

AN ERROR ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' WRITING DESCRIPTIVE TEXT (A Case Study at Tenth Grade Student of SMAN 9 Banda Aceh)

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Abstract

This study is aimed at analyzing and classifying the types of errors made by tenth-grade students of SMAN 9 Banda Aceh in writing descriptive texts and identifying the most dominant type of error. Writing descriptive texts remains a challenge for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students because it requires mastery of grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure. This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design. The participants of this study were 26 tenth-grade students from class X-3 at SMAN 9 Banda Aceh. The data were collected through descriptive writing tasks and analyzed using the Surface Strategy Taxonomy proposed by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982), which consists of omission, addition, misformation, and misordering errors. The findings revealed that the students made a total of 421 errors. The errors were categorized into 246 misformation errors (58.43%), 115 omission errors (27.32%), 38 addition errors (9.03%), and 22 misordering errors (5.23%). The results indicated that misformation was the most dominant type of error made by the students. These errors were primarily related to incorrect tense usage, verb forms, subject-verb agreement, and spelling. The findings suggest that tenth-grade students of SMAN 9 Banda Aceh still experience considerable difficulties in grammar and writing mechanics when composing descriptive texts. Therefore, teachers are recommended to provide more focused instruction on grammar, particularly simple present tense, subject-verb agreement, and writing mechanics, as well as intensive proofreading activities to improve students' writing accuracy.

Keywords: *Error Analysis, Descriptive Text, Surface Strategy Taxonomy.*

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Introduction

Language is a fundamental tool for communication that allows people to convey ideas, opinions, and experiences. In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language across all levels of education to develop students' proficiency in four core skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among these skills, writing is widely regarded as one of the most complex, as it requires learners not only to generate ideas but also to organize information logically and apply appropriate linguistic conventions to communicate meaning clearly and accurately. Writing is the process of translating

thoughts into coherent written texts (Faudi, 2016). According to Fitri et al. (2022), writing demands consistent practice because learners must simultaneously attend to multiple elements: grammar, vocabulary, text structure, and mechanics. For EFL learners, writing poses an additional challenge, as they must produce texts following a linguistic system that differs substantially from their first language.

One text genre introduced to tenth-grade students in Indonesian senior high schools is descriptive text. The primary purpose of descriptive text is to portray a specific person, place, object, or animal by detailing its unique characteristics and features (Siregar and Dongoran, 2020). Structurally, descriptive texts have two core components: identification, which introduces the subject to be described, and description, which elaborates on the subject's qualities. Linguistically, descriptive texts typically use the simple present tense, specific participants, descriptive adjectives, and linking verbs. Despite being considered a foundational text type, many students still face significant difficulties when writing descriptive texts. These challenges often manifest as grammatical errors, inappropriate word choice, incorrect word forms, and flawed sentence structure all of which can reduce the clarity and precision of students' writing (Apriyanti and Nurdini, 2021).

Several prior studies have examined student errors in descriptive writing. Mardiah (2021) analyzed errors among university students and found omission to be the most prevalent error type. Similarly, Putri et al. (2022) reported that omission errors dominated the writing of junior high school students. Conversely, Amelia (2023) found that verb-related errors and general language use difficulties were most common among tenth-grade learners. These divergent findings suggest that error patterns vary based on learners' educational background, proficiency level, and local learning context. While writing errors have been researched extensively, there is limited empirical research specifically examining tenth-grade students at SMAN 9 Banda Aceh using Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's (1982) Surface Strategy Taxonomy. This study addresses this gap by systematically classifying and analyzing students' descriptive writing errors into four categories: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. This study is guided by the following research questions: Using Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's (1982) Error Analysis, what types of errors are most commonly made by tenth-grade students of SMAN 9 Banda Aceh in writing descriptive texts? Addressing this question is expected to provide practical benefits for several stakeholders; students can gain greater awareness of their common writing difficulties; teachers can design more effective writing lessons and targeted feedback strategies; and future researchers can use this work as a reference for related studies in similar contexts.

