

### STUDENTS' ERRORS IN WRITING DESCRIPTIVE TEXT VIEWED FROM SURFACE STRATEGY TAXONOMY

<sup>1</sup>Ni Wayan Diani\*, <sup>2</sup>Olga Dona Retsi, <sup>3</sup>Novika Amalia, <sup>4</sup>Maria Arina Luardini

<sup>1,2,3,4</sup> Universitas Palangka Raya, Kalimantan Tengah, Indonesia

<sup>1</sup>[niwayandiani01@gmail.com](mailto:niwayandiani01@gmail.com)\*, <sup>2</sup>[olga.retsi@edu.upr.ac.id](mailto:olga.retsi@edu.upr.ac.id), <sup>3</sup>[novikaamalia@fkip.upr.ac.id](mailto:novikaamalia@fkip.upr.ac.id),

<sup>4</sup>[maria\\_luardini@edu.upr.ac.id](mailto:maria_luardini@edu.upr.ac.id)

#### Abstract

This study aimed to identify and explain errors types and underlying causes of errors in writing descriptive texts among students of English Department at Universitas Palangka Raya. The study employed a qualitative descriptive method by describing factual findings and aspects related to students' errors in composing descriptive texts. The participants comprised 30 second semester students from class C of intermediate English writing course who were taken randomly. An essay test was conducted to collect students' writing in processing data. The results of students' writing were then classified into types of errors based on the surface strategy taxonomy by Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982). Furthermore, the researchers interviewed 5 students with more error categories than others to find out the causes of errors. The results showed that students still made many errors in writing descriptive texts. There were 128 total errors found in the use of grammar in writing descriptive texts. The errors are: (1) 33 omission errors. (2) 23 addition errors. (3) 72 misinformation errors. Misordering errors in the students' descriptive text writing were absent. Interview results revealed that the cause of this error was lack of vocabulary size, time limitation, lack of comprehension, lack of confidence.

Keywords: *writing, error analysis, descriptive text, surface strategy taxonomy*

#### INTRODUCTION

Writing is a thinking process activity and is an important skill that language learners need to learn which is useful for preparing other skills such as listening, speaking and reading (Brown, 2008; Nation, 2009). Writing is also a valuable skill that allows individuals to communicate indirectly and express their thoughts and feelings through written words. It involves a collaborative process that involves organizing, refining, and disseminating knowledge effectively, and achieving this requires a variety of important skills, including selecting appropriate insights, using appropriate punctuation and spelling, creating well-structured content, and having clear writing objectives. In an academic environment, improving students' writing skills is the main goal in education, and in this case, it is important for students to be able to produce well-structured writing (Al-khazraji, 2019; (Ceylan & Nuray, 2019).

Despite the importance of writing subjects for students, this skill is still a difficult task for them. This occurs in various context throughout the world with several aspects of writing difficulties experienced by students in the areas of grammar, grammatical structure and features, vocabulary, and content (Ginting, 2019; Ade, 2019; Toba et al., 2019). This will cause the writing in a paragraph or essay written by students to lack good ideas and structure. In other studies, it was also found that students experienced difficulties in writing due to difficulties in first language transfer, writing exercises that lacked coherence and cohesion, and reading. On the other hand, most students feel confused about how to use correct grammar. They make a lot of errors in writing English text because they tend to ignore grammatical errors (Choironi et al., 2017).

Writing has many types, one of which is descriptive text. Descriptive text contains sensory experiences, visual experiences, and also perceptions about how something looks, sounds, and feels by including several activities such as naming, classifying, and handling attributes, behaviors, functions, and other things and allows readers to imagine what the author wrote without seeing the object or person directly (Surya Dewi et al., 2020). writing that describes persons, places, and objects physically based on their appearance is simply referred to as descriptive writing. However, there are several challenges with producing descriptive text. This lies in the structure of describing objects in detail, the process of arranging ideas into good paragraphs, the ability to write with appropriate spelling, the use of upper and lower-case letters, and punctuation, which must make it easier for readers to read and understand it (Glynn et al., 2006). This difficulty will later cause writing errors in descriptive text. It is important for researcher to analyze errors contained in text writing to provide valuable insights to teachers and students, aiding in the enhancement of writing quality. Error analysis is a study of errors made by second or foreign language learners in writing English sentences where this analysis activity includes identifying, classifying and interpreting the errors made (Brown, 2008; Corder et al., 1981; Richards, 1985; Choironi et al., 2017).

