

Error Analysis in Descriptive Text Compositions of Seventh-Grade Students at SMP N 1 Gatak Sukoharjo

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Abstract

Language errors are defined as violations or deviations from established language norms and rules. In practice, students' written work in the form of essays can be evaluated based on content, accuracy in word choice, sentence structure, and spelling. Based on this premise, the present study aims to identify the quality of students' descriptive text writing and the types of language errors that occur among students. This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design. The subjects of the study were seventh-grade students at SMP N 1 Gatak, and the data consisted of students' descriptive texts. The findings indicate the presence of various language errors in the descriptive essays produced by the seventh-grade students of SMP N 1 Gatak. These language errors can be classified into five categories: spelling errors, word formation errors, morphological errors, and syntactic and semantic errors. Overall, the findings demonstrate that students still require intensive training in grammar and spelling in order to produce essays with accurate structure and meaning. Therefore, Indonesian language instruction is expected to place greater emphasis on the contextual application of linguistic rules, enabling students not only to understand theoretical concepts but also to apply them effectively in producing well-structured and accurate written texts.

Keywords: language errors, descriptive text, students

Introduction Section

The Language errors are violations or deviations from established linguistic norms and rules. It is undeniable that, as human beings, errors in language use inevitably occur. Such errors constitute forms of oral or written infractions against particular linguistic conventions. According to Tarigan (2011), an error is an aspect of someone's speech or writing that contains a defect. Language errors are found not only in speech or oral expression but also in written form (Ghufron et al., 2022). In writing, linguistic elements must be used in a complete and appropriate manner. If these elements are incomplete, readers may fail to comprehend the intended information, resulting in what is known as a written language error. Written language errors relate to mistakes occurring at the level of word formation as well as sentence construction. Such errors fall within the domain of linguistic competence, specifically writing.

Writing is a complex activity that requires the ability to convey ideas coherently and logically so that the content of the text can be clearly understood. As a skill, writing involves a continuous process; therefore, consistent practice and regular exercises are essential. Writing constitutes a crucial component of Indonesian language learning at the junior high school level. SMP Negeri 1 Gatak (Gatak Public Junior High School 1) is one of the junior high schools located in Gatak District, Sukoharjo Regency, Central Java. In the context of language error analysis, SMP Negeri 1 Gatak serves as a relevant research site due to the importance of language proficiency in developing students' competencies. As an educational institution comprising students from diverse backgrounds, the school provides a rich environment for examining the dynamics of language use within the learning process.

Writing instruction in schools has received insufficient attention from teachers (Khairunnisa, 2020). This reflects students' limited ability in writing. In fact, learning to write serves the important function of sharpening thinking skills and fostering students' creative reasoning. In language learning, student errors are common, as no learning process is free from mistakes. Given the frequency of such errors, conducting an analysis of students' language errors becomes necessary. The purpose of this analysis is to help students reduce those errors. Mantasiah and Yusri (2020:6) assert that language error analysis views language instruction predominantly from the students' perspective rather than the teachers'. Therefore, all instructional content provided to students should be based on an analysis of their needs and requirements.

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One of the language skills taught in schools is writing. The ability to compose texts is an essential writing skill that students must develop when learning Indonesian in school. A composition consists of sentences that form paragraphs and is grounded in the writer's ideas so that readers can understand it (Naimatul Hidayah & Rahayu Pujiastuti, 2020). In writing activities, linguistic conventions must be taken into account. However, many students still neglect these conventions, resulting in linguistic errors in their compositions. Such errors may occur due to students' insufficient understanding of linguistic rules or their lack of accuracy when writing.

In practice, students' written work in the form of compositions can be analyzed based on content, accuracy in word choice, sentence construction, and spelling. However, in reality, language errors are still frequently found in students' compositions. Such errors hinder the achievement of writing objectives. Students' writing can serve as one indicator of their success in learning Indonesian. Therefore, language errors commonly made by students must be reduced or even eliminated. This can be achieved if teachers thoroughly examine all aspects of language errors.

Language errors constitute an unavoidable part of the learning process for students. Oktaviani and Rohmadi et al. (2018: 98) state that "Language errors are generally caused by competence-related factors, meaning that students do not yet understand the linguistic system of the language they are using." Thus, efforts to minimize language errors in students' compositions are urgently required. This goal can be accomplished by conducting an in-depth analysis of the nature of these errors.

