

## Analysis of Grammatical Errors in the Writing of the Eleventh Grade Students at SMA Labschool UNTAD Palu

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### ABSTRACT

The study aimed to investigate errors in students' writing assignments and identify which errors students committed most often. This research was prompted by the fact that students in SMA Labschool UNTAD Palu struggle with the simple past tense as a language feature in recount texts. Utilizing a descriptive quantitative design, the study involved 15 students as the sample. Using the Surface Strategy Taxonomy by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen as a guide, it was shown that students commit all types of grammatical errors. Misformation was committed the most with a total of 127 occurrences (80,89%). Omission ranked second with 20 appearances (12,74%), followed by addition errors with 9 appearances (5,73%), and misordering ranked last with only 1 appearance (0,64%). The high number of misformation errors indicated that students were struggling to form correct verb tenses and to choose the correct word form. This suggests that students' understanding of English morphology and tense usage is inadequate, especially in forming sentences with past-tense verbs.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

English has four main components regarding skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Out of the four, writing is considered the most intricate skill to learn. Anh [1] states that writing skills are an important part of communication through which people can express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions. Writing is the skill of presenting pieces of information and/or ideas into sentences and then into paragraphs, as well as connecting every single one of them cohesively and coherently from one to another by the language aspects. The process is based on the structural ways of a particular text's type. However, writing in a foreign language often poses many challenges, one of which stems from the language's own rules.

It is not surprising that, in many cases, students struggle to construct written work due to their grammatical knowledge. A study from Napitupulu [2] shows the same idea. According to the study, grammatical errors are the most frequent issues among students.

Among the other types of error, namely syntactic, lexical, and substantive, grammatical errors lead with a huge margin by almost half of the total errors (42.4 %).

In writing, many students struggle to grasp the basics of writing a text. For the case in SMA LABSCHOOL UNTAD Palu, after brief observations, the researcher found the students' struggle related to the simple past tense as the language feature of the recount text, which is the same problem shown in the data of studies by Fitria [3], Khairinisaak et al. [4], and Pratiwi et al. [5]. Students are struggling when constructing verbal sentences consisting of irregular verbs of verb 2. In short, the problems that occur in writing the text are grammatical errors.

To further analyze and group the errors, the surface strategy taxonomy proposed by Dulay [6] served as a guide for this research. The taxonomy provides four types of categories: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. This error analysis taxonomy was chosen because the researcher wanted to know which kinds of errors most students commit in their writing. In addition, the difference between mistake and error is that a mistake is commonly known as a "performance error" or a "competence error." The term "mistakes" has shifted to what we now call performance errors.

In contrast, the term "errors" was used to refer to systematic differences resulting from the condition in which the learner is still learning and developing knowledge of the language's rule system. Moreover, distinguishing performance and competence errors is essential, but it is not surprising that it requires extensive treatment to determine the nature of a deviation. Thus, this study did not restrict the term "error" to only competence factors but rather to every "wrong", no matter what the characteristics.

Some previous studies have examined grammatical errors at various levels. Mufidah and Islam [7] performed a qualitative research on 26 eleventh-grade students, gathering 155 errors from their exposition text writing using Dulay et al. [6] surface strategy taxonomy, finding omission (44%) as the most frequent type, followed by addition (27%), misformation (23%), and misordering (6%). Another example is from Ma et al. [8], who organized a mixed-method study on 21 university students' descriptive writings and identified errors such as verbs (9.1%), subject-verb agreement (12.6%), articles (15.3%), and word order (19.8%) based on Dulay et al. [6] standard grammatical error analysis. Lastly, Latupeirissa and Sayd [9] examined 19 students at the State Polytechnic in Kupang using Vásquez's [10] linguistic category taxonomy, revealing that verb group errors (65.0%) were the most dominant, followed by prepositions (12.8%) and pronouns (9.8%).

