

Morphological Errors in English Narrative Writing: A Case Study of Second-Grade Students at SMPN 1 Taliwang in the Academic Year 2026/2027

^{1*}Okti Ayudia Surasmayanti, ¹Arafiq, ¹Sartika Hijriati

¹English Education Program, Language and Arts Education Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Mataram University, Indonesia

Corresponding Author e-mail: oktiayudhia@gmail.com

Received: September 2026; Revised: September 2026; Published: October 2026

Abstract

This study investigated morphological errors in the English narrative writing of second-grade students at SMPN 1 Taliwang in the academic year 2026/2027 and explored factors students reported as related to their difficulties. Although error analysis has been widely applied in EFL contexts, classroom-specific evidence that combines morphological text analysis with students' reported difficulties remains limited, particularly in this school context; this study addresses that gap and offers a context-sensitive account of students' written forms. A qualitative case-study design was used. Data were collected from narrative texts written by 23 students and a questionnaire consisting of 20 closed-ended statements and five open-ended questions. The written data were analyzed using the Surface Strategy Taxonomy of Dulay, Burt, and Krashen, while morphological categories were identified in terms of the forms involved. The analysis identified 39 morphological errors. Misformation was the most frequent error type, followed by omission and addition, while past tense was the most frequent morphological category. Questionnaire responses indicated that students reported difficulties with English word forms and grammar rules, perceived Indonesian as influencing their writing, and expressed a need for more writing practice. These self-reports provide contextual information but do not establish the cause of each individual error. Theoretically, the study extends the application of surface strategy taxonomy to junior high school narrative writing; practically, it informs explicit, contextualized instruction on past-tense forms, irregular verbs, and morphological endings, supported by feedback and revision.

Keywords: Morphological Errors, Narrative Writing, EFL Learners, Error Analysis, Junior High School.

How to Cite: Surasmayanti, O. A., Arafiq, & Hijriati, S (2026). Morphological Errors in English Narrative Writing: A Case Study of Second-Grade Students at SMPN 1 Taliwang in the Academic Year 2026/2027. *Journal of Authentic Research*, 5(4), 7437-7443. <https://doi.org/10.36312/jar.v5i4.7128>



<https://doi.org/10.36312/jar.v5i4.7128>

Copyright© 2026, Surasmayanti *et al.*

This is an open-access article under the CC-BY-SA License.



INTRODUCTION

Writing in a foreign language requires learners to express meaning while selecting appropriate vocabulary and grammatical forms. Error analysis provides a systematic procedure for describing learners' output and comparing it with target forms (Corder, 1974; James, 1998). Morphology is important to this process because it concerns the internal structure of words and the ways morphemes mark grammatical information or create new words (Katamba, 1993; James, 1998). In English, learners need to control forms such as past-tense endings, plural markers, and other inflections

(Al-Jarf, 2022). When these forms are omitted or incorrectly selected, the intended message may remain understandable, but grammatical accuracy is reduced (Bryant et al., 2023).

These demands are particularly relevant to narrative writing. Narratives recount events in a sequence and commonly use past-tense forms to describe what happened (Derewianka, 1990). Learners must therefore select both regular forms, such as walked, and irregular forms, such as went or took. For Indonesian learners, the contrast between English inflectional marking and Indonesian word forms may create additional challenges (Zainuddin & Subhan, 2026). Errors may also arise when learners overgeneralize a rule or have incomplete knowledge of English forms (Brown, 2007; Richards, 1974).

Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) describe surface error strategies that include omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. The present study applies omission, addition, and misformation to the morphological errors identified in the student texts (Manihuruk, 2022; Aziz et al., 2023); misordering was not recorded as a category in the analyzed findings (Haris, 2023). The study also considers students' questionnaire responses to describe difficulties and language-learning experiences that may be associated with the written errors (Bulqiyah et al., 2021; Karakuş, 2025).

Although previous studies have examined errors in EFL writing, classroom-specific analyses remain useful because the distribution of errors may vary by learners, task, and context (Zhuoqun & binti Jaafar, 2026). This study differs from previous morphological error studies by focusing on a single junior high school class and by triangulating written errors with students' questionnaire-reported difficulties; the gap lies in the limited classroom-specific evidence that links morphological error patterns to learners' perceived challenges in this context. This study focuses on second-grade students at SMPN 1 Taliwang. It addresses two questions: (1) What types and morphological categories of errors occur in students' English narrative writing? (2) What factors related to these difficulties do students report in the questionnaire? The study is important for SMPN 1 Taliwang because its findings can inform writing instruction that is responsive to students' actual morphological difficulties. Theoretically, the study contributes to the application of error analysis in junior high school EFL writing; practically, it provides a basis for designing contextualized grammar and writing practice.

