

## Art Students' Error Analysis in Using Past Tense in Narrative Essay

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### Abstract

For EFL learners, the task of composing a narrative essay that adheres to grammatical conventions and maintains a coherent chronological structure is challenging. Despite the introduction of simple past tense to students at Sekolah Tinggi Kesenian Wilwatikta Surabaya, previous research has revealed that the incorrect use of past tense continues to be an issue. Consequently, this study was undertaken to identify the faults made by students when utilizing the past tense in their narrative essays. Due to the scarcity of literature on the writing outcomes of art students, this issue is seen as essential. This study utilized qualitative content analysis, which involved six stages: data collection, identification, categorization, analysis, report, and conclusions. The errors made by the students were classified into three distinct categories: omission (98 errors), addition (67 errors), and misinformation (32 errors). The analysis indicates that the students made grammatical errors in their narrative essays as a result of numerous reasons, including L1 interference, disparities in grammatical rules between their native language (L1) and the second language (L2), inadequate grammatical knowledge, overgeneralization, rule limitations, and lack of awareness. In order to address this issue, it is necessary to offer students a combination of integrated materials, rigorous yet enjoyable activities, and a supportive atmosphere.

**Keywords:** *Error; Past Tense; Narrative Essay*

### INTRODUCTION

According to the empirical evidence, students who are pursuing a degree in fine arts, dance, musical arts, and theatre arts at Wilwatikta Arts College in Surabaya are obligated to enroll in a compulsory course on Reading and Writing. The objective of this course is to provide students with the necessary skills to compose an essay in the English language. One of the elements is a Narrative Essay. Nevertheless, students have challenges when it comes to composing essays in English due to their limited

exposure to the language and the lack of assistance from the college environment in fostering their English language proficiency. Students frequently make various errors particularly grammar problems, when composing essays in English. Hence, it is imperative for EFL students to acknowledge and prioritize grammar as a fundamental element of language (Calanoga, 2019).

Regarding the concept of narrative essays, Joyce & Feez (2000) provided a definition stating that a narrative is a recounting of how individuals navigate obstacles and react to specific occurrences, societal expectations, and cultural principles. In addition to entertaining readers, narrative enables writers to convey their genuine firsthand experience, which culminates in a conflict and concludes with a resolution. The narrative essayists have the responsibility of captivating readers with their stories, regardless of the subject matter (Rewa, Ketut, Ni, 2021).

Pham (2021) mentioned that a way of organizing ideas based on their occurrence in time is one of its features. The topics might be simple but they should be informative, clear, and engaging. Thus, besides focusing on the events, a good narrative essay must meet the requirements of schematic structure, social function (Zein, Silvana, Nurlela & Muhammad, 2019) and language use, particularly the use of past tense (Laia, 2020). In narrative essays, one of the grammatical features is the use of past tense. Baharudin & Yunus (2018) stated that while some people have no trouble understanding the use of the past tense, others can find it challenging. Without learning the writing components, there would be errors in the students' writing results (Heryanti, Sucipto & Makmur, 2017). Therefore, writing and grammar have become something inseparable.

To acquire native-like thinking and speaking abilities in English, non-native speakers must utilize a range of tenses as a means of communicating time. Having a strong grasp of grammar and tenses is essential for developing proficient writing skills, since it enables students to construct high-quality sentences (Sadiah & Royani, 2019). In her study, Sari (2020) stated that narrative essays can serve as a means to assess students' comprehension and application of the simple past tense, as they encompass individuals' previous experiences. Nevertheless, certain prior studies have indicated that students had a deficiency in employing the correct tense when composing their articles. Presented below are exemplars of prior research pertaining to the subject matter of narrative essays and the utilization of past tense.

In a study conducted by Abdullah (2013), it was found that 44% of TESL college students omitted the verb 'be' in the past tense: '*She happy because his dad attended her first ballet competition*'. However, the correct version is '*She was happy because his dad attended her first ballet competition*'. Besides omission, 45% of the students also faced double marking such as: '*I did not realized*' '*We could saw*' and '*This study would took*'. Abdullah went on to provide the following explanations for his students' errors: 1). Lack of proficiency and grammatical understanding, 2). Native language effects on sentence form, 3). Overgeneralization, and (4). Inadequate exposure to the target language.