The current study aimed to combine multiple aspects from each of the previous studies to fill the gap between. This study employed a descriptive quantitative approach, used Dulay et al. [6] surface strategy taxonomy, the sample will be 1 class from the eleventh grade of senior high school students located in Palu, Central Celebes, focused on recount text with the simple past tense as its language feature, and only selected errors were gathered regarding simple past tense sentence structure (adverb of time error, verb error, and word form & word order error). These combinations were utilized to answer 2 proposed research questions:

- a. What grammatical errors are committed in students' writing assignments?
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- b. What type of errors do students perform the most out of the four grammatical errors proposed by Dulay et al. [6]?

## **2. THE COMPREHENSIVE THEORETICAL BASIS**

Writing is an important part. The main focus of this research is to understand students' writing ability better and to serve as a data-collection instrument. The students' writing will provide a full perspective of how students understand how to express their thoughts through their hands. In this research, the recount text will be the main focus. Not just a purposeless choice, this type of text is a learning material for students. It is familiar to them since this text was taught when they were first introduced to English in junior high school. By understanding how writing works and drawing on studies by Gerot and Wignell [11], Knapp and Megan [12], Anh [1], Fitria et al. [13], and Siegar et al. [14], the researcher was able to develop the research instrument properly. This was important to ensure that the instrument covers everything necessary, thus avoiding any confusion.

Grammar is a foundation of writing. Collecting data and then examining it is much work. There are many aspects of grammar and grammatical errors, including understanding what grammar and grammatical errors are. By understanding the grammar and grammatical errors identified in studies by Anh [1], Ma'mun [15], Gerot and Wignell [11], Bungsu [16], Chaudhary and Zahrani [17], and Mustafa [18], it was possible to set boundaries for this research. The researcher will acknowledge which aspects fall into the grammar categories. In the end, this research will shed light on the types of grammatical errors that appear in students' writing assignments in response to the first research question.

Together with grammatical errors, error analysis is an essential step for this research. As previously mentioned, error analysis helps the researcher identify writing errors, describe them in specific error categories, explain what the errors are and how they occur, and evaluate them to avoid the same errors in the future. Studies and theories by James [19], Dulay et al. [6], Ellis [20], Gass and Selinker [21], and Vásquez [10], covered everything the researcher needed to utilize. Not only did the researcher conduct error analysis, but they also had a firm grasp of how the taxonomy works. A comprehension of the surface strategy taxonomy is a must. The researcher needed to provide thoroughly analyzed data on students' writing errors. Grouping them into omission, addition, misformation, and misordering not only provided clear data but also helped this research answer its research question.

## **3. METHOD**

### **3.1. Research Design**

According to Creswell [22], research design is a set of procedures for a certain type of research. This research will use a descriptive quantitative approach. Moreover, the quantitative approach involves various methods for testing specific theories about each variable. Variables in the research will be examined using a set of instruments, and the data will consist of numerical values analyzed using statistical procedures. The expected data for this research is about errors examined throughout students' writing. The data is then processed through several steps, resulting in numbers that will be analyzed further.

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On the other hand, Kothari [23] describes descriptive research as studies that focus on describing the characteristics of a targeted individual or group, using factual narratives. Numbers will be the end product after finishing the quantitative analysis of students' writing. Descriptive analysis remains a pivotal step following previous steps. This ensures every number has a reasoning, explanation, and better understanding, and not just a baseless assumption out of nowhere. The final results will provide a sufficient answer to the research questions.

### 3.2. Population & Sample

Creswell [22] points out that a population is a group of individuals or objects. In this context, the population is a group that the researcher is interested in studying. This research will focus on senior high school students at SMA LABSCHOOL UNTAD Palu, especially eleventh-grade students. This has gone through discussion among the researcher, the English teacher, and the school's headmaster regarding consent, anonymity, and permission to collect appropriate data. Moreover, the researcher requested that the university send a formal letter and the required documents to the school administration as a sign of proper and legal activity.

