

## Investigating EFL Students' Errors in Using Time and Place Prepositions

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### Abstract:

The study tries to investigate the types of grammatical error of time and place prepositions, and to notice the error percent of the tenth-grade students of State Islamic Senior High School (MAN) 1 Bandar Lampung, Lampung Indonesia. The research design is descriptive qualitative using an error analysis (EA) framework. There were 31 students as the research participant chosen by using purposive sampling procedure. The data were obtained from documentation of learners' essay writing and analyzed using Surface Strategy Taxonomy to categorize them. In addition, the writer calculated the proportion of errors found. The findings indicate that students made 27 items (25%) of omission, 25 items (24 %) of addition, 30 items (28%) of misformation, 24 items (23%) of misordering. Errors of misformation were found the most, whereas the errors of misordering were found the least. The errors were often caused by L1 interference, carelessness, and literal translation. Certain pedagogical implications along with the research suggestions were also discussed.

**Keywords:** *EFL students, error analysis, essay writing, surface strategy taxonomy*

### Abstrak:

Penelitian ini mencoba untuk mengetahui jenis kesalahan tata bahasa preposisi waktu dan tempat, dan untuk mengetahui persentase kesalahan siswa kelas X Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 1 Bandar Lampung, Lampung Indonesia. Desain penelitian ini deskriptif kualitatif dengan menggunakan kerangka analisis kesalahan (EA). Partisipan penelitian berjumlah 31 siswa yang dipilih dengan menggunakan teknik purposive sampling. Data dikumpulkan dari dokumentasi tulisan karangan siswa dan dianalisis menggunakan Surface Strategy Taxonomy untuk mengkategorikannya. Selain itu penulis menghitung proporsi kesalahan yang ditemukan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa siswa membuat 27 item (25%) omission, 25 item (24%) addition, 30 item (28%) misformation, 24 item (23%) misordering. Kesalahan misformation paling banyak ditemukan, sedangkan kesalahan misordering ditemukan paling sedikit. Kesalahan tersebut sering disebabkan oleh interferensi bahasa pertama, kecerobohan, dan terjemahan harfiah. Implikasi pedagogis tertentu bersama dengan saran penelitian juga dibahas.

**Kata Kunci:** *Siswa EFL, analisis kesalahan, penulisan esai, taksonomi strategi permukaan*

## 1. Introduction

There has been an intense discussion among researchers why error is always related to mistake. Some think that both are similar and they do not consider them differently. Instead many have tried to differentiate error from mistake with various definitions, yet their discussion refers to the same conclusion. Errors are faulty aspect of learners' speech and writing as a result of deviation from certain

rules of mature performance of language (Dulay et al., 1982). Similarly Brown (2007) asserts that error is a significant deviance from an indigenous tongue indicating the learners' interlanguage proficiency, whereas mistake is due to error of language performance that is either an incidental guesswork or slipping. In addition, error is a systematic, constant deviation as the trait of the learner's linguistic structure at a certain phase of learning, while mistake is a deviance caused by performance aspects such as memory constraint, exhaustion, and emotive stress (Fauziati, 2009). In such a case, the students have accommodated specific faulty patterns from the viewpoint of the intended language into their system (Gass & Selinker, 2008).

In order to keep things in perspective, it is necessary to differentiate between mistakes and errors, which are practically two separate things. A mistake is a presentation fault that is either an unplanned prediction or a "slip," in which a known method is not used correctly. It's the result of an interim failure or flaw in the mechanism of indiscriminate grammatical errors (Brown, 2007). Mistakes have no impact on the language learning process (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). A mistake is created by a student when he neglects the laws that he already understands. Briefly a mistake is a non-structured deflection from the language's rules.

Additionally, according to (Crystal, 2008), errors are supposed to represent the degree of competence attained by the learner in a systematic manner; they are built with "mistakes," which are presentation shortcomings that the student can correct. Meanwhile, according to Ellis (2008), an error is a visible deflection from an indigenous speaker that represents the student's interlanguage competence. In contrary, a mistake is a performance error that is either an incidental assumption or a "slip," in that it is a negligence to correctly use an established method. He also argues that mistakes are triggered by a shortage of comprehension of the language's norms. Performance error is referred to as a mistake in some second language literatures, when it refers to a systematic deviation caused by the learner's still developing second language system.

