

AN ERROR ANALYSIS OF USING SIMPLE PRESENT TENSE IN WRITING DESCRIPTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This Descriptive text is a type of writing that explains or illustrates people, places, and objects by focusing on their physical characteristics or appearances. This study analyzes students' grammatical errors in using the simple present tense in descriptive texts. Conducted on 24 second-semester English Education students at HKBP Nommensen University Medan, the research used a qualitative descriptive method and surface strategy taxonomy (Dulay et al., 1982) to classify errors into omission, addition, misinformation, and misordering. The population of this research included all second-semester students of the English Education Study Program at HKBP Nommensen University Medan during the academic year of the study. These students had completed Writing I and were enrolled in Writing II, which covers the use of grammatical structures such as the simple present tense in descriptive writing. Using purposive sampling, one class (Class B) was selected, consisting of 24 students who met the criteria and were deemed suitable for analyzing grammatical errors. The primary instrument was a supervised writing task, where students wrote a five-paragraph (200–300 words) descriptive text about a person, place, or thing within 60 minutes. Their texts were analyzed using the Surface Strategy Taxonomy (Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982), which classifies errors into omission, addition, misinformation, and misordering. For data validity, two grammar experts assisted in reviewing and confirming the identified errors through triangulation. From 263 simple present tense usages, 141 (53.61%) were incorrect. The most frequent error was omission (40%), followed by addition (29%), misinformation (18%), and misordering (13%). These findings indicate that students still face difficulties in mastering simple present tense, especially in forming grammatically complete sentences.

Keywords:

Present tense, Error, Descriptive text

1. Introduction

Writing skills are one of the four basic skills in learning English which include the ability to organize sentences well, choose the right vocabulary, and use the correct grammar structure and rules. (Rahimi, 2025) In practice, many students have difficulty writing, especially in terms of the use of tenses, which has a direct impact on the meaning of the sentences to be conveyed. (K. Sipayung & Pangaribuan, 2019) This mistake shows that although writing is an important communication tool for conveying ideas, emotions, and thoughts, students are still not fully able to apply grammar rules well, especially in the use of simple present tense (Journal et al., 2022). As stated by Widianita (2023), many students often ignore basic rules in writing such as articles, sentence patterns, and the use of tenses. One of the biggest challenges faced is the application of the now simple form, especially in distinguishing the use of verbs in singular and plural subjects. This is due to the fundamental difference between the grammatical structure of English and Indonesian, where in Indonesian, the form of the verb does not change according to the subject or time.

In the context of academic writing, particularly descriptive texts, the simple present tense has an important role because it is used to describe objects in actual and detailed detail. (K. T. Sipayung et al., 2021) Descriptive text aims to arouse the reader's imagination about an object, so it is necessary to use the right tense (Muniroh et al., 2024). According to (Abdullah Syukur & Ardhy Supraba, 2022), the writing of a descriptive text not only reflects the ability to convey information, (K. T. Sipayung, 2021) but also

demonstrates the extent of the student's understanding of grammar, including the use of the simple present tense in explaining general facts and static conditions (Yunanda et al., 2022).

Based on the results of observations of second-semester students of the HKBP Nommensen English Education Study Program, University of Medan, many errors were found in the use of simple present tense in descriptive texts, such as in the sentence "He likes to cook" which should be "He likes to cook". Errors that appear can be classified as verb form errors, inconsistencies in subject and verb mismatches, omissions of important elements such as -s/-es, and unnecessary additions of elements (Fadilah, 2022). These types of errors are caused by interlingual (native language influence) and intralingual (limited understanding of the target language) (Gumelar, 2024). According to Leo (2021) quoted from (Mukarromah & Suryanto, 2022), the form is now simply used to express common facts, repetitive actions, and universal truths. Therefore, errors in their use can obscure the meaning and interfere with the effectiveness of communication. This is reinforced by the view of Wishon and Burks (1998) who stated that descriptive texts describe how something looks, sounds or feels, and requires the right grammatical structure to effectively evoke the reader's mood and imagination (Journal et al., 2022).

Previous research was conducted by (Lestari, 2020) It shows that the correct use of the simple present tense by students in descriptive texts only reaches 52.86%, with an error rate of 47.14%. The most common type of error based on the taxonomy of surface strategies was a misformation of 39.39%. This mistake often occurs because students have not been able to adjust the verb form to the singular or plural subject. Meanwhile, the least error was the addition type, with a percentage of only 6.07%. These results are in line with the results of research from (Journal et al., 2022) which found 84 total errors consisting of 38 omission errors (45.23%), 7 addition errors (8.33%), 17 misinformation errors (20.23%) and 22 sequencing errors (26.19%). From the data above, it can be seen that negligence errors are the most common mistakes made by students. Meanwhile, (Mukarromah & Suryanto, 2022) The most errors were found to be influenced by intra-lingual errors with a total of 84 errors found caused by intra-lingual errors stemming from negligence (46 errors), addition (4 errors), improper formation (32 errors) and setting errors (2 errors). The error factor of students is caused by the fact that they forget the present tense formula, some are still confused about distinguishing verbal and nominal sentences, and some are still confused about applying the use of s/es in the present tense.