As for the sample, Creswell [22] provides more explanation. In short, a sample is a portion of the population that the researcher chooses to represent the whole population. Purposive sampling will be used to select the sample, and students in class XI IPA 3 will be the focus. The researcher collected pieces of information from the teacher. Having a conversation with the teacher supplied more diverse details. The reason behind choosing class XI IPA 3 as the sample is pretty straightforward. Among 7 classes, Class XI IPA 3 has the highest average student out of all classes. All the gathered information provides the researcher with a big-picture view of the population's situation in general and the sample specifically.

Table 1. Population

No	Class	Total
1	XI IPA 1	22
2	XI IPA 2	22
3	XI IPA 3	15
4	XI IPA 4	21
5	XI IPS 1	18
6	XI IPS 2	18
7	XI IPS 3	17
<b>Total</b>		<b>133</b>

### 3.3. Research Instrument

One of the main components of proper research design is the use of an instrument. Creswell [22] clarifies that an instrument refers to the tools and methods used to collect and measure data. There are various instruments to choose from, namely questionnaires, interviews, observations, and documents, and the choice depends on the research approach. The researcher will construct an instrument based on the research questions. The instrument

will consist of a writing assignment based on a recount text. The instrument will ask students to write a text about their most memorable high school experience so far, with the instruction: "Please create a recount text based on the topic. The text is no less than 3 paragraphs with 10 sentences in total!" To ensure the most authentic results from each student based on their own knowledge. The researcher applied a specific rule. For example, during the 90-minute frame, no smartphones or dictionaries were allowed. This instrument will provide the researcher with the necessary data by collecting students' writing and analyzing potential errors.

### **3.4. Technique of Data Collection**

Data collection began after the researcher had completed constructing the research design, including the instrument, based on the previously defined research question. This was in line with Kothari's [23] statement that data collection (or data gathering) is a step in the process of accumulating the necessary data. This step involves an instrument previously constructed.

After constructing the necessary instrument for this research, the researcher informed the school about the research plan. After that, the researcher shared the instrument with the students in the targeted class. After the time was up, the researcher collected their writing. Furthermore, the researcher analyzed the writing for the final results.

### **3.5. Technique of Data Analysis**

Continuing the data collection process, the researcher identified and classified every grammatical error in each student's writing, sentence by sentence, looking for potential errors. By understanding the rule/formula for the simple past tense, the researcher identified errors in the writing. Moreover, the exact writing was recreated, together with supervisors, as a second coder, into a more detailed and precise form. Every error counted, even if it appeared more than 1 time in 1 writing. This process was guided by the steps of error analysis suggested by Vásquez [10]. The steps began with identifying every possible grammatical error, or any suspicion of one. Moreover, this research implemented the error analysis proposed by Dulay et al. [6] and supported by the steps by Ellis [20] (i.e., describing and explaining). The chosen error analysis steps provided clear categories by providing a surface strategy taxonomy. The taxonomy consists of four types of errors: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. The percentage of errors was calculated based on the cumulative errors across the four categories. For example, the researcher counted the number of addition errors among the total errors. Then, the researcher counted the number of double-marking errors relative to other sub-addition errors.

## **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Findings**

The researcher did the test on September 25th, 2025. Of the 15 students who took the test, only 8 had writing that met the 10-sentence standard specified in the research instrument. Most students admitted they did not know what to write. This was obviously a vocabulary-related problem. Students were unable to translate their thoughts into writing

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because they had mastered only a limited vocabulary. This confusion led to a lack of sentences in their writing.

Table 2. Students' Writing Classification

Students' Writing Output	Number of Students	Percentage	Sentence Range
Complete Paragraph	8	53,3%	10 Sentences or more
Partial Paragraph	7	46,7%	5-8 Sentences

As previously mentioned, only 8 students, or roughly 53% of the total, met the standard of 10 sentences arranged for the research instrument, ranging from at least 10 sentences, which is called "Complete Paragraph". Partial Paragraph means that the students' writing did not achieve the target of 10 sentences. Based on that, 7 students, or approximately 47%, were categorized in this segment because their texts had 5 to 8 sentences. Given that almost half of the students' writing did not reach a certain standard, every data point still represents important information about students' knowledge. Ignoring the rest of the data, as the population representatives do, would introduce bias that might affect the overall research results/findings. Therefore, the number of sentences in a text is not a problem; the analysis is based on the number of errors present in the overall available data corpus.

