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An Analysis of Grammatical Errors in the Use of Simple Past Tense in Students' Recount Text Writing

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Abstrak—Penelitian ini dilakukan berdasarkan fenomena yang diamati di sekolah, khususnya rendahnya kemampuan siswa dalam menggunakan tata bahasa Inggris, terutama dalam menyusun kalimat dengan penggunaan tenses yang benar. Banyak siswa masih mengalami kesulitan dalam menggunakan *simple past tense* saat menulis teks recount. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis jenis-jenis kesalahan dan mengidentifikasi sumber utama kesalahan siswa dalam penggunaan *simple past tense*. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif yang melibatkan siswa kelas delapan di SMP Islamiyah Balen, Bojonegoro. Data dikumpulkan melalui tugas menulis di mana siswa diminta untuk menyusun teks recount, kemudian dianalisis untuk mengidentifikasi kesalahan dalam penggunaan *simple past tense*. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kesalahan yang paling sering terjadi adalah misinformation 67 kesalahan atau (29.65%), diikuti oleh Misordering 62 kesalahan atau (27.43%), Omission 59 kesalahan atau (26.11%), dan Addition 38 kesalahan atau (16.81%). Berdasarkan hasil tersebut, dapat disimpulkan bahwa sumber utama kesalahan siswa adalah *interlingual transfer*, yaitu pengaruh bahasa pertama terhadap penggunaan bahasa Inggris mereka.

Kata kunci— *Simple Past Tense*, Recount Teks, Kesalahan Grammar

Abstract— This research was conducted based on a phenomenon observed in schools, particularly the low proficiency of students in using English grammar, especially in constructing sentences with correct tenses. Many students still struggle to use the simple past tense when writing recount texts. Therefore, this research aims to analyze the types of errors and identify the main sources of students' mistakes in using the simple past tense. The research employed a descriptive qualitative method involving eighth-grade students at SMP Islamiyah Balen, Bojonegoro. The data were collected through a writing task in which students were asked to compose a recount text, then analyzed to identify errors in the use of the simple past tense. The findings revealed that the most frequent error was misinformation 67 errors or (29.65%), followed by misordering 62 errors or (27.43%), omission 59 errors or (26.11%), and addition 38 errors or (16.81%). Based on these results, it can be concluded that the primary source of students' errors is *interlingual transfer*, which refers to the influence of the first language on their use of English.

Keywords— *Simple Past Tense*, Recount Text, Grammatical Error

INTRODUCTION

English as a foreign language encompasses four primary skills: speaking, reading, listening, and writing. Among these, writing is considered one of the most complex skills, as it requires the integration of grammar mastery, vocabulary, punctuation, and spelling. According to Prastiwi & Pujiawati(2019), writing involves the ability to compose English texts while paying attention to grammar, style, spelling, word choice, and other essential components. Similarly, Tirtanawat & Rahmawati (2020), states that writing is an active skill that allows students to express their ideas in written form as a means of communication. The structural differences between Indonesian and English often pose challenges for students in constructing grammatically correct sentences. English, as a foreign language in Indonesia, has been introduced from an early age through formal education. However, language errors still frequently occur during the learning process, as students need time to adapt to linguistic rules that differ from their native language or Bahasa Indonesia, according to Rahmawati (2017), english writing becomes more difficult when one assumes that they are speaking a second or non native language. Making errors is an inevitable part of learning a language. In writing, students often make mistakes due to their limited understanding of sentence structure. Writing will be a very difficult thing to do because, in writing, someone usually struggles to make words and string them into paragraphs with the correct structure (Nurdianingsih & Rahmawati, 2018). Many of them are unable to identify or correct the errors in their own writing. Therefore, analyzing students' errors is crucial in determining their level of understanding of the material and serves as an important tool for evaluating and improving the teaching process.

Several previous studies, such as the one conducted by Susilowati & Harida (2023), have primarily focused on general errors in the use of the simple past tense. However, those studies tend to overlook more specific analyses. Therefore, this research aims to address that gap by examining the types of errors made by students in using the simple past tense when writing recount texts. One of the common challenges in writing English texts is the correct use of grammar. This is particularly evident in writing recount texts, which require the use of the simple past tense. Recount texts are intended to retell past events, experiences, or incidents, making the use of the simple past tense essential in their construction. The simple past tense functions to indicate that an event has been completed in the past. Based on this background, the present study aims to identify and analyze the grammatical errors made by students in their use of the simple past tense while writing recount texts.

