

THE USE OF SIMPLE PRESENT TENSE AND ADJECTIVE IN STUDENTS' DESCRIPTIVE TEXTS

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Abstract. This study was conducted to know the use of simple present tense and adjectives by students in Junior High Schools in Indramayu when writing a descriptive text. The method used in this study was Descriptive Qualitative. The procedure employed includes collecting students' work, analyzing the data, interpreting them, and concluding. The result shows that: 1) In the *simple present tense*, students make many errors when writing a descriptive text to describe people. The most dominant errors made by the students are *omission* (46%), followed by *misformation* (33%), then *addition* (20%), and finally, the *misordering* (1%). In the use of the *adjective*, the most errors produced by the students are *misformation* (39%), followed by *omission* (38%), *misordering* (18%), and the least is *addition* (5%). Students' interlanguage problem usually causes the high frequency of errors made by students. They use their native language's structure in the target language.

Keywords: simple present tense; adjective; error; writing; descriptive text

Introduction

Human beings spend a lot of their time talking, listening, and in more developed communities, reading, and writing throughout their life. Humans talk to each other for various purposes. They talk to ask for and give information, ask for and give opinions, express feelings, give directions. All those activities involve transferring information from one person to another, what we call communication. Although humans mostly communicate verbally in particular situations, they need to communicate in writing.

Writing is considered the most challenging and least developed skill among the four, but it is an integral part of communication. Good writing skills allow us to communicate our message with clarity and ease to a far larger audience than face-to-face or telephone conversation. Writing has always occupied a place in most English language courses. One of the reasons is that more and more people need to learn to write in English for occupational or academic purposes. So, writing skill is becoming very important now.

Based on Indonesia's newest curriculum, language teaching should use Genre Based Approach (GBA), so in teaching writing, we divide texts into 12 types or genres. The genre's twelve kinds are anecdote, description, discussion, explanation, exposition, hortatory, narrative, news item, procedure, recount, report, and review. The students must learn how to write well so that they can write each genre correctly. Descriptive writing is the way we describe how things look, smell, taste, feel or sound; it may also evoke moods, such as happiness, loneliness, or fear.

There are several grammatical features of descriptive writing: a) In the descriptive text, the present tense is dominantly used. b) Although present tense may be used in the literary description, it is past tense that tends to dominate. c) Relational verbs are used when classifying and describing appearance or qualities and parts or functions of the phenomenon. d) Action verbs are used when describing behaviors or users. e) Mental verbs are used when describing the feeling in literary descriptions. f) Adjectives are used to add extra information to nouns. g) Personal and literary descriptions generally deal with individual things.

We know that present tense and adjectives are essential features in a descriptive text based on the description above. It means students must be aware that they should be able to use the present tense and adjectives correctly if they want to write a descriptive text well.

Despite the length of learning time, not many Indonesians are fluent or have good English competence after finishing high school and finishing college. This had been a significant question on the effectiveness of English teaching in schools and universities in Indonesia. Many studies have been conducted, but the problem is still there, probably waiting for a more profound and comprehensive study.

Second or foreign language learners face some commonly known problems in acquiring the target language. The most fundamental problem is first language interference or negative transfer, which is the psycholinguistic tendency to rely on familiar forms of expression when the students intend to develop a new form – the form of the target language.

From the statement above, we may conclude that one of the Indonesian students' problems in mastering English is that their mother tongue rules still influence them in using the target language. Since they have differences in their mother tongue from English, the students often find problems with grammar, vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, and the like. Nevertheless, the students usually face difficulty in English grammar in arranging words into correct utterances or sentences. It means that grammar is one of the most important parts of English to communicate with others. When we communicate in written and spoken ways, we should have a good vocabulary and correct grammar with other people. Therefore, it is hard for people to understand what we say or write without grammar because grammar makes a string of words or utterances meaningful.

There are at least five potential problems faced by students who learn to use simple present tense and adjectives in writing a descriptive text in English: incorrect verb form, subject-verb agreement, missing linking verb, word order, and spelling. Knowing where the students potentially make errors, we probably can anticipate them and take the necessary steps to prevent the problems from occurring.