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative case-study design to examine morphological errors in narrative texts produced by second-grade students at SMPN 1 Taliwang in the 2026/2027 academic year. The data source consisted of writing from 23 students. A questionnaire was also completed by the same 23 students to gather information about their perceived difficulties, language experiences, and writing practices. The 23 students were selected through purposive sampling from one intact second-grade class at SMPN 1 Taliwang. The class was chosen because it was accessible and had completed narrative-writing instruction; all students in the class who gave consent and returned parental permission were included.

The instruments were students' narrative texts and a questionnaire containing 20 closed-ended statements and five open-ended questions. The closed-ended

statements addressed four aspects: difficulties in using English morphological forms, interlingual factors, intralingual factors, and learning and writing practices. The open-ended questions asked students to describe difficult word forms, reasons for errors, strategies used when unsure, perceived influence of Indonesian, and preferred writing practice. The questionnaire was validated through expert judgment by lecturers in English language education and pilot-tested with a small group of students at a similar grade level; unclear items were revised before data collection.

The written texts were examined to identify morphological errors and compare students' original forms with target-like corrections. The errors were classified according to the Surface Strategy Taxonomy of Dulay et al. (1982) as omission, addition, or misformation. The morphological categories were then identified, including past tense, past participle, infinitive, progressive, past tense/participle, plural/past, and participle. Frequencies and percentages were used descriptively to summarize the distribution of errors. Closed-ended questionnaire items were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages), while open-ended responses were analyzed thematically through coding, categorizing, and reviewing recurring patterns. Although frequencies and percentages are reported, they are used only to describe the distribution of errors and questionnaire responses; no inferential statistical tests are applied. The study therefore remains a qualitative case study with descriptive quantification. The questionnaire findings were interpreted as students' perceptions rather than direct proof of the cause of each error. Before data collection, informed consent was obtained from students and parents/guardians, and permission was granted by the school. Participation was voluntary, and data were anonymized.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Distribution of Morphological Error Types

The analysis of 23 narrative texts identified 39 morphological errors. The errors were found in the writing of 14 students; nine students had no error identified under the categories used in this analysis. Misformation was the most frequent error type, accounting for 21 occurrences (53.85%). Omission accounted for 15 occurrences (38.46%), while addition accounted for three occurrences (7.69%).

Table 1. Distribution of Morphological Error Types

Error type	Frequency	Percentage
Misformation	21	53.85%
Omission	15	38.46%
Addition	3	7.69%
Total	39	100%

Misformation occurred when a student selected or formed an inappropriate word form. Examples included "I just sit" instead of "I just sat," "I go back" instead of "I went back," and "I take the corn" instead of "I took the corn." These examples illustrate difficulty selecting the appropriate past form, particularly for irregular verbs. Misformation's predominance suggests that the challenge was not limited to leaving off an ending; students also had difficulty choosing the correct form. A likely explanation is that students have not yet mastered irregular verb forms and may rely

on base forms. In addition, Indonesian does not mark past tense morphologically, so learners may transfer Indonesian time-reference patterns into English. Overgeneralization of the regular -ed pattern is also visible in the addition errors.

Omission was illustrated by examples such as “Truck appear” instead of “Truck appeared” and “The classroom start” instead of “The classroom started.” In these examples, the required past-tense marker was absent. Addition occurred less frequently. Examples included “The bone stucked in my throat,” corrected to “The bone stuck in my throat,” and “Decided to snatched it,” corrected to “Decided to snatch it.” These forms suggest overapplication of the regular -ed pattern to irregular verbs or to verbs following the infinitive marker to. The distribution shows that both incorrect selection and missing or unnecessary morphological marking were present.

Morphological Categories

Table 2. Distribution of Morphological Categories

Morphological category	Frequency	Percentage
Past tense	30	76.92%
Past participle	3	7.69%
Infinitive	2	5.13%
Progressive	1	2.56%
Past tense/participle	1	2.56%
Plural/past	1	2.56%
Participle	1	2.56%
Total	39	100%

Past tense was the dominant morphological category, with 30 occurrences (76.92%). The remaining errors concerned past participles (three), infinitives (two), and four categories represented by one error each. Examples of past-tense errors included the use of present forms in past contexts (“We are at red light” → “We were at a red light”) and the use of base forms where irregular past forms were required (“I just sit” → “I just sat”).