METHOD

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach. This method is used to describe, identify, and analyze grammatical errors made by students in their use of the simple past tense when writing recount texts. According to Tirtanawati & Prastiwi

(2022), descriptive research aims to provide an accurate and systematic depiction and analysis of events occurring in the classroom. Through the descriptive method, the researcher can gain a deeper understanding of the types of errors found in students' writing. The population of this study consists of second-year students at MTS Islamiyah Unggulan Balen during the 2025/2026 academic year. The research was conducted with a focus on Class VIII students in the language program, totaling 31 students. Data were collected by assigning students a writing task. The researcher used a recount text writing assignment to obtain more detailed information regarding the students' writing abilities and the most common errors they make. The data collection process involved several steps: 1. providing a brief explanation of recount texts and their elements, 2. Asking students to choose a topic related to a pleasant personal experience from the past. 3. Guiding students to write a recount text based on their chosen topic, 4. Collecting the students' written work and identifying the types of errors that appear in their use of the simple past tense, 5. Analyzing the students' writing based on the criteria outlined in the following table:

Table 1. The Criteria For Various Types Of Error

Types of Error	Criteria
Addition	The element that should not have been presented was presented instead.
Omission	The element that should have been included was removed.
Misinformation	A grammatical form used instead of a different grammatical form.
Misordering	Incorrect word order in a sentence.

(Hamid & Qayyimah, 2015)

After the students' errors were identified, the researcher provided corrections for the inaccurate sentences. These corrections served as a reference for evaluation, both for the students and for educators. To process the data and calculate the percentage of errors made by the students, the researcher applied a percentage formula as explained by Lionny & Kusumadewi (2022),

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

P = Percentage of the error
 F = Frequency of the error
 N = Total number of the error

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

After the test was carried out, the researcher identified various types of errors in the students' writing. However, as outlined in the previous chapter, the primary focus of this research is on errors related to word order in the use of the simple past tense by eighth-grade students at MTs Islamiyah Unggulan Balen. The data for this study were collected through a writing task in which students were asked to produce recount texts with a specific emphasis on the use of the past tense. To identify the types of errors that occurred, the researcher analyzed the students' writing using a pre-designed worksheet. This analysis aimed to determine both the frequency and the types of errors made by eighth-grade language program students at MTs Islamiyah Unggulan Balen in the 2025/2026 academic year. The table below presents information on the total number of errors made by students in using the simple past tense while writing recount text.

Table 2. Total Analysis of the Students' Errors

Total of The Students	Total of The Errors
31	226

This data provides an initial indication of students' level of understanding in applying grammatical structures (simple past tense) within the context of recount text writing.

Based on the error identification process, the researcher found several types of errors made by the students, including: Misinformation: 67 errors or (29.65%), followed by Misordering: 62 errors or (27.43%), Omission: 59 errors or (26.11%), and Addition: 38 errors or (16.81%). The percentage of each type of error is presented in the table below:

Table 3. the percentage of errors made by students

Types of error	Total	Percentage
Misformation	67	29.65%
Misordering	62	27.43%
Omission	59	26.11%
Addition	38	16.81%
Total	266	100%

Based on the table above, it can be concluded that the most frequent error made by students is misinformation, with 67 errors or 29.65%. This indicates that many students still face difficulties in correctly forming past tense verbs. The second most common error is misordering, with 62 errors or 27.43%, suggesting that students have not fully grasped word order. Additionally, omission accounts for 59 errors or 26.11%,

which shows that some students have not fully understood the essential grammatical elements required in simple past tense sentences. Meanwhile, the least frequent error is addition, with 38 errors or 16.81%, stemming from the use of unnecessary grammatical elements in sentence structures. These results indicate that the students' grammatical errors are not limited to one particular area but occur across various sentence structures, highlighting the need for enhanced grammar instruction. Here are some examples of sentences containing errors made by the students:

Misformation

Misformation errors occur when students use word forms that are not in accordance with grammatical rules, for example in using incorrect tenses and choosing inappropriate verb forms. In this error, the author found 67 errors. the example can be seen below:

Table 3. Examples of Errors in Misformation

Error Recognize	Error Reconstruction	Correction
We visit Tanah Lot and took many photos	We visited Tanah Lot and took many photos	This error is caused by a lack of tense. Visit should be in the past tense turned into visited, which is the 2nd regular verb form and to be consistent with the verb after it, took. Both verbs describe past events
My sister not find the broom	My sister did not find the broom	The negative sentence structure in the past tense is incorrect. "Not" should be replaced with "did not" and followed by the base verb "find", not directly "not find".
It is a pleasant day	It was a pleasant day	The use of "is" is a linking verb in the present tense sentence, this is not appropriate because the context of the sentence tells the events that have been done. It is correct to use "was" to fit the context of the simple past tense.