Many people think that writing is the most difficult language skill to practice. This is supported by Richards & Renandya (2002: 303), who states that "writing is the most difficult skill for second and foreign language learners." This is very logical because writing is the last skill we learn in any language. Even in our first language, writing is the last skill to develop. In our natural way of learning the mother tongue, we begin by listening to our immediate surroundings. Mother, father, brother, sister, or any other people close to us are the primary sources of our listening practice when we are babies. Later, we begin to learn to speak by imitating or repeating what people or mother teaches. At four or five, we begin to learn to read either at home or kindergarten. Only after we go to primary school, then we begin to learn to write.

Descriptive Text is a text that describes a particular person, place, or thing. The purpose of descriptive text is to describe people, places, or something specific. This is in line with what Zemach & Rumisek (2005: 25) say that "a descriptive paragraph explains how someone, or something looks or feels." If one wants to write the physical description of a person or a thing, he/she should write a descriptive text.

In every language, sentences usually consist of a set of words. These words are classified into different types of word classes. Lester & Beason (2019, 1) say that "words are classified into parts of speech according to how words function in a sentence." He further explains that "There are seven functional parts of speech: nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, conjunctions, and prepositions." So, we can say that words are grouped into parts of speech based on their functions. The commonly known parts of speech are noun, verb, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, conjunctions, and prepositions.

One of the functional parts of speech is *verbs*. Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (2015, 20) say: that "the notional or semantic definition of a verb is that it is a word that denotes an action or state of being." All words that tell an action are verbs, such as walk, talk, drink, read. The words which tell the state of being are, among others, be, seem, look. As previously mentioned, English verbs have four principal forms, but there is another form for the third singular person subject in the simple present tense. The writer would like to say that verbs in the English language may have five forms: the simple form, simple past, past participle, present participle, and third singular simple present form. The verb forms are used for different tenses, aspects, and modalities in English grammar.

The Simple Present Tense refers to an action or situation that to do not change frequently. It is used to describe habits or routines, express opinions, or make general statements of fact. The simple present can also be used to refer to the future. In English grammar, a simple present tense is a verb that refers to an action or event that is ongoing or that regularly takes place in the present time (for example, "He cries easily"). The simple present tense is the one that we use when an action is happening right now or when it happens regularly (or unceasingly, which is why it has sometimes been called present indefinite). The simple present tense is formed by using the root form or adding -s or -es to the end, depending on the person.

Hutchinson (2005:10) says, "Adjectives are words that give more information about nouns or pronouns." By this definition, we know that any word which gives information about a noun or pronoun is classified as an adjective. The word "bright" in the phrase "bright color" and the word "interesting" in the sentence "The book is interesting" are adjectives because they give information about color and book.

A process that fundamentally makes mistakes is learning. Brown (2007) clarified the statement by explaining that mistakes, misjudgments, miscalculations, and erroneous assumptions form an essential aspect of learning. Moreover, it happens virtually in any skill or acquiring information. It is similar to someone who learns to swim. First, someone jumps into the water and flails arm and leg until forming a combination of movement. A structured pattern can keep you afloat and propel you through the water. Learning to swim, play tennis, type or read all involves a process that begins from mistakes. From those mistakes, the learner gets feedback from the environment, and with the feedback, the learner makes a new attempt that successively moves closer to the desired goal.

Method

The writer researched two locations. The first location is State Junior High School Unggulan of Indramayu (SMPN Unggulan Indramayu), which is located on Jl. Terusan Sindang, Kabupaten Indramayu 45224, and the second location is State Junior High School 1 Juntinyuat (SMPN 1 Juntinyuat), which is located at. Jalan Sepat No. 9, Desa Dadap, Kec. Juntinyuat, Indramayu 45282. The research was done for about five months, starting from September 2019 to January 2020, during school hours.

In this research, the writer uses the descriptive qualitative method. The descriptive qualitative method employs the technique of seeking, collecting, and analyzing data. As Bodgan and Taylor stated in Moleong (2004:3), qualitative methodology is a research procedure that produces descriptive data such as written words or spoken words from people or activities that can be observed.

In this study, the writer used the eighth-year students of SMP N Unggulan and SMPN 1 Juntinyuat in the Indramayu regency in the academic year of 2019/2020 as the population. The population's choice was based on the fact that the students have studied the use of simple present tense and adjectives. They have also been taught several writing genres, particularly descriptive writing in Indonesian and English, since they were in the first year. Based on this consideration, I assumed that the students had had the basic knowledge of using simple present tense and adjectives in writing a descriptive paragraph.