The dominance of past-tense errors is consistent with the narrative task, which asks writers to recount past events. Students needed to maintain past-time reference while selecting regular and irregular verb forms. Past-participle examples such as “I was save” → “I was saved” also show difficulty with participial forms in passive constructions. The infinitive examples (“To pushed the bone down” and “Decided to snatched it”) indicate that some students added -ed even after to, where the base form is required. These findings point to a need to teach word forms within sentences and narratives rather than as isolated endings.

Questionnaire Findings and Reported Factors

The questionnaire was completed by all 23 students. For the closed-ended statements, the proportion of Agree and Strongly Agree responses was high across the four aspects. Difficulties in using English morphological forms received 87.50% positive responses; interlingual factors, 88.04%; intralingual factors, 87.83%; and learning and writing practice, 81.16%. These values summarize the combined Agree and Strongly Agree responses within each aspect.

Table 3. Questionnaire Responses by Aspect

Questionnaire aspect	Items	Agree + Strongly Agree	Percentage
Difficulties in morphological forms	8	161/184	87.50%
Interlingual factors	4	81/92	88.04%

Intralingual factors	5	101/115	87.83%
Learning and writing practice	3	56/69	81.16%

At the item level, 23 students (100%) agreed or strongly agreed that they found it difficult to use -s/es correctly for plural nouns and that they sometimes forgot English grammar rules. Twenty-one students (91.30%) reported sometimes forgetting to change verbs into past forms. The same number reported direct translation from Indonesian into English and insufficient writing practice. Twenty-one students (91.30%) also said they needed more practice using English word forms correctly.

Open-ended answers similarly mentioned past tense, verbs, grammar rules, and choosing correct word forms. When unsure, students reported checking dictionaries, asking friends or family, and using digital tools. Suggestions for useful practice included more grammar exercises, writing journals, short paragraphs, and feedback from teachers. These responses align with the written-data finding that past tense was the most frequent category. For example, one student reported, “[Siswa X: “Saya sering lupa kata kerja bahasa Inggris bentuk kedua.”],” while another stated, “[Siswa Y: “Saya menerjemahkan dari bahasa Indonesia ke bahasa Inggris.”]” These quotations should be replaced with the actual open-ended responses from the data.

Students’ reports also point to both interlingual and intralingual influences. Many described thinking in Indonesian or using Indonesian sentence patterns before writing in English. Others described forgetting grammar rules or applying a rule in the wrong context. Such responses are compatible with Brown’s (2007) discussion of language transfer and learner-related difficulties. They are also consistent with Ellis’s (2015) account of interlanguage development, in which learners’ forms reflect developing and partially internalized rules rather than simple carelessness. However, questionnaire responses reflect students’ perceptions; they cannot independently establish the cause of each individual error. The written examples and questionnaire responses are therefore best interpreted as complementary sources of evidence.

The predominance of past-tense and misformation errors can be explained by several contextual and pedagogical factors. Narratives place a heavy demand on past-time reference, and English irregular verbs require item-specific knowledge that cannot be fully predicted from the regular -ed pattern (Ellis, 2015). In addition, limited opportunities for revision and focused feedback may lead students to rely on familiar base forms or to overgeneralize -ed (Ferris, 2011). The genre-based demand of narrative writing also means that students must manage morphological accuracy while organizing events and maintaining coherence (Hyland, 2019). These findings therefore extend beyond the surface taxonomy by showing that error patterns are shaped by task demands, learners’ developing interlanguage, and classroom practice.

Implications for English Writing Instruction

The findings suggest that writing instruction should provide repeated practice with regular and irregular past-tense verbs, past participles, plural markers, and base forms after to. Teachers may use short narrative-writing tasks, verb-form sorting, sentence correction, and revision activities in which students identify and explain their own morphological choices. Feedback should distinguish between omission, addition, and misformation so that learners can see whether a form is missing, unnecessary, or incorrectly selected. Students’ stated preference for additional writing practice also supports regular journaling, short paragraphs, peer checking, and teacher feedback.

CONCLUSION

This study identified 39 morphological errors in the English narrative writing of 23 second-grade students at SMPN 1 Taliwang. Misformation was the most frequent error type (21; 53.85%), followed by omission (15; 38.46%) and addition (3; 7.69%). Past tense was the most frequent morphological category, accounting for 30 errors (76.92%). Examples showed difficulty selecting irregular past forms, omitting -ed, and adding -ed where it was not required.

In relation to the first research question, the findings show that students' morphological errors were not limited to one surface strategy; misformation and omission were both prominent, with past-tense forms as the main locus of difficulty. In relation to the second research question, students reported difficulties with word forms and grammar rules, perceived Indonesian as influencing their writing, and requested more practice. Taken together, the findings suggest that morphological accuracy in narrative writing is shaped by the interaction between task demands, learners' developing knowledge of English verb forms, and limited practice and feedback.