Misordering

This error occurs when the order of words in a sentence is not in the correct order according to the rules of English, causing the meaning of the sentence to be incorrect

or unclear. From the analysis, the writer found 62 misordering errors. Here are some examples:

Table 4. Examples of Errors in Misordering

Error Recognize	Error Reconstruction	Correction
We together ate snacks.	We ate snacks together	Together is correctly placed after the object snacks because together is an adverb that describes the object snacks. not between the subject and verb.
We photos took together.	We took photos together	Took which functions as a verb must be placed before photos which functions as an object, this is in accordance with the SPO (Subject-Predicate-Object) structure
Very delicious and fresh was grandmother's cooking.	Grandmother's cooking was very delicious and fresh	Adjectives such as very delicious and fresh should be placed after was because "was" is a linking verb that connects the subject of Grandmother's cooking with the predicate that describes the subject, namely very delicious and fresh.

Omission

Omission errors are errors when mandatory elements in the sentence structure, such as verbs, subjects, or punctuation marks are not used, making the sentence awkward and less in line with grammatical rules. Based on the results of the research, the author found 59 errors that belong to omission. Some examples can be seen below:

Table 5. Examples of Errors in Omission

Error Recognize	Error Reconstruction	Correction
We visited museum near the old town area.	We visited the museum near the old town area	The word "the" is omitted here, which is necessary because the article "the" is useful for referring to something

		specific or known, such as a museum.
I tired but happy.	I was tired but happy	This sentence is incomplete because the auxiliary verb "was" is missing. In recount texts, "was" is useful for showing past events.
We danced together the hall.	We danced together in the hall.	In this sentence, the preposition of place "in" is missing. The preposition "in" should be present to show the location of the scene.

Addition

Addition occurs when students insert unnecessary language elements in a sentence, thus making the sentence structure seem excessive or inappropriate. the results of data analysis, the author found 38 addition errors, the following are examples of errors:

Table 6. Examples of Errors in Addition

Error Recognize	Error Reconstruction	Correction
We watched television togethered.	We watched television together.	The word togethered is not found in English. It is sufficient to use together to show that the activity is done together.
It was a fun.	It was fun	The word "fun" in this sentence is an uncountable noun, so it doesn't need the article "a" before the word "fun".
Mom was proud to us.	Mom was proud of us	The word "proud" is followed by the preposition "to" which is wrong because the word "proud" is followed by the preposition "of" not "to". So, the correct word is "proud of" to describe a sense of pride in someone.

The percentage of errors made by the students is presented in the form of a pie chart, displaying the data from the highest to the lowest percentage as follows:

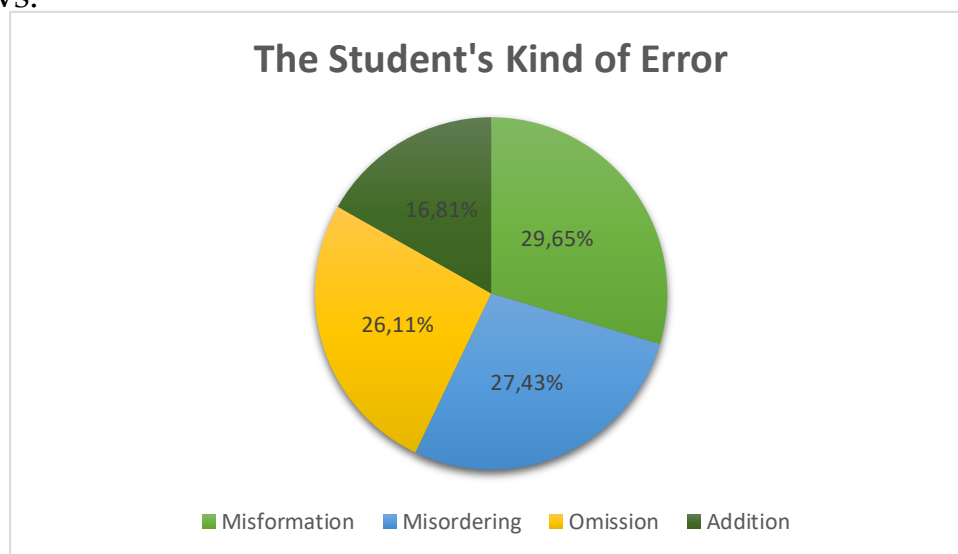


Figure 1. Student's Error

Discussion

From the data, it can be seen that, based on the analysis, the most frequent error found is the misuse of past tense verb forms, particularly in the category of misinformation. This study's result are consistent with Hamid & Qayyimah (2015), which outlines four categories of language errors in simple past, among which misinformation is the most common. This error typically occurs because students have not yet fully grasped that in English, there are various verb forms, such as the basic form, regular and irregular past tense forms, past participle, third-person singular forms, and so on. Many students mistakenly believe that to form the past tense, they simply need to add the suffix -d or -ed to the basic verb, without understanding that some verbs do not follow this pattern. For instance, they write "seed" as the past tense of "see," whereas the correct form is "saw." Additionally, many students continue to use the base verb without any modification, as if there is no distinction between present and past tense forms. This indicates that their understanding of the difference between regular and irregular verbs needs to be enhanced, and they should acquire a broader vocabulary of past forms.

The next error, misordering, as the second most frequent error in this study, indicates that a number of students still struggle with placing sentence elements correctly according to English language rules. This error typically arises when they construct sentences involving additional information such as time, place, or other supplementary details. Many students tend to translate English sentences word by word, following the order of their native language (Indonesian), even though the sentence structure in English does not always follow the same pattern. On the other hand, some students are disturbed by translating word by word, so they attempt to

change the word order. Unfortunately, these changes often do not align with correct English grammar. For example, they may place time expressions in incorrect positions or move the subject and predicate in illogical ways. As a result, the message in the sentence can become unclear or even misinterpreted. These findings emphasize the importance of teaching word order in English, particularly through more structured writing exercises.

The third error, omission, reveals that some students omit essential elements when constructing sentences, such as verbs and auxiliary verbs that should appear in the structure of a simple past tense text. This indicates that students' understanding of the grammatical elements required in recount texts is still limited. From the data collected, two common omissions were identified: the omission of verb forms and the omission of the auxiliary verb *be* in the past tense form (was/were). This error suggests that students have not yet fully grasped the important role of *be* in both nominal and verbal sentences. Additionally, some students frequently omit articles such as *the*, *a*, or *an* in sentences. The omission of articles indicates that students have not fully mastered the rules regarding the correct position and use of articles in English sentence structures.

The last error is addition, involves the inclusion of unnecessary grammatical elements in the sentence structure. Although this type of error is not as frequent as the others, it remains important to address, as it shows that some students add elements that do not belong in the sentence. This is because they have not fully understood the correct grammar rules. Based on the analysis above, the most common addition errors are related to the use of preposition and articles. Some students were observed adding articles or conjugations in sentences, but these were not placed correctly or appropriately, thus failing to serve their intended function. This suggests that students still struggle to distinguish when a grammatical element is necessary and when it is not, leading them to use it incorrectly and excessively.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing the data collected, the researcher concludes that the eight-grade language students' of MTS Islamiyah Unggulan Balen found that there are still many students who make mistakes when using the simple past tense when writing a recount text. The most errors made by students are misformation with 67 errors or 29.65% and misordering with 62 errors or 27.43%. This is caused by interlingual transfer. This happens because the grammatical structure of the Indonesian language differs significantly from that of English. In Indonesian, there is no need to change verb forms to indicate tense, whether in the past, present, or future. In contrast, in English, changing the verb form is crucial and must align with the tense, such as the past tense, which involves both regular and irregular verbs. This fundamental difference often confuses students, as the patterns they learn in English do not match their everyday

language habits in Indonesian. Moreover, some errors arise not due to first-language influence but because students incorrectly apply English grammar rules. These errors are known as intralingual transfer, which occurs when students make excessive generalizations about rules in the target language, causing them to frequently make mistakes when changing present-tense verbs to past-tense forms.

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