Based on research from Puspita et al, 2021 entitle “An Error Analysis of Students’ Sentence Structure in Paragraph Writing Based on Surface Strategy Taxonomy at the Second Year of SMA Nasional”. The goal of this study is to determine the different kinds of sentence structure errors that second-grade high school students make in paragraphs using the surface strategy taxonomy. The descriptive quantitative method was employed in the study. Using the purposive sampling

technique, 30 students from a single class served as the study's sample. The researcher discovered writing errors that can be classified into the following categories: 28.84 misinformation errors, 28.84 misordering errors, 21.16% omission errors, and 21.16% addition errors. The similarities of this research are the same as analyzing a text or paragraph using surface strategy taxonomy. While the difference is in the research method, the research subject and the text studied.

With reference to the existing research, the researcher observes an undiscovered gap, particularly with regard to the causes of students' error when writing descriptive texts. In the previous study, descriptive text error analysis usually centered on middle school and high school students (Murti et al., 2022). The researcher has not found a similar study that conducted research at the University level. And this can ensure that this research produces useful advantages in the field of writing learning. For this reason, this research is intended to find out whether the university level still makes errors when writing descriptive texts that examined based on the surface strategy taxonomy theory or not and what are the reasons they make these errors. In this study the researcher's focus shifted to the second semester English language education students at Universitas Palangka Raya. These second-semester students are selected due to their engagement with the Intermediate English Writing course material. The aim is to determine whether errors exist in the descriptive text written by students, considering that they have been studying these texts since junior high school.

## **METHOD**

### **Design**

In conducting a study, researchers need to develop a research design. This becomes the design and reference to ensure the goal can be achieved. Thus, the method that was used in this research is qualitative. Qualitative research is research that studies a phenomenon, process, or point of view of the parties involved (Ary, 2006). In qualitative research, descriptive data is produced in written or oral form from the behaviour of subjects observed in their behaviour so that methodologically as research on abstract or imaginative objects (Taylor et al, 2016).

Based on the explanation above, descriptive text focuses on real problems, where data is identified, corrected and summarized. Because this research aims to identify or explain the types of error analysis based on the surface strategy taxonomy, the type of descriptive qualitative method is very appropriate to use.

### Participants

This research was conducted on second semester students of English Education Study Program of Universitas Palangka Raya in academic year 2024 with 30 participants from class C who had studied descriptive text and attended Intermediate English Writing course. The second semester was chosen because students have been introduced to descriptive text material since high school and are still learning descriptive text writing, so it is suitable to analyze errors based on the surface strategy taxonomy. To find out the causes of errors, the researcher interviewed 5 students with the most errors in a structured manner. The research results are expected to be taken into consideration for lecturers in overcoming student writing errors.

### Instrument

Students are given a descriptive text writing test as this research instrument. In addition to identify and categorize the many kinds of errors in students' writing, the researcher additionally utilized an observation sheet to examine errors using the Surface Strategy Taxonomy. The writing instrument consisted of two different topics and one student wrote two descriptive texts with both topics. The first topic was about describing a place and the second was about local food. The results of students' writing were then analyzed using the error analysis instrument according to the theory of Surface Strategy taxonomy (Dulay, et al. 1982):

**Table 1. Types of Surface Strategy Taxonomy**

No	Type	Description
1.	Omission	The error is the omission of a word element that should be there.
2.	Addition	Errors in the form of adding unnecessary word elements.
3.	Misformation	Errors in incorrect tenses, plurals, or verb forms.
4.	Misordering	Errors in word order in sentences.

Five students were interviewed by the researcher to find out why they made the errors they did in their writing, which helped to guarantee the data's accuracy.

### Data Collection

In collecting the data, the researcher obtained it from the students of Universitas Palangka Raya majoring in English Language Education. To obtain data from the error analysis of descriptive text writing using the surface strategy taxonomy the researcher used the written test technique for 2 tests. This was done so that the researcher could analyze the students' writing and

could identify whether the writing had errors or mistakes. The researcher took several steps to obtain this information. First of all, the researcher was asked for permission to conduct research in the class to the teacher of the Intermediate English Writing course. The researcher then gave an explanation to the students about some thoughts about descriptive text that centered on describing a place and original food. The researcher collected the students' writing tests on their descriptive texts. The researcher set a time limit of 90 minutes for the students to submit their tests. Finally, the researcher took photos of the students' descriptive writing and analyzed them.

As a continuation of the previous data collection techniques, researchers also used structured interview techniques to confirm the information that had been obtained. The researcher was contact 5 participants who made a lot of errors in writing descriptive text and engage them in a conversation aimed at finding out or confirming what has been received previously. This was explored opportunities to obtain a variety of unknown information so that it is commensurate with the researcher where current information is useful to consider (Blaxter et al., 2010). Interviews conducted informally in places such as parks or other places as agreed.