Research Method

This study employed a qualitative case study design. This design was selected because the study aimed to investigate and describe students' writing errors in their natural learning context without manipulating any variables. A qualitative approach allows researchers to systematically identify, classify, and interpret patterns of errors in students' written work in detail (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2012).

The research was conducted at SMAN 9 Banda Aceh during the second semester of the 2025 academic year. The participants were 26 tenth-grade students from Class X IPAS 3. They were selected through purposive sampling, as the class was judged to represent the study's focus and had demonstrated consistent difficulties in English writing tasks based on preliminary classroom observations and confirmation from their English teacher.

The primary research instrument was a descriptive writing task. Students were instructed to write a descriptive text of approximately 250–300 words, choosing one of five provided topics: My Favorite Idol, My Favorite Friend, My Favorite Thing, My Favorite Pet, or My Favorite Place. The writing activity was completed in one 90-minute session under the researcher's direct supervision. All students worked individually to ensure the data reflected their independent writing ability. Upon completion, all texts were collected for analysis.

Data analysis followed the error analysis procedures outlined by Ellis (1994), while error classification was based on Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's (1982) Surface Strategy Taxonomy. The analysis was conducted in four sequential steps:

1. Error Identification

Each text was examined line-by-line to identify deviations from standard academic English, including grammatical, lexical, orthographic, and mechanical errors.

2. Error Classification

All identified errors were grouped into four categories per the taxonomy:

- Omission: Absence of a required linguistic element (e.g., She beautiful → She is beautiful).
- Addition: Inclusion of an unnecessary or redundant element (e.g., He does not likes it → He does not like it).
- Misformation: Use of an incorrect or non-standard form (e.g., She go to school → She goes to school).
- Misordering: Incorrect sequence of words or phrases (e.g., She has eyes blue → She has blue eyes).

3. Error Quantification

The frequency and percentage of each error type were calculated using the formula :

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

P = percentage of errors in each category

F = total frequency of errors in the category

N = overall total number of identified errors

4. Error Interpretation

Errors were further analyzed in relation to the core language features of descriptive texts: simple present tense, subject–verb agreement, adjective use, articles, and vocabulary choice. Potential sources of error were discussed in terms of interlingual transfer (L1 influence) and intralingual transfer (incomplete L2 knowledge), with the note that these remain tentative explanations, as no interviews or questionnaires were conducted to confirm learners' underlying processes.

Research Findings

Overview of Students' Errors Analysis of the 26 descriptive texts yielded 421

distinct errors, classified into the four categories defined by Dulay et al. (1982).

Table 1 Frequency and Percentage of Errors by Category

Type of Error	Frequency	Percentage
Misformation	246	58.43%
Omission	115	27.32%
Addition	38	9.03%
Misordering	22	5.23%
Total	421	100%

As shown in Table 1, misformation errors were the most common, accounting for more than half of all errors, followed by omission. Addition and misordering occurred far less frequently. Detailed Classification of Errors

1. Misformation Errors: With 246 occurrences (58.43%), misformation was the dominant error type. Most involved incorrect verb conjugation, subject verb agreement, spelling, and inappropriate word forms:

- Parrots came in many colors → Parrots come in many colors
- Cat have four legs → A cat has four legs
- greend → green

This indicates students often recognize the need for specific grammatical or lexical items but select the wrong form.

2. Omission Errors: There were 115 omission errors (27.32%), most commonly missing linking verbs, articles, prepositions, and word spacing:

- When I tired → When I am tired
- I have cat → I have a cat

This pattern reflects direct transfer of Indonesian sentence structure, which does not require articles or linking verbs in the same contexts as English.

