STUDENTS' ERROR ANALYSIS IN CONSTRUCTING SIMPLE PAST TENSE OF THE EIGHTH GRADE STUDENTS AT SMP N 2 LIRUNG

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Abstract: This research aims to identify students' errors and dominant errors and examine the causes of errors students make in constructing simple past tense. The errors have been classified into four types: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering, based on the surface approach taxonomy from Dulay. The researchers used a descriptive quantitative method to find the result. The subject of this research was the eighth-grade students of SMP N 2 Lirung, which consists of 30 students. The instrument for gathering the data was the essay test. The findings showed that the students made 250 errors. With 170 errors or 68%, misformation is the most common error students commit. The addition comes in second with 30 errors, or 12%. The following error is an omission, with 28 errors totaling 11,2%, and misordering with 22 errors, or 8.8%. In addition, the cause of errors students made in constructing simple past tense is Carelessness, with a total number of 133 or 53.2%, followed by the first language with 75 or 30% errors, and the last cause of error, translation, with 42 or 16.8% errors. Misformation is the most frequent error that students of the eighth grade at SMP N 2 Lirung make when constructing simple past tense. The cause of errors students make in constructing simple past tense is Carelessness, followed by first language and translation. From the percentage of students, the mastery of using simple past tense was poor.

Keywords: *Error, Error Analysis, Constructing, Tenses, Simple Past Tense*

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, many people want to learn English for various reasons for instance, students desire to study English because it is part of the school curriculum. Whether they like it or not, they must learn it. In different cases, some people want to learn English because it allows them to advance in their professional lives. Also, many people

want to learn it because they live in the target language community, so they must understand it to communicate with others.

According to Liando (2010), English is increasingly important as an international language, particularly for non-native speakers. This statement aligns with the fundamental role of language in human interaction worldwide. In numerous countries, English holds a significant position either as a primary language or as a widely spoken second language. Conversely, in other nations like Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language within the educational curriculum, starting from primary school and continuing through all levels of education. English proficiency is essential for students, regardless of their academic pursuits or career paths. As a result, English instruction is integrated into the curriculum to ensure students develop language proficiency.

According to Sarem (2012), the curriculum's syllabus is a crucial component that includes information on the subjects that will be taught in the classroom. The focus of Basic Competencies 4.10 and 3.10 in the syllabus is on giving and requesting information about previous events or occasions. Basic Competency 4.10 emphasizes on creating concise and clear texts about transactional interactions, both written and oral, by paying attention to linguistic elements, social functions, text structures, and social norms. In contrast, Basic Competency 3.10 emphasizes using linguistic elements, text organization, and social functions in transactional interaction texts, which involve asking for and giving information about actions, events, or situations.

In Indonesia, English is considered a foreign language and is taught from elementary through senior high school. For many years, the focus of English education in Indonesia has been on language structure, and the students are expected to be able to recall the pattern of tenses. Many experts, including (Ur, 2016) argue that describing subject matter related to English language education in Indonesia is challenging, such as the opinion of severe experts who state that English is challenging due to the complexity of grammar rules and a diverse vocabulary.

Therefore, English has become an essential part of the school curriculum, studied as a significant subject by Indonesian students to develop technology, science, and culture according to (Astutik, 2022).To achieve this, Indonesian students must master

listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, and structures in English (Liando, 2009). Therefore, a good command of English is necessary for students to compete in the future.

Learning English is not as easy as it is taught because you have to master a set of rules called grammar. It is one of the parts of English that is taught to all learners and is essential to understanding the English language. If language learners do not have sufficient knowledge of grammar, they may find it difficult to construct sentences and express their ideas in English classes. However, a good understanding of English grammar will help students feel more confident in speaking and writing English and will be able to use it correctly and clearly.

One aspect of grammar is tense. Tense plays a crucial role in making a sentence in English, both written and spoken. According to Baker in (Jabbari, 2013), Tense is a grammatical category that involves changing a verb's form to reflect an event's location in time. The usual distinction is between past, present, and future. According to (Jabbari, 2013), tense is a grammatical category that correlates with time differences. To distinguish between time and tense in language, time refers to the actual chronological position of an event. At the same time, tense is a grammatical statement of time used in language to describe the timing of an event or action.

