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Errors Analysis in Using Simple Past Tense in Nursing Students' Writing Assignments

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Abstract. Nursing students learn General English (GE) to prepare them to study English for Nursing as their core subject. The primary goal of GE is to prepare them to be able to talk about daily topics and grammar points including simple past tense which was taught implicitly. In fact, teaching grammar is assumed to be trivial lately as teachers shift to more into English teaching trends. Therefore, it is important to go to the root and find ways to help students with their grammar struggle. This study seeks to find the nursing students' error in simple past tense through scrutinizing their writing and thus can evaluate the teaching grammar method. The methodology was descriptive quantitative where 50 students' writing assignments were the data. The errors were identified in the table and were classified based on the error types based on Duly's surface strategy taxonomy. The errors were then analysed quantitatively to find percentages of the errors. The excerpts from the students' writing were included in the result to support the analysis. The findings indicate that mis-formation were the biggest errors with 57.59%, mis-ordering with 20.98%, addition with 12.95%, and omission with the smallest error with 8.48%. The analysis indicates that the interlingual and intralingual transfer contribute to these errors made. Thus, there needs to be a reflection on the grammar teaching done in nursing students now. Teachers should focus on helping the students with their grammar difficulties and flexibly switch the teaching implicitly and explicitly to suit the students need.

Keywords: Simple Past Tense; Grammar; General English; Errors

Introduction

Nowadays, the focus of second language instruction has started to move away from grammatical instruction. The primary focus was on instructing linguistic functions and facilitating communicative actions. In the framework of education in Indonesia, the Merdeka Curriculum is currently being implemented,

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including for EFL instruction (Lestari & Qamariah, 2023). The primary principle of this curriculum is self-directed learning, emphasizing the autonomy to acquire knowledge and express creativity. This ultimately fosters the cultivation of students with autonomous character where teaching grammar is in forms of tenses has been obviously neglected. Regrettably, a study conducted by Sugeng (2015) revealed that pupils in Indonesia had a subpar degree of grammatical proficiency in their language utilization. Previous study reported that students were found to exhibit errors when it comes to writing recount text in which simple past tense is the core. Errors in writing simple past tense through various texts including narrative and recount text has been reported in high school and college settings (Burhan, 2019; Chan, 2016; Devie et al., (2019); Kristiani Br Ginting & Purwanto, 2019a; Mahmudah, (2017); Nurul Amla, (2022).; Situmeang et al., 2021; Umar, 2015; Wahyuningtyas & Bram, 2018a). These studies have called for serious attention to errors made when grammar teaching in the case of tenses is ignored.

General English (GE) is one of English subjects offered for nursing students in one faculty of nursing in Tangerang. It serves as the pre-requisite subject to learning English for Nursing. English for Nursing subject is the core of learning English for nursing students as they are prepared to be nurses who are able to give nursing care emphatically both in Bahasa Indonesia and English. Therefore, preparing them in GE before learning the purposefully English for nursing plays a major role in their English learning trajectory. In the topics of the GE, the students are introduced properly to how to do self-introduction, describe routines, tell times, describe the family tree, describe physical appearance, talk about best friend, do phone call, explain directions and procedures, and tell unforgettable experience. The topics are designed so the students will at the end of the class be able to identify and use some useful phrases in real life conversation contexts. The topics are supported with some implicit grammar points including simple present tense, present continuous tense, present perfect tense, and simple past tense. Most importantly, the topic of unforgettable experience learning objective has always been examined by the students writing their recount text where they write one of their experiences in the past with 300-500 words.

Classroom observation shows that among the grammar points, the simple past tense part appears to be the most difficult part learned by the students. There are a few reasons why students think simple past tense is difficult. First, the fact that there are changes of the verbs used, from infinitive (Verb1) to preterit (Verb 2) confuses the students. Second, the regular and regular verbs added confusion as they are not sure whether a verb should be added with d/ed only or just an irregular one. Third, the appearance of “did” as the auxiliary verbs in negative and interrogative sentences and that verb changes into verb 1 when put together with “did.” They contribute to why students find it hard to write their story of the past. However, teachers cannot just skip simple past tense even if students find it difficult. It is deemed important as (Ur, 2009) defines that grammar in this case simple past tense is the way to put the words together to make a grammatically correct sentence. Therefore, students must master the simple past tense for them to be able to fulfil the learning objective of the topic, namely writing unforgettable experiences. With these in context, it has been an obvious problem

in writing the simple past tense sentences through writing recount in the context of nursing students.