Furthermore, Mandasari's (2019) research, which specifically examined errors in written English committed by students, revealed that the second most prevalent mistake is the utilization of simple past tense. It was discovered that the majority of pupils did not employ the correct verb form in accordance with the tense. Although they had written the time signal such as '*last week, yesterday, and last month*, they kept on using the present form of the verb. For example, "*My sister call me last week*", "*The shop close last month*", and "*I plan my business last year*".

In a study conducted by Anjarani and Indawati (2019), it was found that among English department students in their seventh semester at a university in Madura, 25% of the students committed omission and addition errors, while 62.5% of them struggled with forming the past tense correctly. For example, '*Yesterday, I sing all the fun songs*', '*The childrenrunned to catch the ball*', and '*my parents did not wanted to waste time*'.

A study conducted by Vera (2020) revealed that 58.4% of students who composed narrative texts experienced errors in their utilization of the past tense. Despite the fact that most of them had the written indication of the past tense time signal, they were nonetheless unable to utilize it. One example demonstrates that the student wrote '*I buyed a laptop two days ago*' rather than '*I bought a laptop two days ago*'.

In their study, Rewa, Ketut, and Ni (2021) identified several errors in the essays written by second-semester English Language Education students at Ganesha University. The example of addition error is '*When sad scenes, they are cried*' where it is supposed to be '*When sad scenes, they cried*'. Meanwhile, the example of omission is '*I visit it two days ago*' which should be '*I visited it two days ago*'.

Furthermore, Fajarina and Bahtiar (2022) observed that a significant proportion of their students, specifically 52%, had misformation errors in their writing outcomes. They disclosed that the occurrence occurred due to the students' confusion regarding the

translation of English words into Bahasa. Furthermore, they were unable to distinguish between regular and irregular verbs in the past tense.. For instance, '*They sitted on the chairs.....*' while it is supposed to be '*They sat on.....*' since 'sit-sat' is an irregular verb.

The six aforementioned research have demonstrated that students, particularly those with weaker English competence, continue to face challenges when utilizing the past tense. Despite numerous conducted research, none have encompassed art students. These art students were chosen based on their successful completion of the writing course, but, they regularly made mistakes while using the past tense. Therefore, our study incorporated existing material and the perspectives of readers.

## **METHOD**

This study used qualitative content analysis as a research method. It concentrated on the analysis of written manuscripts and journals, among other recorded human artifacts, without specifically collecting data from participants. As a result, the data's source is the meticulous analysis of the papers (Singh, 2006). This study was conducted at the Sekolah Tinggi Kesenian Wilwatikta Surabaya. 30 second-year students were participated in this study. Fourteen students from the traditional dance department, six students from the fine art department, three students from the theatre department, and seven students from the Karawitan art department. These students were chosen since they had learned about narrative text and tenses, in particular, simple past tense. However, most of them still made errors in using simple past tense in their sentences.

The narrative text, which has a word count of 275–400, served as the data's primary source. Meanwhile, the researchers themselves served as the main instrument in this study. To perform content analysis, a few steps must be taken. The first step was gathering data. After the data had been gathered, it was thoroughly analysed and examined to see how the past tense was being used. Then, note-taking was done by applying Dulay et al. (1982)'s classification of grammatical errors. A theory of error analysis techniques, as seen in Figure 1, by Gass and Selinker (2008) such as gathering data, identifying errors, classifying errors, analysing mistakes, and making conclusions was also applied during the data analysis. Finally, all of the analysis results were performed descriptively.



Figure 1. Error Analysis Procedures by Gass and Selinker (2008)

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the analysis, 30 students' narrative essays contained 197 errors. These errors were identified into three categories: errors in omission (98 errors), errors in addition (67 errors), and errors in misinformation (32 errors). Look at Figure 2 below for the percentage.