The simple past tense is one of the most basic and commonly used grammatical forms in English. However, understanding and implementing its principles pose significant challenges for SMP N 2 Lirung students in language learning. Even though simple past tense looks simple, students at SMP N 2 Lirung always face difficulties in distinguishing the use of the auxiliary verbs "did" and "was", regular and irregular verbs, and memorizing verb 2. These difficulties arise from the lack of mastery of the simple past tense, which can lead to grammatical errors and misunderstandings.

Analyzing errors is very important in language learning as it allows teachers to discover students' strengths and weaknesses, thus improving teachers' efficiency in the classroom. Error analysis can help students avoid mistakes while enhancing their ability to learn the target language. Error analysis has various advantages for teachers and students and can help achieve language learning goals. All learners make

mistakes, and error analysis assists learners in determining how far they have progressed and what remains to be taught, thus making it an essential component in the learning process according (Corder, 1981).

Therefore, by understanding these competencies, this study aims to provide insight into the challenges students face in constructing sentences in the simple past tense and provide suggestions to improve language education and enhance students' well-being. The results of this study will benefit educators, researchers, and readers in improving language education and supporting student success.

RESEARCH METHOD

In this research, the researcher used quantitative research as a non-experiment design. According to Creswell in (Santoso, 2021), quantitative methods provide the advantage of collecting data that can be measured numerically, which allows for in-depth statistical analysis and generalization of findings to a wider population. This study focuses on two primary variables: the independent variable – students' errors in constructing simple past tense, and the dependent variable – simple past tense itself.

The subjects of this study were the eighth-grade students at SMPN 2 Lirung, totaling 60 students divided into two classes: VII-A and VII-B. Among these students, there were 35 males and 25 females. By utilizing random sampling, Class VII-B, consisting of 30 students, is chosen as the sample.

The instruments used to identify students' errors and causes of errors are essay tests. The researcher curated ten essay test items, ensuring a comprehensive student language proficiency assessment. The test prompts required students to fill in the blanks with appropriate sentences for various categories, including positive and negative forms, interrogative forms, Wh-questions with auxiliary (did), and Wh-questions with be (was/were). This strategic design aimed to elicit detailed student responses and encourage them to demonstrate their understanding across simple past tense.

Through the use of a formula that determines the percentage of errors based on frequency, the descriptive data analysis technique was used in this research to obtain insight into the types of errors students make in constructing simple past tense sentences, as well as their causes of error, the researcher used the following formula:

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

Note :   P: Percentage

F: Frequency of errors

N: Number of total errors

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings of Student Scores in Constructing Simple Past Tense

Table 1. Student Scores

No	Student's Initial Names	Score
1.	AGM	40
2.	ALD	10
3.	NUB	10
4.	NCK	20
5.	FB	10
6.	LLT	0
7.	JSS	10
8.	JBS	0
9.	GTS	0
10.	PYD	20
11.	ELP	20
12.	NJD	80
13.	PM	10
14.	CR	20
15.	AE	20
16.	ABM	30
17.	EAM	10
18.	HRS	10
19.	ISL	10
20.	JW	0

21.	GJK	20
22.	GM	10
23.	KRM	10
24.	LDT	70
25.	MSM	0
26.	CEL	0
27.	AKS	10
28.	RMT	0
29.	YTP	20
30.	FAT	10

From the table above, the researcher concludes that students' lowest score in constructing simple past is 0, and the highest score is 80.

Table 2. The Percentage of Frequency Number and the Category Level of the Students

Score	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
0-20%	Poor	26	86.67%
21-40%	Fair	3	10%
41-60%	Fairly – good	0	0%
61-80%	Good	2	6.67%
81-100%	Excellent	0	0%
Total		**30**	**100%**

From Table 4.2, it can be seen that the percentage of student scores in constructing simple past tense from 30 students: 26 (86.67%) students obtained Poor, 3 (10%) obtained Fair, and 2 (6.67%) students received Good.

Table 3. The mean score of results in constructing sentences

Mean score	3.78%

The analysis of the mean score above shows that in constructing simple past tense, the eighth-grade students of SMP N 2 Lirung in the Poor level.