Simple past tense is part of the tenses that indicate changes in the verbs according to the time of occurrence. It described an action that started and ended in the past (Bradeley, 2015; Piercy, 2014). Simple past tense is formed by preterit. The preterit itself can be a regular verb in which an infinitive is added with “d” or “ed.” Joshi (2016) explained that the verbs added with “d” are verbs that ends in “e” such as decide-decided-decided, abuse-abused-abused, type-typed-typed. “Ed” are added to verbs that end in multiple ends like blink-blinked-blinked, look-looked-looked, and lean-leaned-leaned. There are also verbs added with “ied” for verbs ending in “y”. The verbs include modify-modified-modified, classify-classified-classified, and intensify-intensified-intensified. The irregular verbs are verbs that have no rules on the forms. There are no rules like “d” or “ed” on the verb (see rules in Situmorang et al., 2018). The absence of the rules is thought to be one of the causes of why the students have difficulty on the Simple Past Tense. Additionally, the negative and interrogative sentences are constructed through the emergence of the “did” as auxiliary verbs. Whenever “did” appears in the sentence, the verbs will turn into the infinitive (see more in Mahmudah, 2017.). Apparently, all these formulas have put more challenges to students as to why many of them fail in writing the grammatically correct simple past tense sentence.

A number of studies have tried to unpack the reasons why the students have difficulty learning the simple past tense. Wahyuningtyas & Bram (2018) in their study with the first semester students of Language Education students found that students had difficulty in remembering the formula of the tenses and that these formulas are hard to comprehend. Interestingly, these students admit that they rarely review their grammar lessons independently. Inayati and Damayanti (2016) show that the students find significant differences between the L1 and L2 patterns. Meanwhile, Sunarto (2012) and Çakir (2011) find that the students L1 interfere with the L2 productions creating errors.

Errors are the sign of the inability to construct the sentences using the formula well. Kristiani Br Ginting & Purwanto (2019) state that it is indeed a good way of indicating what students have known and what they need to learn. Teachers and students will be informed about which areas are in need of improvement. Situmorang et al., (2018: 66) put it as “the failure of the learners in using the appropriate rule of the language, which will help us to see how learners process the target language and develop underlying system of rules”. The study of errors has been conducted in many studies. The use of simple past tense in the sentences have been seen in recount text (Febriansyah et al., 2020; Kristiani Br Ginting & Purwanto, 2019b; Lionny & Kusumadewi, 2022; Maya Sari et al., n.d.; Yulianawati, 2018). The listed studies have found that all errors including error of omission, error of mis-formation and error of mis-ordering, error of addition appear in the students writing, but mis-formation have appeared with the highest presentation in almost all findings (see Situmorang et al., 2018 for error classification)

Teaching tenses as a part of grammar has sparked a debate among the English teachers and the applied linguist. Çakir (2011) shows that students in Turkey are suffering from English phobia as a product of being immersed to

grammar instead of the linguistic competence for eight years long. The similar situation is likely happening in Indonesia as well where English have been revolving around grammar causing students to feel frightened of English (Trine Chodija et al., 2017), as it enjoys the popularity being the international language is believed to be the language that you need to have to get better job and promotion (Siregar, 2010) Therefore, learning grammar is the fundamental part of the English learning upheld by many. As a result, grammar modules and handbook are created to support English teaching and learning (Mestari, 2016). It is not sure yet who created this grammar trend in teaching of English but it surely has the market in the English teachers and learners as well as in the curriculum opposed to schools.

However, there is a dearth of research pertaining to Error Analysis among nursing students who are studying English, particularly in relation to the simple past tense. This is crucial since the utilization of the simple past tense holds significant importance for nursing students due to many reasons. Nursing documentation is an essential component of patient care, functioning as a legally recognized record of the treatments and interventions provided. Comprehending the usage of the simple past tense guarantees precision and correctness when documenting previous occurrences, which is crucial for maintaining the consistency of care and addressing legal responsibilities. Moreover, proficiency in language abilities, encompassing grammar and tense use, demonstrates professionalism and amplifies prospects for career progression among nursing students. Hence, it is imperative to conduct research that examines the simple past tense errors made by nursing students as a reflective measure, in order to enhance the efficacy of future past tense instruction.