Table 3. Recapitulation of Surface Strategy Taxonomy Errors

No	Students	Types of Errors			
		Omission	Addition	Misformation	Misordering
1	Student 1	4		11	
2	Student 2			2	
3	Student 3			9	
4	Student 4	2	2	17	
5	Student 5	4	2	13	
6	Student 6	3		16	1
7	Student 7			8	
8	Student 8	1	2	12	
9	Student 9	1	1	7	
10	Student 10			11	
11	Student 11	1		9	
12	Student 12			3	
13	Student 13	2	2	4	
14	Student 14			2	
15	Student 15	2		3	
Total of Each Error		20	9	127	1
Total of All Errors		157			

Table 4. Frequency and Percentage

Type of Error	Total Frequency	Percentage
Omission	20	12,74%
Addition	9	5,73%
Misformation	127	80,89%
Misordering	1	0,64%
Total	157	100%

The data shown above were assessed through every single student's writing, regardless of the writing output. After a series of calculations, the researcher arrived at these numbers. Briefly, among 15 students' writing, misformation is the most common error, with 127 occurrences, or roughly 80,89% of the total errors. Omission followed with 20 appearances or 12,74% of the total errors. Addition is the third most common error, with 9 appearances (5,73% of the total errors). Finally, misordering occurs in the last position, resulting in only 1 error among 15 students' writings (0,64%). After calculating every aspect, there were 157 total errors from 15 students' writing, as 100% of the total.

#### **4.1.1 Omission Errors**

There were 20 or 12,74% of total errors that fell into this category due to the students' habit of omitting some elements that are necessary for the sentence. These errors might affect the message's overall meaning.

- (1) ..., we back to our home.
- (2) And I so happy because ...
- (3) There a lot of funny moments.

Every example above shares a similar issue. 3 sentences are lacking in past marker to be considered as a simple past tense. Sentence (1) is missing its verb, making it confusing. By adding "went" after the subject, it clears the meaning. On the other hand, sentence (2) is missing its to be, and adding "was" will finish the problem. The last example also has the same problem. Unlike the second example, this sentence uses the plural marker "a lot". Looking at that, the perfect addition is "were" to match the context in the sentence.

#### **4.1.2 Addition Errors**

There were 9 errors, or 5,73% of the total errors. These errors are marked by the appearance of some elements that are not necessarily needed inside the sentence. Out of 3 subcategories, only 2 appeared in total, with double marking being the subcategory that occurs the most in addition errors, followed by simple addition. Regularization does not make an appearance in every student's writing, a sign that students have at least a base knowledge of when to use -ed for verb 2 context.

- (4) They're say hi to me ...
- (5) I'm come from Java.
- (6) I'm feel so tired.
- (7) We cook **very** a lot of food.

Sentences (4), (5), and (6) reveal the problem among the students. Besides other types of errors, these 3 sentences have double-marking errors, meaning that some students do not have a better understanding of how to use either to be/copula or verb correctly in a sentence. From the evidence, we can identify that the student uses the copula together with a verb. It is obviously incorrect. Since this context is about the simple past tense for recount text, the usage of the copula above ("are" and "am") is not in the right condition. Instead, the sentence only needs verb 2 to be able to stand and deliver a correct message. On the other hand, sentence (7) shows a simple addition error marked by the appearance of "very".

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Because it is neither regularization nor double marking, the addition of “very” lies as a simple addition. The correct form of every sentence above is shown below:

- (8) They **said** hi to me ...
- (9) I **came** from Java.
- (10) I **felt** so tired.
- (11) We cooked **a lot** of food.

#### 4.1.3 Misformation Errors

There was 127 errors, which accounted for 80,89% of the total errors. It occurred because students constantly use the wrong form of a morpheme to represent a message. As with addition errors, only 2 subcategories appeared.