Findings of Student's Errors

Table 4. The Recapitulation of Errors

NO	Student's Initial Names	Types of errors			
		O	A	MF	MO
1.	AGM	-	1	5	-
2.	ALD	3	-	6	1
3.	NUB	6	2	1	9
4.	NCK	2	1	3	-
5.	FB	-	-	8	2
6.	LLT	1	2	4	2
7.	JSS	-	-	9	-
8.	JBS	-	2	8	-
9.	GTS	1	2	4	3
10.	PYD	2	1	7	-
11.	ELP	-	-	7	-
12.	NJD	-	-	1	-
13.	PM	-	2	5	1
14.	CR	1	-	6	-
15.	AE	-	-	7	3
16.	ABM	-	-	4	-
17.	EAM	-	2	6	1
18.	HRS	-	4	5	1
19.	ISL	1	2	7	-
20.	JW	3	-	6	1
21.	GJK	-	3	6	-
22.	GM	2	-	6	2
23.	KRM	1	-	5	2
24.	LDT	1	-	2	-
25.	MSM	-	1	9	-
26.	CEL	1	2	4	3
27.	AKS	1	1	6	2
28.	RMT	-	2	7	-
29.	YTP	2	-	6	-
30.	FAT	2	2	6	-
Total = 250		**28**	**30**	**170**	**22**

From Table 4.1, it can be concluded that the total error of omission is 28, and the total error of addition is 30 errors. The absolute error of miss-formation is 170, and the last total error of miss-ordering is 22. So, the total number of errors students

make in constructing simple past tense is 250, and miss-formation is the most common error made by the eighth-grade students at SMP N 2 Lirung.

Table 5. Percentage of Students' Error

No	Types of error	Percentage of errors
1.	Error of omission	11.2%
2.	Error of addition	12%
3.	Error of misformation	68%
4.	Error of misordering	8.8%

Based on the table above, it can be concluded that total errors of omission are 28 (11.2%), errors of addition are 30 (12%), errors of miss-formation are 170 (68%), and errors of misordering are 22 (8.8%). Based on the data, misformation was the most common error made by students of SMP N 2 Lirung with a 68% rate, while a 12% rate followed addition, and misordering was less than 8.8% rate.

Findings Cause of Errors

Table 6. The Recapitulation of Students' Cause of Error

No	Student's Initial Names	Cause of errors		
		Carelessness	First Language	Translation
1.	AGM	5	1	-
2.	ALD	3	5	2
3.	NUB	6	2	1
4.	NCK	4	3	1
5.	FB	5	3	2
6.	LLT	6	2	2
7.	JSS	5	3	1
8.	JBS	4	3	3
9.	GTS	5	3	2
10.	PYD	3	3	3
11.	ELP	3	2	2
12.	NJD	1	-	-
13.	PM	6	2	2
14.	CR	4	3	-
15.	AE	6	2	2

No.	Code			
16.	ABM	2	2	-
17.	EAM	4	4	2
18.	HRS	5	2	3
19.	ISL	4	3	3
20.	JW	4	4	-
21.	GJK	4	3	3
22.	GM	7	1	2
23.	KRM	3	3	2
24.	LDT	2	1	-
25.	MSM	7	3	-
26.	CEL	5	2	1
27.	AKS	6	3	1
28.	RMT	5	3	1
29.	YTP	4	4	1
30.	FAT	4	3	3
Total = 250		**133**	**75**	**42**
Percentage		**53.2%**	**30%**	**16.8%**

From Table 4.3, it can be concluded that carelessness is the most common cause of errors made by eighth-grade students at SMP N 2 Lirung in constructing simple past tense. The total number of errors due to carelessness is 133 (53.2%), followed by the first language with 75 (30%) errors, and the last cause of the error, translation, has 42 (16.8%) errors.

Based on the data above, the errors were classified into four types based on the Surface Taxonomy Categories (Dulay, 1982) : Omission, Addition, misformation, and misordering.

After identifying students' errors in constructing simple past tense, the data obtained were errors found in misformation, as most errors students make. As the earlier researcher, Situmorang (2020) recognized the same result: misformation was the most frequent error found in that research.