Many people are sometimes confused with the words error and mistake. This is rational to place the two cases in the suitable contexts. Brown (2007) illustrates one of the most common differences, explaining that errors are immediate manifestations of a procedure in which a student is working at the time, whereas mistakes apply to breakdowns to use an established rule properly. It is obvious from the above definition that error and mistake are not the same thing. Error is as a result of the shortcoming of comprehension of grammatical laws. Students are unable to detect error because they are unaware that they have made a mistake. It is triggered by a lack of language knowledge; learners are unable to correct themselves and need clarification. It is a concept that defines a learner's ability to use language effectively. The difference is that learners can identify errors because they are linked to language success, but they can also correct them. It is the consequence of a mistake in the processing of expression. The students are aware of the rules for constructing good sentences, but their circumstances force them to make errors.

Applied linguistic researchers have conducted in-depth studies of learning difficulties or problems in the SLA process. Further, the result of the studies has led to three widely accepted approaches to analyze L2 learners' errors, i.e. Contrastive Analysis (CA), Interlanguage (IL), and Error Analysis (EA) (Al-Sobhi et al., 2017; Krish & May, 2020). CA focuses on the comparison of L1 and L2 linguistic systems and tries to estimate errors and areas of student difficulty in the process of obtaining L2 due to L1 interference (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). Meanwhile IL provides an analysis pertaining to a sort of language constructed by learners at a certain period of L2 development. Specifically IL possesses three simultaneous features of errors, i.e. systematic, permeable and fossilized (Hong et al., 2011). Unlike the previous approaches in SLA, EA is solely devoted at identifying and describing students' actual errors at classrooms rather than predicting errors or examining a continuum language between L1 system and L2 system (Fauziati, 2014).

EA deals with a procedure to examine and reveal errors produced by learners (Al-Qudat, 2015). Moreover, EA seeks to identify some aspects in language learning, such as strategies of the learners, causes of learners' error, and the common difficulties faced by the learners (Richards and Schmidt, 2010). As an approach to SLA study, EA primarily focuses on learners' error and the reasoning of how learners' error can give an awareness of the essential stages of SLA (Hameed, 2016). It is hence clear that EA is an effective method to scrutinize errors in word's structure either in written or spoken formats. EA is applicable for this study as it attempts to explore the grammatical errors of time and place prepositions in essays. Consequently, this study mainly aims to investigate and categorize errors of time and place prepositions made by the senior high school students in Lampung Indonesia.

A research or attempt to observe, analyze, and identify the errors of students is known as error analysis. In addition, it implies that the instructor will assist learners in avoiding flaws, and that both of them must learn diligently. As a result, having an error analysis will be very beneficial to the language teacher. This emphasizes that error analysis is the fact that students perform faults, and those can be seen, described, and examined to uncover something about the procedure intervening inside the students, which has caused to an increase in the study of learners' errors (Fauziati, 2014). It signals that error analysis is extremely useful to observe, analyze, and categorize the students' faults.

There are several techniques suggested by experts in the field of error analysis (Saugi, 2014). Recognition of faults is the first phase in the error analysis. The instructor notices the students' faults by looking at the assignment they were assigned. The second step, which starts after the identification step has been completed, is the explanation of errors. The categorization of types of faults done by learners is included in the description of the students' errors. The third step is to explain when and how errors happen. The fourth stage in the error analysis process is assessment, in which the instructor assigns assignments or assessments to show which errors are incorrect. The final stage is error correction, which includes the instructor or examiner evaluating the outcomes of the assignments given to the learners and correcting any faults.

Error refers to a mistake in a learner's speech or writing. Linguistic Category Taxonomy, Surface Strategy Taxonomy, Comparative Analysis Taxonomy, and Communicative Impact Taxonomy are the types of errors found by Dulay et al. (1982). The researcher concerned on the Surface Strategy Taxonomy, which involves omission, addition, misformation, and misordering errors, based on this theory. By defining cognition processes that underpin students' reformation of the present language, evaluating flaws from a surface strategy taxonomy method brings a lot of commitment for writers. It surely gives us awareness that the mistakes are effected by the reasoning. The faults are the result of students' application of the temporary theory to construct a new vocabulary, not of laziness or sloppy thought.