The total population used in this study is 595 students. The writer did not take the whole population as a sample because of the limited time and resources. Instead, he selected 30 students from each school, so the total number is 60 students who were taken as the sample. The writer used the cluster random sampling technique to get the sample because it saved his time in analyzing the data obtained from the whole population. Gay (2006:74) stated that: "cluster sampling is more convenient when the population is substantial or spread out over a wide geographic area as long as they have similar characteristics." The writer's reason for using this kind of sampling was that he did not control all the population.

In his research, the writer's instrument was the writing task sheet because this study talked about the subjects' achievement in using the simple present tense and adjectives in descriptive text. Consequently, the writer used such a writing test to measure the students' writing ability to obtain empirical data. Therefore, the writer used 60 pieces of paper for the student's writing.

In collecting the data, the writer first explained writing a descriptive text on someone's appearance using the simple present tense and adjectives. And then, he also explained the rules in writing a descriptive text. Next, he held field research by preparing questions sheets and answer sheets. Each of the question sheets consisted of an outline that will guide them in writing a descriptive text, and the answer sheets were for the students' writing. He monitored the test to avoid cheating among the students. Then he analyzed the students' works by making a list of the students' errors in using the simple present tense and adjective in their descriptive text. Based on those errors, he later began to conduct an error analysis.

In analyzing the data, first, the writer made a list of students' errors. He checked the sentences that the students made whether they used the simple present tense correctly or not when they described their favorite animal. After that, he classified their errors individually, and then he calculated their percentages of errors individually by the total number of the simple present tense they used by using the formula of the percentage of errors as follows:

$$X = \frac{\sum Er}{\sum W} \times 100 \%$$

With: X = the percentage of errors

Er = kinds of errors

W = words, and

Σ = the total number

After having the students' errors in using the simple present tense in descriptive writing individually and getting the mean of the students' errors, the writer carried out an error analysis to determine the dominant errors that often occurred. Here, the writer classified their errors into several types. Then, he counted the percentage of each type of error. In this analysis, I used the 'Preselected Category Approach' favored by Etherton (1977) as adopted from Norrish (1983), in which the statistical computation is based on Gulo's formula as follows:

$$pi = \frac{f_i}{n} \times 100\%$$

With: pi = the proportion of frequency of errors.

fi = absolute frequency of a particular type of error, and

n = the total number of errors observed

After computing the proportion or percentage of each error type, the writer calculated the average proportion of occurrence frequency. This study uses a simple statistical method; namely, the proportion as a whole (100%) was divided by the types of errors observed. The result was called the mean (PI). The final step was to identify the degree of dominance of the particular error. Any error whose (pi-PI) is plus (+) is considered to be dominant. On the contrary, if the result of (pi-PI) is minus (-), the error is less dominant. The dominant errors are considered to be the students' problems.

Results and Discussion

Sixty pieces of paper were collected from the students containing their answers to the writing task: describing their close friend in a descriptive text. Thirty were collected from SMPN 1 Juntinyuat and another 30 pieces from SMPN Unggulan. The data were then analyzed to find erroneous sentences. The erroneous sentences were then classified into the addition, misformation, omission, and misordering categories. The results can be seen in Table 1 below. The writer then counted the errors for each category and then found out the percentage of each error type.

Table 1
The Percentage of Error Category

No	Type of errors	Simple present tense	Adjective	Total
11	Addition	23	3	26
		20%	5%	15%
22	Omission	52	21	73
		46%	38%	43%
33	Misformation	38	22	60
		33%	39%	35%
44	Misordering	1	10	11
		1%	18%	6%
	Total	114	56	170
		100%	100%	100%