Ellis et al. (2009) mentions there are two ways of how tenses can be taught. The first is through explicit instruction where English is taught as the language teaching itself. The teacher facilitates the students with the grammatical rules and guide them with the rules, indicate error and contrast the grammar teaching with the L1. Overall, it focuses on the forms and keeps on drilling the language teaching through the structures. The study of Eliasi, Salehi, and Borji (2013) indicate that teaching grammar explicitly contribute to successful English learning. Meanwhile, Ellis (2009) continues defining implicit grammar teaching as learning grammar without emphasizing the grammar but in a meaningful and comprehensible way. In this case, the students learn the grammar not as the target of the language but acquiring it as the tasks are being naturally taught. Unfortunately, the implicit teaching can go wrong too if not emphasized that grammar is included in the topic that is taught. (Chodija et al., 2017) points out teaching grammar implicitly to Junior high school students in Indonesia through the text genres lead the students to create a less accurate text as they are not aware of the grammatical mistakes they make. However, there is also the study of explicit vs implicit grammar teaching that indicates that they make no difference in the students' success in learning English (Soleimani et al., 2015).

Writing unforgettable experience in recount text in the context of nursing has put its importance on the meaning leading the grammar teaching is done implicitly. The teachers lead the students to write and try to understand what the students are trying to say from their writing. On the one side, the students are free to express their thoughts without worrying about grammar. On the other side, the

students are not able to construct grammatically correct sentences in simple past tense which is included in the rubric resulting in low scores. Therefore, this study seeks to find out the students' errors in formulating the simple past tense sentence by holding into the error analysis theory of Dulay's surface strategy taxonomy. The finding will serve as a starting point for the teachers to approach the teaching of tenses, improving the teaching, and understanding the learners' point of view when processing the language. With the above stated background, this study therefore set its research problem as follows: "What are the students' errors in formulating the simple past tense through in writing recount text: the unforgettable experience?"

Method

This study was designed as a descriptive quantitative study as it aimed to analyze the errors made by the students. This study focused on the students' writing product of learning grammar implicitly. The participants are 50 nursing students who were in the learning General English. The students came from very diverse background cultural and areas of Indonesia and thus their English ability vary. They studied General English on the third semester as the pre-requisite to learn English for Nursing. In meeting 14, they learned about writing their unforgettable experience which was rationally using simple past tense. However, in the process, the teacher did not teach the simple past tense explicitly. The teachers focused on the structure of the writing in which it involved opening, events (sad; happy; embarrassing, etc.) The students were asked to write about their unforgettable experiences in turn, which was the instrument itself and the writing assignment therefore served as the data in this study.

The data analysis was done through several steps. First, the researchers identified the errors of the simple past tense emerging in the students writing into a list. Secondly, the errors are classified into the error types based on Dulay's surface strategy taxonomy (Dulay et al. 1982) as cited by Fadzilyna, (2013). The taxonomy highlights the errors in constructing the sentence including the errors of omission, addition, mis-formation, and mis-ordering. The identification of the students' errors is carefully identified based on the following guide:

Tabel 1: Analysis guide based on errors' criteria.

Errors	Criteria	Sample
Omission	An omission of an element that should be present in a well-formed sentence	The little girl crying when we arrived there. Suggestion: <i>The little girl <u>was crying</u> when we arrived there.</i>
Addition	A presence of an element which should not be presence in a well-formed sentence	She did not liked the movie. Suggestion: <i>She <u>did not like</u> the movie.</i>
Missed Formation	The use of a well-formed grammar in place of another grammar form.	David cries at school yesterday. Suggestion: <i><u>David cried</u> at school yesterday</i>

Missed Ordering	Incorrect order of morpheme in sentence	Noodle is my food favorite. Suggestion: <i>Noodle is my favorite food.</i>
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Thirdly, the errors were analyzed quantitatively to identify the percentage of errors made by the students by using the formula of $P = F/N \times 100\%$ where P is for the percentage of error, F for the frequency of error, and N is the total number of the error. The findings were presented in the table of percentages. Then the authors presented some of the sample findings from the data to highlight the errors made. The percentage of errors made by the students would in turn indicate the help they need in improving their proficiency in the use of simple past tense.

Finding and Discussion

This study sought to find the errors made in simple past tense through writing a recount text entitled “unforgettable experience”. Fifty students’ work of writing an unforgettable experience were analysed by listing the sentences that contained errors. The sentences were then classified based on the errors’ criteria. After the sentences were classified into error types, the data indicated there were 224 errors made by the students. The distribution of the errors is as shown in the table below.