### **Data Analysis**

In analyzing the data from the descriptive text writing test, the researcher used the content analysis method to identify and classify the types of errors made by students. The unit of analysis in this study was each word, phrase or sentence construction in the students' descriptive texts that contained grammatical errors. The researcher carefully read and analyzed each text to identify areas where students made errors. To classify the identified errors, the researcher used the theory of (Dulay et al., 1982) namely Surface Strategy Taxonomy (SST). This Surface Strategy Taxonomy has four categories of errors namely omission, addition, misformation and misordering.

In this study, researchers used structured interviews. Structured interviews are an interview method where the interviewer uses a list of questions that have been prepared in advance and asked to all participants in the same way (Begum et al., 2014). Researchers use this type of interview to obtain objective answers and this can minimize bias in the research.

At this point, the researcher conducted interviews with students to find out more about their errors when writing descriptive texts. And through interviews, researchers divide questions into

several topics to make it easier for researchers and can find out the reasons for each error made by students when viewed from the taxonomy theory of surface strategies.

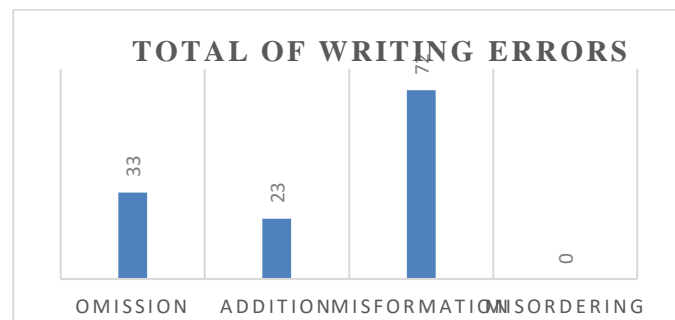
## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data was collected from 60 descriptive texts written by 30 second semester students of English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Palangka Raya. Each student wrote two descriptive texts about 2 different topics the first topic was describing places in Palangka Raya and the second was about local food. The test was conducted on March 4 and 17, 2025. The time given was 90 minutes. And the interview was held on March 20, 2025 which was conducted face-to-face with 5 students with the most writing error categories.

### Students' errors in Writing

Based on the test results of second semester students in the English Education study program, the researcher found 128 writing errors in the students' descriptive writing. The following graphic explains the research's findings:

**Figure 1. Total of Errors in Descriptive Text Writing**



Source: (Authors, 2025).

According to the chart, there were 128 errors made by students overall in their descriptive texts. Based on the theory SST, it can be inferred that misinformation had the highest error frequency, occurring in 72 entries. Numerous verb and noun usage issues among students lead to error when writing descriptive texts. The percentage of descriptive text analysis was used to compute the student data using the following formula:

$$P1 = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$$

**Table 2. Percentage of grammatical error**

No	Type of Error	Percentage (%)
1.	Omission	25.78%
2.	Addition	17.96%
3.	Misformation	56.25%
4.	Misordering	0%

Based on these data, concluded that second semester students of English Education study program still make grammatical errors in writing descriptive text seen from the theory of surface strategy taxonomy. Of the four types of surface strategy taxonomy, the most errors are in the type of misformation as many as 72 errors (56.25%), omission 33 errors (25.78%), addition 23 errors (17.96%) and for misordering there are no errors found in descriptive writing.

**Table 3. Example of students' writing errors**

No.	Types	Example	Correct sentence
1.	Omission	1. The animal noises which make this park in a real condition <b>of forest</b> itself.	1. The animal noises which make this park in a real condition <b>of the forest</b> itself.
		2. Bundaran Besar Palangka Raya is a historical monument <b>that usually</b> called the heart of Palangka Raya	2. Bundaran Besar Palangka Raya is a historical monument <b>that is usually</b> called the heart of Palangka Raya
2.	Addition	1. <b>In the this</b> region, Flat Fish Crackers are well known in two neighboring areas: Sampit in East Kotawaringin Regency and Kuala Pembuang in Seruyan Regency.	1. In <b>this</b> region, Flat Fish Crackers are well known in two neighboring areas: Sampit in East Kotawaringin Regency and Kuala Pembuang in Seruyan Regency.
		2. Pempek <b>is a simple</b> but rich in flavor, very popular because of its savory and unique taste.	2. Pempek <b>is simple</b> but rich in flavor, very popular because of its savory and unique taste.
3.	Misformation	1. It <b>have</b> a special taste because of its rich and savory broth.	1. It <b>has</b> a special taste because of its rich and savory broth.
		2. This dish is best <b>enjoy</b> with warm rice and sambal.	2. This dish is best <b>enjoyed</b> with warm rice and sambal.