The most frequent error in this study was misinformation; this pattern often appears in some students' sentences for example, "He did not read the book" into "He does not read the book" Similarly, in the question "Did they play cards?" students may misarticulate the sentence into "Do they play cards?" this shows that it is difficult for

students to apply the correct structure accurately. The researcher found that the main reason for this error was students' need to understand the correct tense structure in constructing sentences. Students may need help understanding the proper grammar rules, so they make tense mistakes, such as making sentences that should be in the past tense but instead are made in the present tense. Students need help applying the tense structure correctly due to a lack of practice and in-depth understanding of the subject matter. More attention is required from teachers to help students correct sentence construction errors if they do not repeat or practice using sentence structures in daily life. Due to the importance of practice and deep understanding, more interactive and contextual learning students, such as context-based daily activities or grammar-based games, to improve students' understanding and reduce sentence construction errors.

Another common error students make in their worksheets is adding a word or group of words that should not exist in the sentence. The study found that addition occurred 30 times or 12% of the total errors. An example of an addition error is using the word "the" in the sentence "They did not play cards," which shouldn't be there. This pattern of addition errors often appears in some students' sentences when they make sentences with simple past tense. The researcher found that the leading cause of this error involves students' need to understand the correct structure in constructing sentences. Students need to fully understand the correct sentence structure in the context of simple past tense, so they tend to make mistakes in constructing sentences by adding words that should not be necessary to the sentence. This can result in the addition of unnecessary words.

Furthermore, students make omission errors when they leave out crucial words (Permatasari, 2018). Students' response papers contain 28 cases of omission mistakes or 11.2% of total errors. Students must pay close attention to key terms that affect completeness and clarity. For example, on the student's answer sheet, "He read the book" was substituted for "He the book." In this example, the word "read" is removed, which makes the phrase ambiguous and incomplete. Like the first two errors, omission

mistakes often occur when pupils accidentally omit terms that belong in the words. This issue can arise from either inadequate knowledge of grammar rules or excessive focus during sentence formation.

The last is misordering, which is characterized by the incorrect placement of morphemes or groups of morphemes (Ratnawati, 2018). In the students' answer sheets, 22 occurrences of such errors accounted for 8.8% of all errors. For example, 'He did read the book not.' The correct order should be 'He did not read the book.' The misplaced 'not' deviates from the structure of negative sentences in the simple past tense. It can be seen from the collected data, showing that the student's level in constructing simple past tense is poor.

After identifying students' and dominant errors, the researcher continued examining students' causes of error based on students' answer sheets. Carelessness was the most common cause of students' sentence errors in constructing simple past tense with 133 or 53,2% errors. Intan (2020) recognized the same result: carelessness was the most frequent cause of error found in that research followed by first language and translation. Students need more focus on learning, which also occurs because they have previously understood the rules of tenses but made mistakes when applying them. For example, they experience carelessness when changing verbs that should be simple past tense into simple present tense, resulting in incorrect constructions. Additionally, they sometimes omit words that should be included in their sentences, leading to inaccuracies. Even a single missing letter can alter the meaning of a sentence. These mistakes are often caused by students' inattentiveness and lack of focus while forming sentences. Researchers suggest that students must pay more attention to the test's instructions when constructing sentences and learn to appreciate the teacher's efforts during learning.

Furthermore, the cause of the first language is the second factor that causes students' sentence errors to reach 75 or 30% of the total errors. This is because students still use their mother tongue, which tends to transfer grammatical rules from their first language to their second language, supported by (Shcrrmo, 2006). This

move can cause errors in sentence structure and word usage. Students are confident that the formation of the words they write is correct in sentences because they still use their mother tongue (Indonesian). However, students must remember that the structure and formation of words in Indonesian and English are different. With lots of practice, students can make it easier to master the simple past tense while still maintaining the grammatical rules of their first language.

Additionally, because students translated their first-language sentences into English word for word, they made 42 errors or 16.8% of the total translation errors. Students are still influenced by their mother tongue when making and constructing sentences in English and Indonesian (Setiyadi, 2020). The structure and sentence formation are the same, but not the same. Students indirectly translate Indonesian into English.

Based on the research, misinformation is the most common error students make while constructing simple past tense. And carelessness is the primary cause of these errors.

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