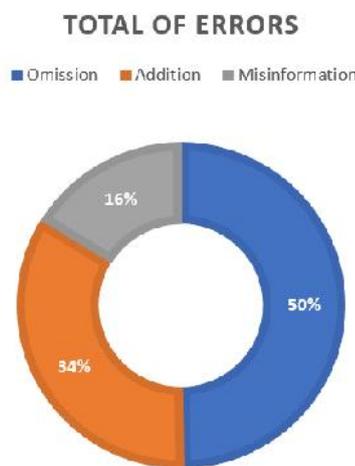


Figure 2. Total of Errors

The figure above depicts that 50% of total errors belong to omission, 34% of errors belong to addition, and 16% of errors belong to misinformation. There were only three categories of errors found in this study even though Dulay et al. (1982) divided them into four groups. Since this study concentrated on the use of simple past tense, the error in 'misordering' category was not found during the data analysis. Below is a more detailed explanation with five examples from each category.

### 4.1 Omission

Students often omit function words instead of content words when making omission errors. Additionally, it occurs when they delete some linguistic constructions because of how difficult they are to produce. Five examples of how the students misused past tense verbs are shown in Table 1 below.

The students referenced past events using present-tense verbs rather than the

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appropriate past-tense ones. They used present-tense verbs in their statements, despite the fact that their time signals (*last week, yesterday, three days ago*) were obvious and clearly indicated past events.

From the total of 30 students, 98 errors (50%) related to omission were found. It indicates that the students were not aware of the proper use of the simple past tense in the sentence.

Table 1. Examples of Students' Errors in Omission

Name	Error found in the sentence	Correction
Student 1	Last week, my friends, and I <b>go</b> to Lamongan to watch PerselaLamongan.	Last week, my friends, and I <b>went</b> to Lamongan to watch PerselaLamongan.
Student 2	My mom <b>cooks</b> my favorite fried rice yesterday.	My mom <b>cooked</b> my favorite fried rice yesterday.
Student 3	At the supermarket, we <b>look</b> for ice cream and snack.	At the supermarket, we <b>looked</b> for ice cream and snack.
Student 5	I <b>teach</b> my classmates to drive a car yesterday.	I <b>taught</b> my classmates to drive a car yesterday.
Student 6	I <b>accompany</b> my sister to Surabaya Zoo three days ago.	I <b>accompanied</b> my sister to Surabaya Zoo three days ago.

The results of this study align with other previous studies. Pasaribu (2021) discovered in his research that the majority of his students frequently committed omission errors. They forgot to put the 'be' like 'was' or 'were' in the sentence and used the present verbs instead of past verbs. Second, while writing the time signals to refer to past events, such as "*two days ago*," some of the participants involved in Vera's study (2020) did not employ the correct past tense verbs. Third, Anjarani&Indawati (2019) and Mandasari (2019) also experienced a similar thing where the students wrote down the time signals for past events correctly, but they kept on using the present form of the verbs, for instance, "*Yesterday, I sing all the fun song*".

Based on the results of both past and current research, most students demonstrated an inability to classify verbs based on their respective tenses. Despite the preference for past tense verbs in narrative essays, students tend to predominantly use present tense verbs in their sentences. In his study, Budiharto (2019) highlighted the disparities in grammar rules pertaining to sentence structure, linguistic components, and verb tenses between Indonesian and English. In contrast to English, which often has varying verb forms, Indonesian verbs do not require any changes to their forms.

The requirement for Indonesian EFL students to narrate past events using past

tense verbs continues to be challenging. Due to the differences in structure between Bahasa and English, the students used their L1 parameters to translate sentences into L2, which caused tense and verb errors (Putriani, 2020). Evidently, the predominant errors in this study were related to verb tense. The researcher determined that errors of this nature can be attributed to the influence of the linguistic structure of one's native language on interlingual transmission. Hence, the interference of the students' native language had a notable effect on their omission errors.