### Cause of student error in writing descriptive text

The causes of the errors that second semester English Education Study Program students frequently make when writing descriptive texts were also examined in this study. After conducting interviews with 5 students, with the initials P12, P1, P2, P5, P3 with the category of making the



most writing errors, the researcher found that there were several student perspectives that resulted in errors in writing descriptive texts: lack of vocabulary size, time limitation, lack of writing comprehension and lack of confidence.

### Discussion

Based on the results of the study, the researcher wants to discuss that students still do not understand the principles of descriptive text, especially in the use of words, such as the use of articles, adjectives and verbs which are important components of descriptive text. The results showed that second semester students in the English Language Education study program still made errors in writing descriptive texts. The researcher found writing errors when analyzed with Surface Strategy Taxonomy theory, omission, addition, misformation and misordering.

The researcher found that the most common errors were misformation errors with a total 72 errors. Misformation is an error in the form of morpheme or structure in a sentence. There are several student writing errors with this type, namely errors in the use of to be/ verb, errors in the use of relative pronouns, errors in the form of prepositions and errors in the use of verb forms. As in sentence P9 in the first descriptive text, *“Heavenly Mud **have** an interesting appearance because it consists of two different layers”*. In this sentence, there is an irregularity when viewed from the sentence structure. The use of “have” in this sentence is not in accordance with grammar because in that sentence “Heavenly Mud” is the singular subject. Where the single subject uses the verb “has” instead of “have”. In her research written by (Syahputri et al., 2022) stated that the use of auxiliary verbs such as “have, has and had” is still a common difficulty for most students. She said that students are confused with the subject of the sentence, whether singular or plural, so in the present perfect tense, most students choose the auxiliary verb have. Therefore, there are still a lot of students who make mistakes in the use of these auxiliary verbs.

The second most common type of writing errors are omission. The researcher found that omission errors with a total of 33 errors. These errors are in the lack of adding letters to nouns, the use of to be and articles such as a, an. As in sentence P1 (second descriptive text) *“Let me tell you how to make it in easy way”* this sentence omits the word “an” or the absence of articles that are in accordance with grammar writing. The sentence should add the article “an” to the part “in...



easy way”. Because the sentence shows that there is a description of someone who wants to give information to someone. When describing a person or their job, we use the prefix a/an. When referring to a singular noun, we use the definite article “the” (Faqeabdulla, 2024). Therefore, it is important to add article to the sentence so that the reader can understand what is written and it is good to use appropriate grammar in writing.

Writing errors with type addition in surface strategy taxonomy. There are many errors in the spelling of words that are not appropriate, the addition of s/es that are not appropriate, the addition of articles and determiners that should not be and the repetition of words that are excessive. For example, the sentence from P24 in the first description with the sentence *“In **the** **this** region, flat fish crackers are well known in two neighboring areas: Sampit in East Kotawaringin Regency and Kuala Pembuang in Seruyan Regency”*. In this sentence, there is a repetition of the use of determiners or the words “the and this” which should only use one determiner “the” or “this” only. However, in the use of grammar, the sentence should eliminate the word “the” because the use of “this” there is sufficient. Dulay et al, (1982) stated that addition error is characterized by the presence of elements that should not appear in a correct sentence or speech. Therefore, the error of adding too many determiners or articles that do not fit the context in a writing is called addition error.

Misordering is the last type of the Surface Strategy Taxonomy theory. This error occurs when a morpheme is positioned incorrectly in an utterance. Errors in writing mean that items are not placed correctly. One example, “I do not know I spend how much money in one day” this sentence has several items placed incorrectly. The word “I spend” should be placed after the conjunction “how much” as a dependent clause. The correct sentence should be “I do not know how much I spend money in one day” (Mufidah & Islam, 2022). This error is usually very minimal because most students have used google translate which helps them in translating sentences. Like the research written by (Alisa & Apsari, 2025) in their research only 2 misordering errors occurred which means this error is minimal for students. After analyzing 60 students' descriptive text writings, this study did not find any misordering errors. Therefore, it is believed that students can write with a good writing position or utterance.

