
 Example: *His* live in Pondok Indah South Jakarta (X)  
 He lives in Pondok Indah Jakarta.
  
- (4) Misorder: The incorrect placement of a morpheme or group of morphemes in an utterance.  
 Example: He have *face very handsome* (X)  
 He has a very handsome face.

According to Corder (1981), making errors is an inevitable and necessary part of the learning process. The error provides precisely the sort of negative evidence which is necessary for the discovery of the concept of rule. Errors made by the learners are beneficial to teachers, learners, and researchers. For teachers, errors are evidence of learners' progress in language learning. Teachers can refer to it to improve learners' writing skills. For learners, errors can be the resources for their language learning. Lastly, errors provide evidence to the researcher on how learners learn and acquire the language (Corder: 1967). Presada and Badea (2014), for example, analyzed the causes of errors made by students in their translation classes and asserted that this method could help them sort out the real problems. It is confirmed that Error Analysis (EA) could lessen the number of errors in their students' work.

From the frame theory and explanation above, we could assume that using Error Analysis could have a positive effect on students' writing. The outcome of the error-based analysis of students' writing, therefore, serves as an effective means of improving students' language proficiency as it gives them an insight into some errors that they usually make in their writing. Moreover, by investigating students' errors, educators can get a real understanding of the problematic areas for learners, and they can evaluate the effectiveness of their instruction methods and materials as well (Pouladian, Bagheri, Sadighi, 2017).

## II. Methods

The objectives of this research are to describe the types of grammatical errors in students' descriptive writing and to find out the errors committed the most frequently in students' descriptive writing based on surface strategy taxonomy. To fulfill those, this research used a descriptive qualitative approach which produced descriptive data. The data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted in the form of verbal description words.

The research is conducted at Khadijah Islamic Boarding school by focusing on the descriptive writing of second-grade junior high school as the research respondent. The researcher took 22 students' descriptive writing to represent the whole students. After that, the grammatical errors in those writings would be the data for this research. The data then would be documented and analyzed carefully.

In analyzing the data, the procedures of error analysis are conducted (Ellis, 1997 as cited in Murtharho, 2017). The first one is the identification of errors. The second one is the description of errors. In this step, the researcher classifies the errors that have been identified into error classification based on surface strategy taxonomy by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982). The last step is counting the errors. The researcher makes a percentage of each type of grammatical error to know the most frequent type of grammatical errors. the researcher used methods by Corder in Ellis and Barhuizen's theory (2008, as cited in Solihah, 2017). The formula is as follows:

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$$

P= percentage

F= frequency of error occurred

N= Total number of error

### III. Results and Discussion

The results of the analysis are shown in the table below:

*Table 1: Inventory of Errors in Students' Samples*

No	Errors	Frequency	
		N	%
1	Omission	260	38,81%
2	Addition	90	13,43%
3	Misformation	286	42,69%
4	Misordering	34	12,59%
<b>Total</b>		<b>670</b>	<b>100%</b>

After the researcher counted the errors, the researcher found 670 grammatical errors in 22 papers. The most frequent error is the misformation error (286 or 42,69% of 670 total errors), and it is followed by omission error (260 or 38,81% of 670 total errors), addition error (90 or 13,43% of total errors), and the last is the misordering error (34 or 12,59% of 670 of total errors).

#### Misformation Error

Misformation errors are characterized by the use of the wrong form of the morpheme or structure. The learner supplies something but it is incorrect (Dulay, Burt, Krashen, 1982). The distribution of errors in misformation is presented in the table below:

*Table 2: The Distribution of Misformation Errors*

No	Grammatical Error	Number of Errors	Percentage %
1.	Action Verb	73	10,90%
2.	Noun	62	9,25%
3.	Determiner	33	4,93%
4.	Adjective	29	4,33%
5.	Preposition	23	3,43%
6.	Pronoun	23	3,43%
7.	Adverb	15	2,24%
8.	Auxiliary Verb	15	2,24%
9.	Conjunction	13	1,93%
10.	To- Infinitive	1	0,15%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>42,69%</b>

From table two, it can be seen that the misformation errors of action verbs have the highest number of errors, with 73 errors or 10,90% of the total number of errors. The lowest one is the misformation of errors of to- infinitive with 1 error or 0,15% of the total number of errors. The following sentence is one of the students' errors in misformation:

He *have* a good boy.

In that sentence, the verb '*have*' is incorrect. The student is describing someone's trait, not something that person has. Therefore, instead of '*have*', the sentence should use '*is*' as the verb.

### Omission Error

Omission errors are characterized by the absence of an item that must appear in a well-formed sentence (Dulay, Burt, Krashen, 1982). The following table illustrates the distribution of omission errors conducted by the students:

*Table 3: The Distribution of Omission Errors*

No	Grammatical Error	Number of Errors	Percentage %
1.	Determiner	64	9,55%
2.	Auxiliary Verb	47	7,01%
3.	Third person Singular	27	4,03%
4.	Pronoun	23	3,43%
5.	Preposition	21	3,13%
6.	Simple Omission	16	2,39%
7.	Plural (-s/es)	15	2,24%
8.	Past Tense (-d/ed)	11	1,64%
9.	To- Infinitive	10	1,49%
10.	Conjunction	8	1,19%
11.	Action Verb	8	1,19%
12.	Noun	4	0,60%
13.	Adverb	4	0,60%
14.	Progressive (-ing)	2	0,30%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>260</b>	<b>38,81%</b>

The

highest

number of errors in this category are omission errors of determiner with 64 errors or 9,55% of

the total number of errors. Meanwhile, the lowest number of errors is the omission of progressive (-ing) with 2 errors or 0,30% of the total number of errors. The following sentence is one example of students' omission errors:

He is  $\emptyset$  perfect boy.