3. Addition Errors: Addition errors occurred 38 times (9.03%), including redundant words, double marking, and overgeneralized pluralization:

- It is is my favorite → It is my favorite
- Childs → Children

4. Misordering Errors : Misordering was the least frequent category, with 22 occurrences (5.23%), mostly involving adjective placement and clause sequence:

- She has eyes blue → She has blue eyes
- Rabbit my favorite pet is → My favorite pet is a rabbit

Percentage of Error Types in Students' Descriptive Writing

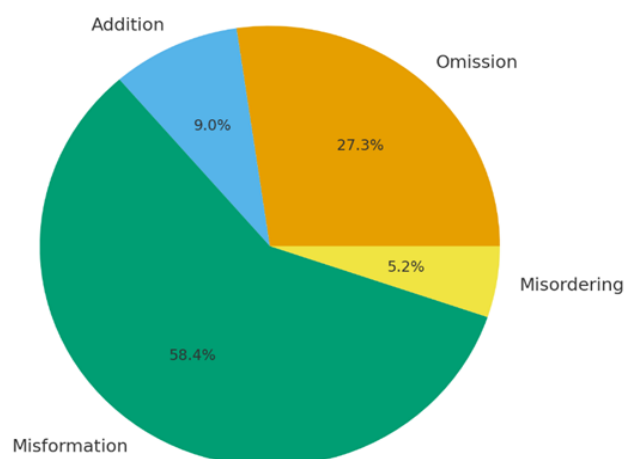
**Figure 1** Distribution of Error Types in students' descriptive Writing

Figure 1 presents the percentage distribution of error types in students' descriptive writing. Misformation was the most common error, followed by omission, while addition and misordering were less frequent.

Discussion

The study confirms that misformation errors were the most prevalent among tenth-grade students at SMAN 9 Banda Aceh. This finding differs from Mardiah (2021) and Putri et al. (2022), who reported omission as the dominant error type; this discrepancy likely stems from differences in participants' educational level, prior learning experience, and local instructional practices. The dominance of misformation suggests students have a basic grasp of English sentence structure but struggle to apply rules accurately for example, overgeneralizing regular patterns to irregular forms, or mixing up tense markers and agreement. This aligns closely with Amelia (2023), who found similar difficulties with verb forms and grammatical accuracy among tenth-grade learners. Two key sources explain these patterns: 1. Interlingual transfer: Indonesian lacks subject verb agreement, definite/indefinite articles, and mandatory linking verbs, so students often produce non-standard forms by applying L1 rules to English. 2. Intralingual transfer: Errors also arise from incomplete or overgeneralized knowledge of English rules, such as adding -s to all nouns to form plurals. The low rate of addition and misordering errors indicates students generally understand basic English word order, but need targeted practice with accurate form selection rather than just structural knowledge.

Conclusion

This study aimed to identify and classify the types of errors made by tenth-grade students of SMAN 9 Banda Aceh in writing descriptive texts using Dulay, Burt, and Krashen's (1982) Surface Strategy Taxonomy. Based on the analysis of 26 students' descriptive texts, a total of 421 errors were identified and categorized into four types: misformation, omission, addition, and misordering. The findings revealed that misformation was the most dominant error type, accounting for 246 errors (58.43%), followed by omission with 115 errors (27.32%), addition with 38 errors (9.03%), and misordering with 22 errors (5.23%). The high frequency of misformation errors indicates that although students have a basic understanding of English sentence structure, they still experience considerable difficulty in selecting and applying correct grammatical forms, particularly in the use of the simple present tense, subject verb agreement, verb forms, and spelling. Omission errors further demonstrate that students often fail to supply essential grammatical elements such as linking verbs, articles, and prepositions, while addition and misordering errors occurred less frequently, suggesting that students generally understand basic sentence order but still require improvement in grammatical accuracy. Overall, the findings indicate that the writing ability of the tenth-grade students at SMAN 9 Banda Aceh is still constrained by grammatical and mechanical problems when composing descriptive texts. These errors appear to be influenced by both interlingual transfer from the students' first language and intralingual transfer resulting from incomplete mastery of English grammar. Therefore, English teachers are encouraged to provide more focused instruction on the grammatical features of descriptive texts, especially the simple present tense, subject verb agreement, articles, linking verbs, and correct word forms. In addition, regular writing practice accompanied by explicit corrective feedback, proofreading activities, and grammar-focused exercises can help students improve the accuracy and quality of their writing. Future researchers are also recommended to investigate the underlying causes of students' writing errors through interviews, questionnaires, or think-aloud protocols, as well as to examine the effectiveness of specific instructional strategies in reducing grammatical errors in descriptive writing.

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