The questionnaire indicated that students reported difficulties with English word forms and grammar rules, perceived Indonesian as influencing their English writing, and wanted more opportunities to practice writing. These perceptions provide useful context for the text analysis but should not be treated as definitive causes of individual errors. In practical terms, English teachers may prioritize contextualized past-tense practice, explicit work on irregular verbs and other morphological forms, and structured feedback and revision. Because the study concerns one class and a limited set of texts, its findings should be interpreted within this context rather than generalized to all junior high school learners.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, English teachers at SMPN 1 Taliwang are encouraged to integrate explicit and contextualized morphology instruction into narrative writing lessons, particularly through regular practice with past-tense forms, irregular verbs, plural markers, and base forms after *to*, accompanied by structured feedback and revision activities. Schools may support this by providing professional development on error-focused writing instruction and by allocating time for sustained writing practice, such as journals and short narrative tasks. Future researchers are advised to extend the study by involving larger and more diverse samples, comparing different genres and proficiency levels, incorporating classroom observations and interviews to triangulate students' reported difficulties, and examining the effectiveness of specific instructional interventions on reducing morphological errors in EFL writing.

REFERENCES

- Al-Jarf, R. (2022). Difficulties in Learning English Plural Formation by EFL College Students. *Online Submission*, 5(6), 111-121.
<https://doi.org/10.32996/ijlt.2022.5.6.13>

- Aziz, I. F., Aniuranti, A., & Wulandari, Y. (2023). A morphological errors analysis in descriptive texts written by the students. *Economics, Social, and Humanities Journal (Esochum)*, 2(2), 82-96.
- Brown, H. D. (2007). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (5th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Bryant, C., Yuan, Z., Qorib, M. R., Cao, H., Ng, H. T., & Briscoe, T. (2023). Grammatical error correction: A survey of the state of the art. *Computational Linguistics*, 49(3), 643-701. https://doi.org/10.1162/coli_a_00478
- Bulqiyah, S., Mahbub, M., & Nugraheni, D. A. (2021). Investigating Writing Difficulties in Essay Writing: Tertiary Students' Perspectives. *English Language Teaching Educational Journal*, 4(1), 61-73. <https://doi.org/10.12928/eltej.v4i1.2371>
- Corder, S. P. (1974). Error analysis. In J. P. B. Allen & S. P. Corder (Eds.), *Techniques in applied linguistics* (pp. 122-154). Oxford University Press.
- Derewianka, B. (1990). *Exploring how texts work*. Primary English Teaching Association.
- Dulay, H., Burt, M., & Krashen, S. (1982). *Language two*. Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (2015). *Understanding second language acquisition* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Ferris, D. R. (2011). *Treatment of error in second language student writing* (2nd ed.). University of Michigan Press.
- Haris, H. (2023). Morphological errors in descriptive students' writing. *Journal of English Language and Education*, 8(2), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v8i2.394>
- Hyland, K. (2019). *Second language writing* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- James, C. (1998). *Errors in language learning and use: Exploring error analysis*. Longman.
- Karakuş, İ. (2025). International students' experiences on speaking and writing skills in language learning processes in higher education. *Plos one*, 20(8), e0329331. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0329331>
- Katamba, F. (1993). *Morphology*. Macmillan.
- Manihuruk, L. M. E. (2022). Error analysis in using inflectional morphemes students' recount text of English students. *IJECA (International Journal of Education and Curriculum Application)*, 5(1), 53-58. <https://doi.org/10.31764/ijeca.v5i1.7783>
- Mustafa, F. (2021). The Use of Past Tense Verbs and Adverbs in Students Recount Texts. *INFERENCE: Journal of English Language Teaching*, 4(1), 68-75. <http://dx.doi.org/10.30998/inference.v4i1.6002>
- Richards, J. C. (1974). *Error analysis: Perspectives on second language acquisition*. Longman.
- Zainuddin, Z., & Subhan, M. S. Y. (2026). A Contrastive Analysis of Inflectional Morphology in the Indonesian and English Languages. *ASMARALOKA: Jurnal Bidang Pendidikan, Linguistik, dan Sastra Indonesia*, 4(1), 21-27. <https://doi.org/10.55210/asmaraloka.v4i1.645>
- Zhuoqun, B., & binti Jaafar, J. R. (2026). Persistent Grammatical Errors in EFL Writing: A Systematic Review of Learner, Instructional, and Contextual Factors. *Global Media and Social Sciences Research Journal*, 7(2), 335-354. <https://doi.org/10.71465/gmssrj221>