Writing errors are some grammatically inappropriate errors. As mentioned by Roslim & Mukundan (2014), grammar has constantly been examined as an indispensable content in teaching English, especially EFL and ESL. Learning grammar is a difficult thing for students, since there are several edicts that cannot be disregarded, and the usual faults frequently detected in learners' writing are preposition errors. Similarly (Sudhakaran, 2015) maintains that the main grammatical error found in students' speech and writing is the error of preposition.

Prepositions, according to Alternberg and Vago (2010), are terms that connect two objects to indicate their relationship. A noun and a pronoun are typically used after a preposition. Depending on the context, prepositions may have different meanings, and some verbs can require mandatory prepositions. Students, on the other hand, defied the edict and learned verbs by disregarding the possibility that unique subsequent prepositions could be needed (Anjayani & Suprpto, 2016). As a consequence, the preposition can be called a connector. The main aim is to link among nouns and pronouns in a sentence. Prepositions are never seen by themselves. It must always be part of a word, which may take on various meanings depending on the situation.

According to Mutmainna (2014), English prepositions can be classified in line with their functions, such as “time” *I will arrive at five o’clock*, “place” *He lives in Lahore*, “path” *Maria went to laboratory*, “agent” *The room was painted by him*, “instrument” *She opened the locker with key*, and “prepositional verb” *She is listening to music*. In using those prepositions, Non-native speakers often made prepositional errors. The errors comprised the omission of a preposition in a sentence where it is obligatory, the insertion of a preposition in a sentence where it is not necessary, and the selection of an incorrect preposition in a sentence. Mostly the errors occur as students transfer spontaneously from their own language prior to hearing the native speakers; thus, the learners' mother tongue is affecting them.

In order to explain the students' difficulties in the case of preposition, the researcher performed an interview and conducted a preliminary study examination. Based on preliminary research conducted in MAN 1 Bandar Lampung, the writer gathered information from students' writing about narrative essays using time and place prepositions, as well as conducting interviews with the instructor and students. Students' motivation to learn English remained low, according to the researcher. Moreover, they were not engaged in the learning process and did not pay attention to the content. The researcher discovered that the students' writing ability remained poor.

The researcher put forward several preceding studies dealing explicitly with grammatical error examination to prove the originality of this study. The first research was conducted by Giatik (2016) titled *Grammatical Errors of Preposition in Descriptive Text Made by Students of MAN Mejayan Ponorogo*. The finding indicated that there were 215 prepositional errors in students' writing task. The errors covered 67 omissions, 25 insertions, and 123 selections. Selection, omission, and insertion were subsequently found the most common errors.

Set in the 2017/2018 academic year, Lembayung (2017) carried out a research titled “An Error Review of Preposition of Place in Students' Descriptive Text Writing at the First Semester of the Eight Grade of MTs Yapenbaya Katibung South Lampung”. The research was aimed at scrutinizing students' prepositional errors in descriptive text. It examined students' grammatical errors of place preposition employing Surface Strategy Taxonomy, as well as to determine and explain the percent of the most common errors students made.

“An Error Analysis on the Use of Preposition in Narrative Composition Made by the Eleventh Grade Students of SMAN 1 Babat Toman Muba” was another study conducted by Utari (2017). In this analysis, she used all of the prepositions found in learners' narrative essay and examined the grammatical errors of preposition written by the SMAN 1 Babat Toman Muba eleventh grade students. The findings showed that the eleventh-grade students of SMAN 1 Babat Toman MUBA as the participants contributed three types of errors on the use of preposition in their narrative composition, those were (1) omission (23,47%), (2) insertion (26,08%), and (3) selection (50,43%). Furthermore, the most frequent type of errors on the use of preposition contributed by the eleventh- grade students of SMAN 1 Babat Toman Muba on their narrative composition was selection with the occurrence 58 errors (50,43%).

Supianda & Amri (2018) investigated the students' common error in writing descriptive text at the second grade of MA Nurul Huda Sungai Luar. Students' writings were assessed based on global error which consisted of error in verb tense (vt), word order (wo), connector (conn), local error which can be divided into article error (art), number (num), and organization error (identification error and description error). Having collected the data, the researcher analysed them by describing the errors. The results indicated that the students made 143 errors which can be separated into verb tense is about 73 or 51%, word order 14 or 10%, connector 7 or 5%, article 8 or 5,5%, number 26 or 18%, and identification 15 or 10,5%. At the end, as the aim of the study was to search for the common errors, it could be inferred that the common one was verb tense (vt) error.