Other than the types of errors, the researcher also found out the causes of the second semester students' writing errors. Based on interviews on March 20, 2025 conducted face-to-face with 5 students with the most writing errors, the researcher found 4 causes of errors, namely lack of vocabulary, time constraints, lack of understanding of writing, and lack of confidence. All five students agreed that writing is difficult because of these 4 causes. More than half of the students stated that grammar was the most challenging issue when writing in English (Bulqiyah, 2021). In addition, most students showed difficulties in sentence structure as an aspect of grammar. On the other hand, some students have difficulty in translating a single English sentence due to lack of vocabulary. They usually translate word by word, resulting in errors. This leads to errors in writing and organizing the writing.

Lack of vocabulary size is one of the causes of writing errors. English is known for its rich vocabulary, which makes some students complain and have not been able to master vocabulary. As said by P12, *"Yes, vocabulary is the main reason for my difficulty in writing"*. The sentence said by P12 in the interview conducted by the researcher made the researcher realize that there are still many students who have difficulty memorizing vocabulary and this is what causes most students to dislike English lessons. Lack of vocabulary can cause English language skills to be poor and make learning each English skill difficult. Students find it difficult to choose the right meaning, and are also still confused about the use of words based on context (Surmanov & Azimova, 2020). Therefore, vocabulary is important when wanting to learn English, especially writing.

Time limitation is also the cause of descriptive text writing errors. Time limitations make students less focused in writing and seem rushed and this will produce writing that is difficult for readers to understand. As P1 said, *"If I have limited time, sometimes I like to write carelessly. Not according to the rules of text writing"*. In the interview, P1 argued that time constraints made him write without paying attention to the rules of text writing, which led to unstable writing and inappropriate grammar. Time allocation is considered an important factor in student writing test performance (Ramadhani, 2024). Considering this, it is necessary to reconsider the amount of time limitation in conducting writing tests on students.

Furthermore, lack of writing comprehension. The ability to write is based on whether or not you practice often. Students who have an interest in writing tend to be better at putting their ideas into their writing. However, when interviewing the five second semester students, they said that they rarely practice writing. For examples P12, *“To be honest, I don't really like writing, so I'm lacking in the practice of writing descriptive text”*. This proves that the lack of writing practice in students causes a lack of skills and understanding in writing. According to (Amelia, 2023) the lack of writing practice is a factor that causes writing motivation to decrease. As a result, students cannot develop their ideas into the writing into the right structure and grammar. This is what causes the lack of understanding of writing on descriptive text of second semester students.

The last cause of writing errors obtained from the interview results is lack of confidence. Lack of confidence is still one of the problems that has not found a solution because this is related to each person. Self-confidence and student writing achievement have a correlation. This means that student confidence has a dominant influence on the achievement of writing essays of undergraduate English Education Study Program students (Mardiansyah, 2018). However, based on interviews conducted by the author, there are some students who still feel less confident in the results. For example P5, *“I lack confidence about everything, especially writing. I feel like people will judge me, so I never ask questions about anything, let alone show my writing”*. Students feel that when they show their writing, everyone will judge their writing. Therefore, this pressure makes their writing not in accordance with grammar and proper writing structure. Because they do not allow criticism and suggestions from anyone regarding their writing. This is what causes them to get stuck on their writing skills.

Last but not least, this study found that there are still writing errors made by second semester students in the Intermediate English Writing course for undergraduate English Education Study Program students. The most errors occur in misformation as many as 72 errors, then omission 33 errors, addition 23 errors and misordering 0 errors. The total number of errors in students' descriptive text writing is 128 errors. There are 4 causes of this error, namely lack of vocabulary size, time limitation, lack of writing comprehension, and lack of confidence. After seeing this, the researcher concluded that second semester students of English Education, Universitas Palangka Raya still experienced errors in writing descriptive text when viewed from

the theory of Dulay, et al (1982). Although second semester students have been exposed to descriptive text from high school, there is still a need for a review of it. Students' writing errors should be minimized in order to provide proper learning in the future when the student becomes a teacher.

### CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis, the researcher concluded that the second semester students in the Intermediate English Writing course, English Education Study Program, Universitas Palangka Raya still made grammatical errors in writing descriptive text. The participants of this study were 30 students with each student writing 2 descriptive texts. And based on the results of this study, there are 128 errors that exist in student writing analyzed by the theory of Surface strategy taxonomy from Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982). Of the four types of surface strategy taxonomy, misformation has the highest error score which is 72 errors (56.25%), then omission 33 errors (25.78%) and misformation 23 errors (17.96%). And in the type of misordering, there is no writing error in students' descriptive. In addition to analyzing students' writing errors, researchers also found 4 causes of writing errors based on interviews with 5 students, vocabulary size, time limitation, lack of comprehension and lack of confidence. These causes of errors are common but can have a negative impact on students' writing skills, especially writing descriptive text.

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