In that sentence, the student omits the determiner before the adjective. The correct sentence should be "He is a perfect boy".

### Addition Error

Addition errors are characterized by the presence of an item that must not appear in a well-formed sentence (Dulay, Burt, Krashen, 1982). There are two types of addition errors: double marking and simple addition. From the table below, it could be seen that simple addition error (55 errors or 8,96% of the total number of errors) is higher than double marking (22 errors or 3,58% of the total number of errors).

Table 4: The Distribution of Addition Errors

No	Grammatical Error	Number of Errors	Percentage %
1.	Double Marking	24	3,58%
2.	Simple Addition	66	9,85%
	Total	90	13,43%

### Double Marking

Double marking is characterized by two items that are marked for the same feature. Below is the distribution of the double-marking errors:

Table 5: The Distribution of Double Marking Errors

No	Grammatical Error	Number of Errors	Percentage %
1.	Verb	8	1,19%
2.	Adverb	6	0,90%
3.	Pronoun	5	0,75%
4.	Noun	3	0,45%
5.	Auxiliary Verb	2	0,30%
	Total	24	3,58%

The most striking feature in this table is the double marking error of the action verb. There are 8 errors or 1,19% of the total number of errors. Meanwhile, the lowest double marking error is the double marking error of the auxiliary verb. It only has 1 error or 0,30% of the total errors. For example:

His teacher 's is Frank.

In this sentence, the auxiliary verb is produced twice. The English rule for tense formation is: it may be marked syntactically only once. Therefore, the correct sentence should be "His teacher is Frank."

### Simple Addition

Simple addition errors are the additional items in a sentence that the students failed to delete that are not part of the double marking. Here is the distribution of simple addition errors:

No	Grammatical Error	Number of Errors	Percentage %
1.	Noun	10	3,70%
2.	Conjunction	9	3,33%
3.	Random Addition	8	2,96%
4.	Determiner	7	2,59%
5.	Preposition	7	2,59%
6.	Verb	5	1,85%
7.	Past Tense (-d/ed)	5	1,85%
8.	Adverb	4	1,48%
9.	Progressing (-ing)	3	1,11%
10.	To- Infinitive	3	1,11%
11.	Pronoun	3	1,11%
12.	Plural (-s/es)	2	0,74%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>9,85%</b>

In the table above, it could be seen that the highest number of simple addition errors is simple addition errors of the noun. There are 10 errors or 3,70% of total errors. It is just slightly higher than double marking errors of the conjunction. On the other hand, the lowest number of simple addition errors are simple addition errors of plural (-s/es). It only has 2 errors or 0,74% of total errors.

Simple addition errors are the “grab bag” subcategory of addition errors. If an addition error is not a double marking, it is called a simple addition. For example:

Calderioz have *as* six members.

The student has failed to delete a preposition in that sentence. The sentence should be “Calederioz has six members”.

### Misordering Errors

Misordering Errors are characterized by the incorrect placement of a morpheme or group of morphemes in a sentence (Dulay, Burt, Krashen, 1982). The table below shows the distribution of the misordering errors.

No	Grammatical Error	Number of Errors	Percentage %
1.	Adjective	15	5,56%
2.	Pronoun	7	2,59%
3.	Noun Phrase	6	2,22%
4.	Verb	6	2,22%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>12,59%</b>

Looking at the table above, it is clear that almost all of the errors are in form of phrases. In the case of this research, the students have made misordering errors that are word-for-word translations of their native language surface structure. For example:

He have *face very handsome*.

'*face very handsome*' is misordered. The English rule of adjective phrase order is the adjective should be placed before the noun as the adjective acts as the modifier of the noun. However, in this case, the student used the Indonesian language structure in writing the sentence, which was placing the adjective after the noun.

#### IV. Conclusion and Suggestion

In general, it could be seen that the students often make errors in their writing, especially misformation and omission errors. It is clear that the students are not familiar with the English language. They either wrote their sentences in a word-to-word translation from their mother language to the English language or if they knew some linguistic items in the English language, they were still not aware of the function of it.

For that reason, teachers should build their lesson plans and design the learning material around those weak areas of the learner's language first, focusing on those points particularly. The teachers should not move on to other weak areas without mentioning the previous material that has been taught to the learners. The teachers should keep repeating the previous material while teaching the new material so that the students would not forget the material they have learned. The teachers also have to encourage the students to be more active in speaking and writing while finding a way to correct them without making them feel discouraged.

Some limitations of this study are it only explored the surface elements of a language and was limited only analysis of the two questions. There are many gaps that future researchers that could be covered, such as the coherence and cohesion of a written text made by students, etc. There is a lot of room for research on this topic. Spoken language errors could also be analyzed to improve learners' communicative skills.

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