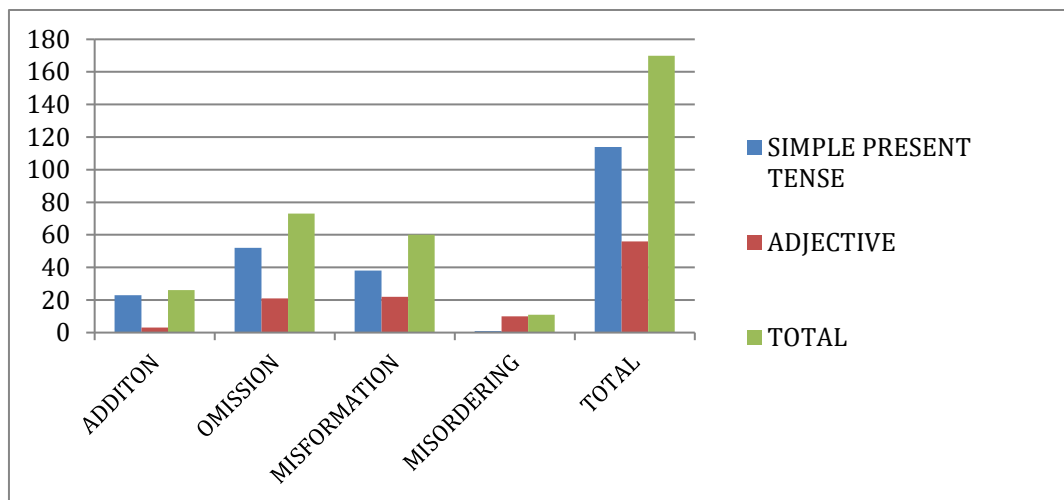


Diagram 1
Type of errors in the use of simple present tense and adjectives

Based on the data, we can see that in the use of *Simple Present Tense*, students make the most errors in the category of *omission* with 52 errors of the total 114 errors or 46%, followed by *misformation* with 38 errors of total 114 or 33%, then *addition* with 23 errors of the total 114 or 20%, and finally the *misordering* with one error of 114 or 1%. While in the use of the adjective, the most significant number of errors produced by the students is on *misformation* with 22 errors out of a total of 56 errors or 39%, followed closely by *omission* with 21 errors out of 56 or 38%, then *misordering* with ten errors of the total 56 or 18%, and the least is on *addition* with only three errors out of 56 or 5%.

Conclusions

Based on the result of the research, we can conclude that students in grade VIII of SMPN Unggulan and SMPN 1 Juntinyuat in Indramayu still made many common errors in the use of present simple and adjectives when writing descriptive text. The writer found four types of common mistakes: Misformation, Omission, Misordering, and Addition.

Many errors are found in the use of simple present tense when students write descriptive text for describing people. Students' errors in using simple present tense for describing people are addition, omission, misformation, and misordering. The most dominant errors made by the students are Omission with 52 errors of the total 114 errors or 46%, followed by Misformation with 38 errors of total 114 or 33%, then Addition with 23 errors of the total 114 or 20%, and finally the Misordering with one error of 114 or 1%. Students very often omit the suffix *s/es* in the verb for the third singular person subject. Many of the students also often omit the verb *be* in a sentence. This is usually caused by the absence of this pattern in their native language. They also make errors of misformation by using incorrect forms of the verb, such as using the past form of the verb instead of the present form. Other frequent errors are related to adding unnecessary verb *be* in a sentence that already has a verb. The slightest error in using simple present is misordering. Almost all students never misorder verb and subjects

In the use of the adjective, the most number of errors produced by the students is on Misformation with 22 errors out of a total of 56 errors or 39%, followed closely by Omission with 21 errors out of 56 or 38%, then Misordering with ten errors of the total 56 or 18%. The least is besides with only three errors out of 56 or 5%. The students have problems choosing the correct word form for adjectives and incorrect pronouns instead of possessive adjectives. Students also very often incorrectly put the adjective after the noun in a noun phrase. Students' interlanguage problem usually causes this. They use their native language's structure in the target language.

Another common problem is the students omit the necessary verb or an article in a sentence. Students rarely have problems with the addition in the use of the adjective. Based on the research results

above, the writer would like to offer some suggestions to reduce the students' errors when they practice describing people in a written form using the simple present tense and adjectives.

When teaching descriptive writing, make sure teachers already pre-teach the necessary language components such as vocabulary of adjectives, spelling, simple present verb, and other essential and necessary grammar points. Then give them enough exercise before teachers assign students to write a composition. Exercises should be designed in such a way so that they would not make students feel bored. The exercises should also be graded from most straightforward to the most difficult one; for example, you can start from word level, phrase level, sentence level, and paragraph level.

As students who learn to use a foreign language, you have to be aware that English has some grammar points which are pretty different from the students' native languages. The order of words in a noun phrase, for example, is different from the Indonesian language. The verb *Be* must be understood well as its presence is essential in a sentence. To minimize errors in writing descriptive text, students must practice a lot in using verbs after the third singular subject

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