Although several researchers have previously conducted research on the use of simple present tense in descriptive texts, there are still shortcomings in terms of population and education focus. Most of the research was done in secondary education. Meanwhile, the emphasis on universities, especially first-semester English education students, is still limited. Therefore, in accordance with these gaps, this study aims to identify the most common mistakes used by English Education students in the 2nd semester of HKBP Nommensen University Medan in using simple present tense in descriptive texts and provide pedagogical recommendations that can be used by teachers to improve the effectiveness of grammar learning, especially in the use of simple present tense in writing descriptive texts. With this research, it is hoped that students can improve their ability to use grammar skills properly and can improve the results of writing that are more effective and communicative.

2. Method

In this study, the researcher used a qualitative descriptive method to analyze grammatical errors made by 2nd semester students of HKBP Nommensen University Medan in the use of the simple present tense in descriptive text writing. This method was chosen because it allows for an in-depth and contextual analysis of language use in authentic student writing. The qualitative descriptive approach is particularly suitable for identifying patterns of error and explaining them within the context of learner interlanguage and development stages. The specific framework employed in this analysis is the surface structure taxonomy proposed by (Kadwa & Alshenqeeti, 2020) Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982), which classifies errors into four categories: omission, addition, misinformation, and misordering. This taxonomy was selected because it provides a clear, structured means of identifying the form of grammatical deviations, making it appropriate for analyzing errors related specifically to the simple present tense. The goal is not only to identify errors but also to understand how and why students deviate from standard usage, which aligns well with the exploratory nature of qualitative research.

The population in this study consists of all students in the 2nd semester of the English Education Study Program. The sample was selected purposively from one class (Class B) consisting of 24 students who had completed the Writing I course and were currently enrolled in Writing II. This purposive sampling ensured that participants had already been introduced to the basic rules of grammar, particularly the use of tenses, and were thus suitable subjects for analyzing more advanced issues in grammar application. The instrument used in this research was a writing task. Students were asked to compose a descriptive text of five paragraphs (200–300 words) about a person, place, or object. This task was administered under direct supervision to minimize the possibility of outside help or plagiarism and ensure the authenticity of the students' language production.

Students were given 60 minutes to complete the assignment. After submission, their work was analyzed for grammatical errors related to the simple present tense. Each error was categorized using the surface structure taxonomy, and the frequency of each error type was calculated and interpreted qualitatively. To enhance the validity of the data, triangulation was used by involving two expert lecturers in grammar who independently reviewed the error analysis. The researcher assumes that all participants had received foundational grammar instruction, including the use of tenses, and that any errors observed could therefore be analyzed as developmental or performance-based rather than stemming from complete lack of knowledge.

This study is limited to examining misuse of the simple present tense in descriptive texts and does not address other grammatical features such as, punctuation, or prepositions. Moreover, because the research employs a qualitative approach, its findings are not intended to be generalized to the broader population but rather to provide a detailed understanding of specific language learning challenges. The research procedure included asking each student to select a topic from a set of predefined options and write a descriptive text. The researcher then identified correct and incorrect uses of the simple present tense, categorized each error, and calculated the frequency using the following formula:

$$P = \frac{n1}{\sum N} \times 100\%$$

Where :

P : Percentage of each error

n1 : Total of the given error

$\sum N$: Total of the whole error

3. Results and Discussion

Based on the research instrument, the researcher found errors in writing descriptive text. Common errors that students often make in writing descriptive text are errors in expressing plural and singular, inappropriate word choice, and, and errors in the form of subject-verb agreement. This was found during data collection to identify all student errors when writing descriptive text. Based on the results of students' descriptive text writing, it was found that all students included four types of errors including omission, addition, misinformation, and misordering in writing descriptive text using present tense.

This research was actually completed on May 17, 2025 from the 2nd semester of English education students of Nommensen HKBP University of Medan. The results of the study are listed in the table below:

Table 1. Total correct and Error

Sample	Total Simple Present Tense	The Correct Use of Simple Present Tense	Total Errors in Using Simple Present
24	263	122	141
	Percentage	46,39%	53,61%

The results above indicate that students have a good understanding of the simple present tense, with a total of 46.39%. The most visible is that students have correctly placed the use of -s or es in sentences depending on the subject. As in the sentence: *My mom is a gentle but firm person. she always teaches me with patience and love.* But the result is 7.22% only difference, so it cannot be said that students really understand Simple Present with a very good level. From a total of 263 Simple Present Tense, students still make as many as

141 sentences in their writing. Below clearly explained their error which has been classified according to surface strategy taxonomy:

Table 2. Total Error Type

No.	Type of Error	Total Error	Percentage
1.	Omission	56	40%
2.	Addition	41	29%
3.	Misformation	26	18%
4.	Misordering	18	13%

Based on these results it can be seen that the most errors were in omission of 56 errors (40%). Omission is an error that occurs due to loss of items in a form that is really needed in well-formed. This error is most clearly seen when students omit articles such as a / an and the in a sentence they write. For example: *My mom is good person.* Or *My brother is superhero for me.* Next is addition. Addition became the second most error after omission with 29%. Addition is the addition of an item that is not needed in well-formed writing. For example : *He doesn't likes it,* it should be *He doesn't like it* because there is already *does.* With 18%, misformation becomes the third error that is often done by students. Misformation is an error where the use of morpheme or structure is wrong. The most error made by students in using to be, how should is and are used depends on singular or plural. For example : *My mom very beautiful,* it should be *My mother is very beautiful.*

Finally, the least errors made by students are misordering, with 13% mistake. Misordering is an incorrect morpheme placement because of the confusion that occurs when composing sentences because students are still affected by the sentence structure in Indonesian. For example : *She have hair a long,* it should be *She has a long hair.* From the explanation above, it can be stated that students made four types of mistakes in writing descriptive texts using the simple present, this is in accordance with Dulay at al's theory, namely Surface Strategy Taxonomy (1982) whose analysis on 24 students in the class found 53.61% errors, there are four types of errors in the Surface Strategy Taxonomy, namely: Omission (40%), Addition (29%), Misformation (18%), and Misordering (13%). In the previous research conducted by the previous research, the previous research was carried out by (Lestari, 2020) The results obtained that students used the correct simple present when writing descriptive texts reached 52.86%. Only slightly different from the total mistakes they made which was 47.14%. The most common mistake they made based on the taxonomy of surface strategies was on the misformation with a percentage of 39.39%. The mistake made by these students mostly is, how they should adjust the plural or singular form. While the least mistake is addition. They rarely make this mistake, so the error percentage is only 6.07%. Compared to previous research by (Journal et al., 2022) The researchers found 84 total errors consisting of 38 omission errors (45.23%), 7 addition errors (8.33%), 17 misinformation errors (20.23%) and 22 sequencing errors (26.19%). From the data above, it can be seen that negligence errors are the most common mistakes made by students. This is reinforced by research from (Mukarromah & Suryanto, 2022) The most errors were found to be influenced by intra-lingual errors with a total of 84 errors found caused by intra-lingual errors stemming from negligence (46 errors), addition (4 errors), improper formation (32 errors) and setting errors (2 errors). The research conducted by the researcher with the previous research was to find that of the 4 types of surface taxonomy, the most errors were in the type of omission (40%) in this study. However, in the study (journal et al., 2022) there were more omission errors compared to this study, namely (25.23%) while in the sustainable study there were no omission errors as well as in the study (Rajagukguk, 2023) that omission errors did not exist.

4. Conclusion

This study reveals that second-semester English Education students at Nommensen HKBP University Medan continue to face significant challenges in using the simple present tense accurately when writing descriptive texts. Although a slight majority (53.61%) of the simple present tense usage was correct, the error rate (46.39%) is still high, indicating a gap in students' mastery of this fundamental grammatical structure. The most frequent errors, based on surface strategy taxonomy, were omissions (40%), particularly the omission of essential grammatical elements like articles and auxiliary verbs. Additions (29%), misformations (18%), and misorderings (13%) followed, each showing specific patterns of

misunderstanding in subject-verb agreement, verb forms, and sentence structure, often influenced by both interlingual (L1 interference) and intralingual factors.

These findings suggest that despite exposure to grammar instruction and writing practice, students still struggle with applying simple present-tense rules correctly and consistently in context. The results highlight the need for more targeted pedagogical interventions, including explicit instruction, practical exercises focusing on tense usage in real contexts, and continuous feedback mechanisms. Therefore, this research underscores the importance of strengthening grammatical competence, particularly in the use of the simple present tense in early semesters of teacher education. By addressing these challenges early, students will be better equipped for advanced academic writing and professional communication in English. The persistence of these grammatical errors raises important questions about the effectiveness of current instructional strategies and the role of language transfer in learners' developmental processes. It is essential to explore whether the teaching methodologies currently employed are sufficiently communicative and context-based to support long-term retention and practical application of grammar rules. Additionally, examining the impact of learner attitudes, motivation, and exposure to authentic English use outside the classroom could yield valuable insights.

Future research could focus on longitudinal studies tracking the development of students' grammatical competence across multiple semesters to identify when and how significant improvements occur. Experimental studies comparing different teaching interventions, such as inductive vs. deductive grammar instruction, or traditional vs. technology-enhanced learning tools, could provide evidence-based recommendations for curriculum design. Moreover, qualitative investigations into learners' cognitive processes during writing tasks may offer a deeper understanding of the sources of grammatical errors and inform more personalized instructional strategies.

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