In order to address this issue, the teacher must employ instructional strategies that can enhance students understanding of grammar. An effective method involves instructing students to compile a learning log whereby they list the past tense forms of the verbs in their vocabulary. Consequently, students have the ability to revisit their repertoire of words at any given time when they are assigned a narrative essay task.

#### 4.2 Addition

Addition errors happen when prefixes, suffixes, or other additions are made to a sentence that is incorrect. Double marking is a part of addition errors when two items—instead of just one—are designated for the same feature. Five examples of how the students added incorrect words (*modal* and *be*) in the sentence are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Examples of Students' Errors in the Addition

Name	Error found in the sentence	Correction
Student 2	I <b>can enjoyed</b> the beautiful scenery from my car	I <b>enjoyed</b> the beautiful scenery from my car
Student 3	My sister <b>didn't gave up</b> after trying so many times	My sister <b>didn't give up</b> after trying so many times
Student 4	Three days ago, my class <b>was joined</b> an event called "ObahNggedruk Bumi"	Three days ago, my class <b>joined</b> an event called "ObahNggedruk Bumi"
Student 7	I <b>was helped</b> the little girl to find her mom	I <b>helped</b> the little girl to find her mom
Student 9	I <b>couldn't cried</b> or <b>screamed</b>	I <b>couldn't cry</b> or <b>scream</b>

The examples in Table 2 show that the students were not aware of the verb rules. The present tense verbs must come after the modal verbs "*can*" and "*could not*". However, the past tense verbs were written after these modal verbs. They should have skipped the modal verbs and used the simple past tense directly since they were writing a narrative essay, which often uses the simple past tense.

Not only the modal verbs, but the students also combined “*be*” such as “*was*” with the past tense verbs “*joined, helped*” in the sentence. These sentence structures were grammatically incorrect since the use of ‘*be*’ is not needed. The simple past tense verbs alone should have been all that the students wrote. Moreover, one student also combined the negative form of past tense with the past verb itself such as in ‘*My sister didn’t gave after trying so many times*’. This sentence is obviously incorrect since the present verb should come after the negative past tense.

Abdullah (2013) supported the existing results based on students’ errors in addition category, particularly double marking errors. In a related study, the previous researcher discovered that 45% of the students had difficulty creating negative phrases in the past tense and employing modal verbs in the past tense. Most of them still combined the negative ‘*did not*’ with the past verbs and modal verbs such as ‘*could*’ and ‘*would*’ with the past verbs as well. Meanwhile, these two constructions must be followed by the present verbs.

Out of 30 students, 67 errors (34%) were found in their narrative essays related to addition errors. These results indicated that students’ competency and grammatical knowledge are insufficient. There is evidence that they did not appear to have a strong grasp of grammar, which led to errors being made in their English compositions.

One option to address this issue is to teach grammar in a fun way, such as through the use of movies, songs, or online games. Organizing intense independent work in the classroom to help students learn the rules of using particular language units, as well as managing students’ cognitive activity and the development of their grammatical skills, are the main goals of game exercises for working with grammatical material (Sarsenbaevna, 2022). Naturally, such techniques contribute to students’ understanding of grammar, especially in the use of past tense.

#### 4.3 Misinformation

Misinformation errors happened when students were ignorant of specific language changes in particular structures. In this study, the regularization type of misinformation errors was mostly found. For example, student 4 wrote the past tense ‘**Leaved**’ for ‘**Left**’ in the sentence ‘We **leaved** Surabaya at 2pm to Malang’ and student 12 wrote ‘**Payed**’ for ‘**Paid**’ in ‘I **payed** for his ticket as well’.

With a total of 32 errors in the misinformation category, it can be seen that the

students have not mastered the regular and irregular past tense verbs. They added the suffix -ed at the end of every present verb to perform the past tense verb. See Table 3 below for the examples.