Table 2: Error finding and percentage

Error types	Occurrence	Percentage
Omission	19	8.48%
Addition	29	12.95%
Missed formation	129	57.59%
Missed ordering	47	20.98%
Total	224	100%

As seen from the table, the most dominant errors were found in the area of Missed formation with a percentage of 57.59%. It is interesting to note that it outweighs all other errors by more than half. Mis-ordering comes second with almost a quarter of the errors made with 20.98%. The error of addition and omission are in the least number with only slight difference. Omissions are 8.48% and Additions are 12.95% respectively. Below are some of the qualitative findings listed based on the errors’ criteria.

Errors in Qualitative Findings

Omission

As presented in the methodology section, error of omission is the absence of one or more morphemes that should appear in a well-formed sentence. As the omission are least in the numbers found namely 19 occurrences, it can be assumed that students are well informed about the sentence formation. Below are some of the omissions found in the data.

Excerpt 1:

“(....) never being rude to his grandchildren.”

Suggestion: **He was** never being rude to his grandchildren.

Excerpt 2:

"When we **started work** we had to pray which is when we work in groups"
Suggestion: *When we started to work in groups, we had to pray first.*

Excerpt 3:

"When i see my friends around **me can run** and play"
Suggestion: *When I saw my friends around me who could run and play.*

Excerpt 4:

When going to school for the first time **I driving alone.**
Suggestion: *When going to school for the first time, I was driving alone.*

Addition

Addition is the errors that happen by the presence of one or more morphemes that should not appear in a well-formed sentence. Addition comes second in the number of the least numbers of errors found namely 29 occurrences. This finding gives light to the researchers that students are well-aware of some morphological forms that do not need addition. Below are some of the additions found in the data.

Excerpt 5:

"When I was hiding suddenly a big brown dog **he** barked"
Suggestion: *When I was hiding suddenly a big brown dog barked.*

Excerpt 6:

"And then, we **are** shed tears and cuddle"
Suggestion: *Then, we shed tears and cuddle.*

Excerpt 7:

"Our cohort **musted gave** a performance at the graduation ceremony."
Suggestion: *Our cohort must give a performance at the graduation ceremony.*

Excerpt 8:

"Moreover **it**, at the beautiful moment **that** I got the opportunity to **gave** a short speech to the teachers, parents, and my friends who came in that event."
Suggestion: *Moreover, at the beautiful moment, I got an opportunity to give a short speech to the teachers, parents, and my friends who came in that event."*

Excerpt 9:

"**It's so make** me sad"
Suggestion: *It makes me so sad.*

Mis-formation

Mis-formation is the use of the wrong grammatical form in place of another grammatical form which at last is not appropriate in a context. Mis-formation is found to contribute to more than 50% of the total errors made by the students in writing their unforgettable experiences in simple past tense. Below are the excerpts from the data involving the mis-formation.

Excerpt 10:

"Everyone **continues** to panic at my absence".
Suggestion: *Everyone continued to panic at my absence.*

Excerpt 11:

"There **is** no chance to go to college, but God's plan **is** indeed beautiful".

Suggestion: *There was no chance to go to college, but God's plan was indeed beautiful.*

Excerpt 12:

"because of what I always ask God to heal my grandfather, but other words, God has called him".

Suggestion: *"Because of what I always asked God was to heal my grandfather, but God called Him"*

Excerpt 13:

"The three of us are from different backgrounds but are united in this event."

Suggestion: *The three of us where from different background but were united in this event.*

Excerpt 14:

"On the way home, I'm just crying because I was afraid and in pain."

Suggestion: *On the way home, I was just crying because I was afraid and in pain.*

Excerpt 15:

"Finally, my parents immediately treat the wound that I experienced at that time."

Suggestion: *Finally, my parents immediately treated the wound that I experienced at that time.*

Mis-ordering

Mis-ordering is the inappropriate order of the morpheme in a sentence. Mis-ordering highlights the position or placement that does not follow the basic grammatical rules. In this research, there is a considerable large number of errors mis-ordering involving the placement of adverbs, adjectives, and nouns. Below are some excerpts taken from the finding.

Excerpt 16:

"I really saw her like a disaster victim at that time"

Suggestion: *I really saw her like a victim of disaster at that time.*

Excerpt 17:

"The hospital at that time in my village only had various ordinary medicines."