According to the gap review, there were differences between this study and the previous research, which can be summarized as follows. Previous research has concentrated on examining errors in descriptive and narrative prose. However, the focus of this study was on the grammatical error of time

and place prepositions of English in narrative writing. Because of the discrepancies in grammar rules between Indonesian as learners' first language and English as a foreign language (EFL), it is crucial to examine the students' errors in case of preposition usage using Surface Strategy Taxonomy analysis. In this scenario, the researchers are willing to do the research on the issue at hand.

## 2. Methods

This is a kind of descriptive qualitative study using Error Analysis (EA) framework devoted to analyzing grammatical error of time and place prepositions at tenth-grade students of MAN 1 Bandar Lampung, Indonesia. The design of descriptive qualitative aims to comprehend and portray the phenomenon which occurs to the issue examined in the natural setting (Creswell, 2014). There were 31 students of class XB as the research participant chosen by using purposive sampling. The motive of purposive sampling is not to gain an enormous sample, but to select individuals, places, or things that can give the richest and most detailed data to help us answer the research questions (Lodico et al., 2010).

The students were all taught with EFL writing and were classified as novice learners who were, hence, subject to errors in English grammar especially in using preposition. Besides based on preliminary research and also information from the teacher, students of the class chosen made the most prepositional errors in writing tasks among other classes. The researcher took the last assignment of the students' essays in narrative text to use time and place preposition as the data of the research.

In the context of the aforementioned argument, the researcher would define and explain the errors created by students in using prepositions of time and place in narrative prose. The goal of this analysis is to explain the students' ability to use the prepositions of time and place in narrative text of tenth-grade students of MAN 1 Bandar Lampung in 2020/2021. The results of the analysis could be realized as the fundament for designing effective approaches and techniques of teaching EFL writing specifically preposition of time and place usage for the tenth-grade students.

To scrutinize the data containing the students' errors, the researcher implemented some steps of data analysis as follows:

1. Collecting the data from the students' task.

To get the required data, writing task was given to the students with the instruction to make a narrative text containing prepositions of time and place.

2. Identifying the data of students' error

To find the error, the researcher identified sentences containing the prepositional errors and applied coding marks used to give a sign to the sentences containing error.

3. Classifying the students' error

Having the data identified, the errors were classified into kinds of errors based on surface strategy taxonomy.

4. Calculating the percentage

Then, the errors were calculated using the percentage of each error type. To get the percentage of each type, the following formula was used:

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

Notes:

P: Percentage

F: Frequency of error's occurrence

N: Number of total errors (Sudjiono, 2008)

### 3. Findings and Discussion

#### 3.1. Types of Error

There are many examples of students' faults in the use of time and place prepositions. The researcher examined the students' fault in narrative text with regard to the Taxonomy Surface Strategy. They have been categorized as omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. Having checked the student's writing results, it was found that there were 27 items of omission error, 25 items of addition error, 30 items of misformation error and 24 items of misordering error.

##### 3.1.1. Omission error

It is defined by the lack of an object in a good phrase. Data (1) provides a sample of the mistake of omission performed by students in their narrative text.

(1) "One day, ^Sumatera region, there lived a poor family."

The preposition of place is missing in (1). It should include preposition "in" before "Sumatera" to indicate a certain place or region. So, it will be "One day, in Sumatera region, there lived a poor family". This finding corroborates the assertion of Phetongkam (2017) that omission error happens when learners dropped obligatory elements of sentence such as verb, article or preposition.

##### 3.1.2. Addition error

It is defined by the inclusion of an object that does not occur in a well-formed speech. The following data gives an example of the students' mistakes in their narrative prose.

(2) "He went \*to home."