- (12) ..., we **meet** in school.
- (13) After we **arrive**, we **eat** first.
- (14) At the time, we **gather** at Vonne’s house.
- (15) And then, we **buy** ticket.
- (16) After that, we **watch** movie.

Students tend to use verb 1 instead of verb 2 inside the sentence. Hence, archi-form is the most common error in every student’s writing. Whether it is a regular or irregular verb, students consistently use verb 1. Since their assignment was to construct a recount text, it is clearly an error to use verb 1 when the text itself is based on the simple past tense as the language feature. The reason is a lack of knowledge of that subject; therefore, students repeat the use of verb 1. This can be proved by the errors in the following subcategory, archiform, in the misformation category.

- (17) My classmates and I **went** to XXI ...
- (18) After that, we **go** to “Palu Grand Mall”.
- (19) After the film, we **went** home.
- (20) **I’m** nervous and scared.
- (21) It **was** a memorable moment with my friend.
- (22) **I’m** so happy...

These examples show an inconsistency in verb usage, leading to an alternating forms error. Unlike archi-forms, this type of error arises when the student has a basic knowledge of word forms but is unable to identify the contexts in which they should be used. The verb “go” and the copula “am” are the only words that fall into this category. This inconsistency suggests that the student has not mastered the rule of tense, specifically for recount texts with the simple past tense, with the main verb as verb 2 and the to be/copula in past form. Thus, shifting between “go” and “went” also “am” and “was” disturbs the comprehensibility of the narrative.

#### 4.1.4 Misordering Errors

There was only 1 or 0,64%, being the least of all errors. An error falls into this category when students cannot place the word in the correct order.

- (23) In February, me and my classmates to do **practice cooking**.
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This sentence contains a misordering error at the phrase level. The student wrote "practice cooking," which reverses the correct noun phrase order. Since the intended meaning refers to a "cooking practice" activity, the word cooking should function as a modifier placed before the noun practice. In English noun phrase structure, modifiers precede the head noun. Therefore, practice cooking should be rearranged as cooking practice.

## 4.2 Discussion

Based on the research findings above, misformation is the most common error in students' writing, with 127 occurrences. This has a similar result to other research, such as Siregar et al. [14] and Ma'mun [15], having misformation as the most common error. Out of 127, 12 of them were alternating forms, and the rest fell into archi-form errors. On the alternating form, every error was only about to be "was" and the verb "went". The students tend to switch the usage of both words with their counterparts. Generally, the correct form was used first, and they would likely switch to the correct form in the following Paragraph. They might use "went" in the first Paragraph together with an adverb of time correctly, and then randomly use "go" the next time they use it again. Other students also used the same word, but the difference was that they used it only once in the text, whereas the writing with alternating errors used it multiple times. That caused the number of archi-forms errors to skyrocket. The characteristic of every student's writing was that archi-forms errors were dominating, marked by the repeated use of verb 1. In some verbs, they used the correct form, but mostly incorrectly for both regular and irregular verbs.

Furthermore, the students' writing shows that students use more regular verbs than irregular ones. By a very small margin, students used the -ing suffix with the verb, especially when creating sentences with numerous verbs. Based on the explanation above, the researcher can conclude that every student has a major issue with using verbs in various contexts, specifically in recount texts where the simple past tense with verb 2 is the main content. With the result concluded, it needs more attention, as this type of error is generally made by every student. Some learning examples that can help them learn much better to understand more, such as contrastive drills between V1 and V2. This would help them memorize and understand the regular and irregular verbs, thus increasing their overall vocabulary.

Omission takes second place with 20 total errors (12,74%), in the same order as [24] in their research. In contrast, other research by Mufidah and Islam [7] found that omission was the most common error, with 44% of cases, similar to the 37% reported by Kumala et al. [25]. These differences show that the students of SMA Labschool UNTAD Palu have a slightly better understanding of when to omit an aspect in their writing. Based on their writing, students typically omit the "be" aspect in their writing, as shown in the previous part. This error arises from the inability to identify which "be" is suitable to use, let alone group which "be" is used for present and past contexts. This phenomenon is caused by the lack of vocabulary, leading to these errors. Students admitted it was hard for them to write the English text directly because they did not know what to write.