Suggestion: *At that time, the hospital in my village had only various ordinary medicines.*

Excerpt 18:

"After I was in Tangerang my grandfather had a stroke."

Suggestion: *My grandfather had a stroke after I was in Tangerang*

Excerpt 19:

"I could only count 1 year I lived in a boarding house when I was in high school."

Suggestion: *I could count that I only lived in a boarding house for a year when I was in high school.*

Excerpt 20:

"Our motorbike suffered considerable damage critical".

Suggestion: *Our motorbike suffered considerable critical damage.*

The findings of this study indicate that the errors made are mostly in mis-formation where students have difficulty in writing the sentences in past tense. As defined, mis-formation is "the use of a well-formed grammar in place of another

grammar form.” There is an indication that students do not really know the form of simple past tense. 57.59% of the errors found in mis-formation show that the students confidently write in the structure that they know namely simple present tense. The simple past tense is not exposed to them as the teachers have expected. The students do not learn the structure implicitly through the material provided in the module as teachers want them to self-study to support their writing about unforgettable experiences. Thus, it can be said that implicit grammar teaching in this context does not reap the success as planned.

The similar findings have also been shown in previous studies where mis-formation appears to be the biggest errors found (Februansyah et al., 2020; Kristiani Br Ginting & Purwanto, 2019b; Lionny & Kusumadewi, 2022; Maya Sari et al., n.d.; Yulianawati, 2018), and narrative (Devie et al., n.d.-b; Situmorang et al., 2018; Umar, 2015c). Lionny & Kusumadewi (2022) explain that the reason behind the errors is the transfer from the mother tongue. The transfer is known as interlingual transfer where the grammatical form of Bahasa Indonesia is translated into English. In Bahasa Indonesia, there is no significant time influence on the verb changes. The verbs are mainly the same through time and events. As a result, students use the structure of subject verb as in simple present tense which resembles the sentence structure in Bahasa Indonesia.

It is interesting to note that students have less errors in error of omission and addition. In omission, there are only a few mistakes were found including verb + verb (started work), subject + verb Ing (I driving), and object + verb (me can run). In addition, students made a few errors including the use of pronoun “he” for animal, **he barked** (should be “*it barked*”), and to be + infinitive - **we are shed** (should be “we shed”). The errors alike are limited to only 20% in total making them as not significant to the problems in writing simple past tense. However, the appearance of these mistakes indicates the effort of the students to make a variation in their grammar writing but they doubt themselves about the correct form. There is a possibility that they have implicitly encountered the simple past tense in the lesson but failed to put it into sentences. Lionny and Kusumadewi (2022) define this source of error as intralingual transfer.

The students grew disinterested of the simple past tense as the teacher keeps asking them to pay attention to the grammar in the module without teaching it explicitly in the classroom session. The teachers ask the students to do more on self-study and raise their awareness of the importance of English (Siregar, 2010). As explained before, the teachers uphold the implicit grammar teaching like Eliasi, Salehi, and Borji (2013) which believed that grammar should not cause students to feel frightened. However, looking at the result of this study, studying grammar implicitly does not work on the student nursing as they do not find implicit teaching as meaningful and comprehensible. The result indicates that students are writing inaccurate stories of unforgettable experiences because they are not aware of the mistakes they make. This finding highlights the same findings with Trine Chodija et al., (2017) Therefore, the findings of this study are eye-opening to the teachers as to reflect on the current grammar teaching method and adjust to the learning objectives.

Conclusion

This study uncovers the implicit teaching of simple past tense in nursing students. Aim to see whether students succeed in their simple past tense use without being taught explicitly, the teachers acting researchers use the writing assignment as the data to find out the errors made by the students. The finding indicates that the errors are made in the area of mis-formation. The indication is that the students experience interlingual transfer where students have not background of simple past tense thus transfer all the sentences from the structure of Bahasa Indonesia. In addition, there is also effort in using simple past tense but ending up in errors of omission and addition. These findings shed light on the teaching method that is done currently to nursing students. The researchers are called to reflect that students need help in their simple past tense thus explicitly teaching them will do them benefit. This study also contributes to teaching simple past tense to students. Though the error analysis seems too trivial to conduct amid the flood of current trends in teaching English, English teachers need to be wise at looking at the need of the students and their learning objective. That way, students will benefit from the lesson and gain success as planned. This study is limited to the context of nursing and sole simple past tense and therefore this study calls for more error analysis research in the areas of other grammatical points with diverse more participants.

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