Table 3. Examples of Students' Errors in the Misinformation

Name	Error found in the sentence	Correction
Student 4	We <b>leaved</b> Surabaya at 2pm to Malang	We <b>left</b> Surabaya at 2pm to Malang
Student 12	I <b>payed</b> for his ticket as well	I <b>paid</b> for his ticket as well
Student 15	So, I <b>readed</b> the novel from morning until evening.	So, I <b>read</b> the novel from morning until evening.
Student 21	We just <b>bringed</b> our clothes and some snacks	We just <b>brought</b> our clothes and some snacks
Student 23	I <b>taked</b> a train for the first time in my life	I <b>took</b> a train for the first time in my life

The results of this study correspond to Fajarina and Bahtiar (2022), who found that 52% of their students' written work had misinformation errors. They admitted that it occurred as a result of the students' confusion about the terms' translation from English to Bahasa. Additionally, they were unable to distinguish between the regular verbs and irregular verbs in past tense. For instance, '*They **sitted** on the chairs.....*' while it is supposed to be '*They sat on....*' since '*sit-sat*' is irregular verb. According to Pardosi, Renstra, Owinike, Hotmahua, and Natalia (2019), 62.81% of the students who took part in their study made errors mostly with irregular past tense verbs. However, fewer students—only 37.19%—made errors when using regular past tense verbs. Based on that, it shows that the students lack of knowledge of regular and irregular past tense verbs contributed a lot to this type of error, and this claim is supported by Chaudary & Sahar (2020).

Richards & Schmidt (2010) have observed that developmental or intralingual errors are what lead to misinformation errors. The intralingual error is divided into four groups on its own. First, overgeneralization is when a previously established grammar rule is applied to new or different contexts when it is not appropriate, for example in the sentence '*I taked a train for the first time in my life*'. The student probably reasoned that if he could construct the sentence '*I baked a cake*', he could also write '*I taked a train....*' as well. Second, applying rules incorrectly is known as rule restriction ignorance, which is virtually identical to overgeneralization. Due to the students' failure to adhere to the

restrictions of the pre-existing structure, they made these errors. Third, the students' inability to apply a completely formed structure results from their partial application of the rules. Not to mention, a faulty hypothesis showed that their understanding of the distinction in the target language is inaccurate or insufficient. For instance, the past tense marker 'was' is used incorrectly in the sentence '*one day it was happened*' when it should be '*one day it happened*'. In their study, Yusuf, Faisal, and Risqy (2019) confirmed that these intralingual or developmental factors were the main causes of errors in EFL writings.

Furthermore, the mistakes made by students can be attributed to their inadequate proficiency in the target language. It is widely recognized that several students lack convenient access to and a conducive environment for honing their English language skills, especially in terms of speaking and writing. Insufficient exposure to a learnt language greatly increases the probability of students making errors in its usage. According to Getie (2020), it is essential for children to be exposed to the target language. It is imperative to provide them with opportunities to engage with the target language. Conversely, the university selected for this study is the opposite. Increased opportunities for student interaction in the target language are expected to result in improved learning outcomes.

## **CONCLUSION**

By employing error analysis procedures in 30 students' narrative essays in art major, this study found that a total of 197 errors were found. These errors were grouped into three categories: omission (98 errors) where students omitted certain linguistic features due to their complexity, addition (67 errors) where students added unnecessary words in a sentence, and misinformation (32 errors) where students did not know the linguistic changes in the sentence structures.

The findings and discussion sections provide a detailed explanation and analysis of each error category. Therefore, it can be inferred that the students made grammatical mistakes in their narrative essays due to various factors, including interference from their first language (L1), disparities in grammatical rules between Indonesian and English, inadequate understanding of grammar, overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, and incorrect hypotheses.

Non-English department students require more comprehensive and rigorous instruction on English components and skills. Utilizing contemporary, enjoyable, and captivating media helps enhance students' engagement and curiosity. Despite having acquired knowledge of the simple past tense and its use in narrative essays, individuals nonetheless commit occasional errors due to their restricted timeframe for mastery. Consequently, it is imperative for both the instructor and the institution to provide a conducive and encouraging atmosphere that enables students to hone their skills in spoken and written English. A mere two semesters are insufficient for imparting the necessary knowledge to them; they ought to be granted additional opportunities to engage in practical application, revision, and enhancement of their English language skills.

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