It can be seen in (2) that the student added "to" to give the Indonesian meaning "ke". Nevertheless it is unnecessary to do so. Preposition "to" should be omitted, and therefore the correct construction is "He went home". According to Hikmah (2020), addition error is excessively done by students as they put unnecessary prepositions into their sentences, for example "Firstly the students can find their skills \*in here." One main cause contributing this error is the L1 interference (Sari, 2015) as students use common Indonesian constructions using preposition, such as *Pulang ke rumah* 'Go \*to home' and *Tunggu di sini* 'Wait \*in here'.

##### 3.1.3. Misformation error

It is marked by the use of an incorrect type of morphology or structure. The following data was provided as examples of the students' mistakes in their narrative prose.

(3) "She came \*for a spring."

The phrase "for a spring" has the wrong use of "for" which should be "to" to indicate target or destination. So the correct sentence is "She came to a spring". This kind of error is caused by students' carelessness in choosing the correct form of words. Carelessness is related to the low motivation of students (Norrish, 1983). In this case students do not have enough motivation to know more about something since the material is not interesting or the students do not feel comfortable with their teacher's teaching styles (Erlangga et al., 2019).

##### 3.1.4. Misordering error

It is a clear indication of incorrect positioning of a morpheme or a group of morphemes or word utterances. The below is a sample of the errors.

(4) "She slipped and fell unintentionally the \*into water."

In the phrase “the into water”, there is an incorrect placement of a preposition. The preposition “into” should be written before the noun. So, the correction is “She slipped and fell unintentionally into the water”. This is in line with the argument of Ayuningtias & Wenanda (2013) which states that the misordering error feature is the incorrect placement of a morpheme or group morphemes in a sentence. This is often due to their practice of doing word-to-word translation from their first language to the target language.

### 3.2. Proportion of Students' Grammatical Errors in Using Time and Place Prepositions

As mentioned on the prior discussion, the errors are categorized into four types, namely omission, addition, misformation and misordering. The distribution of each type of error is shown in table 1.

**Table 1.** Percent of errors of time and place prepositions

<b>Types of Error</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Omission	27	25%
Addition	25	24%
Misformation	30	28%
Misordering	24	23%
Total	106	100%

Having collected the student data, the researchers then analyzed 31 essays containing grammatical error of time and place prepositions. Referring to the results of this study, it can be inferred that the learners created errors of omission, addition, misformation and misordering, as also pointed out by Dulay et al. (1982). Moreover, James (1998) points out that the error categorized into five forms based on the Surface Technique Taxonomy is omission, addition, misformation, misordering and mixing.

In this study, the researchers evaluated the students' errors on the basis of the Surface Strategy Taxonomy. In line with the findings of the study, it was known that certain forms of error existed among students: omission (25%), addition (24%), misformation (28%), misordering (23%). It can be inferred that the highest percent error made by students on the basis of surface strategy taxonomy is misformation (28%) and the lowest percent error resulted is misordering (23%).

## 4. Conclusions

Having analyzed the data, the researchers come to a conclusion that in using time and place prepositions in writing an English essay, EFL learners appear to make all forms of errors based on surface strategy taxonomy, including omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. As far as surface strategy taxonomy is concerned, the learners are more likely to commit misformation errors at the most and misordering errors at the very least. In addition, L1 interference, carelessness, and literal translation often cause such the errors.

## 5. Pedagogical Implications and Recommendations

In the light of the aforementioned observations, this study has some pedagogical consequences and suggests a set of recommendations as follows. As learners appear to commit grammatical errors while writing in English, English teachers should strive hard to teach learners how to write in English effectively. Most significantly, teachers should frequently give them a lot of exercises or homework related to grammar, particularly with regard to the agreement of subject and predicate, before they understand the rules of grammar, and then they will at last reduce errors, in particular the types of error that often occur, such as misformation and omission. Since this study has only used written productions

of learners to analyze errors found therein, more researchers are therefore recommended to carry out another similar analysis, such as learning oral communication apprehension and development. In comparison, the review focused primarily on error taxonomy, i.e. surface strategy; thus, subsequent research is highly advised to answer the questions of two other taxonomies, i.e. linguistic groups and comparative interpretation taxonomies, in order to analyze learner errors.

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### Conflict of Interest

In order to maintain the existence of the disciplines of science and ethics in writing scientific papers, it is necessary to emphasize that, this research aims as open knowledge in adding to knowledge and it is also necessary to know that this research is not the result of plagiarism.

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