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The third most common error is addition, with 9 appearances (5,73%), consisting of 7 double markings, 2 simple additions, and no regularization. Research by Siregar et al. [14] shows the same order: 20,57%, and [24] shows 5,14%. Other research has yielded various results: last place with 9% error by Ma'mun [15], second place with 32% by Kumala et al. [25], and 27% by Mufidah and Islam [7]. As previously mentioned, double marking was the most common error in addition. Students tend to use 'to be' (copula) with a verb in one sentence. This confusion stems from a lack of understanding of how verbs work. They could not manage to choose whether to put only the verb as a verbal sentence or only the copula as a nominal sentence. In general, students lacked knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, which affected most aspects, leading to errors across every category.

The least error in every writing is misordering, with only 1 error. This shows that the students were aware of sentence word order. One error made by one student was understandable, given their method of constructing a text, as the researcher pointed out in the previous explanation. Lack of grammatical knowledge, combined with lack of vocabulary, and the step in writing, resulted in this error occurring in the writing. This result matches the outputs of several studies. The research by Siregar et al. [14] found that 7,66% of the total errors were misordering, making it the least among others. Another study by Maharani et al. [24] reported the same result, with 3,95% and the least amount of errors, together with a study by Kumala et al. [25] with only 1% of the total, and lastly, a study by Mufidah and Islam [7] with 6%. On the other hand, a study by Ma'mun [15] found that misordering was the second most common error, accounting for 28% of total errors.

This study had several limitations. The sample consisted of a small group of students (n=15), equal to just 1 class in an entire school. The results might be different if it were conducted with a larger sample. The researcher would suggest that future studies use a similar method with a larger sample, increase the number of assignments to yield more diverse results, or conduct a pre-post test to evaluate the effectiveness of a teaching method for students and teachers.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Based on an analysis of students' writing assignments, the researcher found that students made grammatical errors, as reported by Dulay et al. [6]. Grammatical errors committed in students' writing assignments were namely omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. Omission errors were distinguished by the lack of a composition that must appear at a certain place/context in order to form grammatically correct writing. Addition errors appeared when the writer added something unnecessary or placed it in the wrong location within a sentence. Misformation errors were those with the wrong form of morpheme/structure. Information was technically delivered well, but it could still cause confusion. Lastly, misordering errors occurred when the learner placed a morpheme or a group of morphemes in an inappropriate position. These findings indicate that students are still struggling to apply English grammatical rules.

The most common error among the four grammatical errors proposed by Dulay et al. [6] was misformation, with a total of 127 occurrences (80,89%). Omission ranked second with 20 appearances (12,74%), followed by addition errors with 9 appearances (5,73%), and

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misordering ranked last with only 1 appearance (0,64%). The high number of misinformation errors indicated that students were struggling to form correct verb tenses and to choose the correct word form. This suggests that students' understanding of English tense usage is inadequate, especially in constructing a sentence with a past-tense verb.

Based on the findings of this research, some suggestions are offered. First, English teachers are recommended to be more active and effective in providing detailed explanations of students' mistakes and difficulties across various aspects of the learning process. Along with the adoption of the new curriculum, adopting a new teaching approach would be recommended, such as a more active and interactive teaching method.

Second, students are supposed to act immediately when they realize that they have problems with English proficiency. In this era, learning is much easier than in the past, thanks to the widespread use of AI (Artificial Intelligence). Another common way is to study together inside a community. Joining the English club will be much better since they will surround themselves with others who have the same interest.

Lastly, the researcher expresses its aspiration for future research to conduct more extensive exploration of this topic, especially examining additional factors underlying potential errors and various teaching methods to improve students' writing comprehension.

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