One type of composition that is particularly interesting to study is students' descriptive texts. According to the KBBI, a descriptive text refers to a detailed and clear account or depiction conveyed through words. In general, descriptive texts are texts in which the main idea is communicated by describing an object or event clearly and in detail.

Therefore, descriptive text writing needs to be mastered by seventh-grade junior high school students because it constitutes one of the early units taught at this level. However, based on previous learning outcomes, students have not yet mastered the writing of descriptive texts. This can be seen in their spelling, punctuation, use of capital letters, and alignment between the title and the content of the descriptive text. Writing descriptive texts requires precision, yet many students still struggle to produce well-written compositions, particularly in terms of spelling, capitalization, and punctuation.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to identify how students write descriptive compositions and to examine the types of language errors that occur among them. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more effective language learning methods at SMP Negeri 1 Gatak as well as other schools.

Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design. Qualitative descriptive research aims to explain phenomena and events occurring in the present, in which the researcher seeks to observe events as the central focus and subsequently describe them using scientific procedures to address problems in an actual and factual manner (Sofita, 2019).

This research utilizes a qualitative research approach with a case study type. Syamsudin in Oktaviani (2018) states that a case study approach focuses intensively and in detail on a single case. This study focuses on one specific issue, namely errors in Indonesian language usage. The research describes language errors found in students' descriptive essays. The subjects of the study were seventh-grade students at SMP N 1 Gatak. The research was conducted at SMP N 1 Gatak because preliminary observations revealed that seventh-grade students at this school frequently commit errors in writing essays.

The data in this study consist of words, written expressions, and sentences found in descriptive essays. The data source comprises students' descriptive compositions from SMP N 1 Gatak. Data collection was carried out through observation, tests, and documentation. Data analysis was conducted through three stages: (1) data reduction, which involves selecting, focusing, and simplifying all the obtained data; (2) data presentation, which refers to organizing the collected information; and (3) data verification, which involves drawing conclusions based on the analytical process.

The research was conducted using simultaneous data collection techniques, namely observation. This technique was applied by identifying data that illustrate language errors in students' descriptive writing, classifying the data or statements that represent language errors based on their types, analyzing the data according to the classification of errors, describing the identified language errors to serve as research findings and conclusions, organizing relevant data in accordance with the research problem, and drawing research conclusions based on Indonesian language errors identified through the research procedures.

Result and Discussion

The findings of this study reveal various language-use errors in the descriptive compositions written by seventh-grade students at SMP N 1 Gatak. These errors can be classified into five categories, spelling errors, word formation errors, morphology, syntax, and semantics. The following are the indicators of the documentation guidelines for identifying Indonesian language errors among seventh-grade students at SMP N 1 Gatak:

Table 1. Documentation Guidelines for Describing Indonesian Language Errors Among Seventh-Grade Students of SMP N 1 Gatak.

No.	Class	Category of Language Errors	Number of Findings
1.	VII E (Junior High School)	Spelling	5
2.	VII B (Junior High School)	Word Formation	6
3.	VII D (Junior High School)	Morphology	4
4.	VII A (Junior High School)	Syntax	3
5.	VII D (Junior High School)	Semantics	1
Total			19

In accordance with the description above, the following are the details of language errors found in the compositions of seventh-grade students at SMP N 1 Gatak Sukoharjo: spelling errors accounted for 26.31%, word-formation errors for 31.57%, morphological errors for 21.05%, syntactic errors for 15.78%, and semantic errors for 5.26%. The most frequently occurring errors were word-formation errors.

A. Spelling Errors

Use of Capital Letters

Capital letters are characters that have distinctive forms and sizes (larger than lowercase letters). Generally, capital letters are used as the first letter of the initial word in a sentence, the first letter of proper nouns, and so forth. Proper writing can be achieved by paying careful attention to the correct placement and use of capital letters. The following are errors made by students related to the use of capital letters.

Lowercase letters are used as the initial letter at the beginning of a sentence.

1. *menjelang sore saya menyirami bunga-bungaku agar tidak layu dan cepat berbunga.* (AD, Grade VII)

Based on the sentence above, the italicized word, which appears as the first word in the sentence, must be written with an initial capital letter. The correct sentence is: *Menjelang sore saya menyirami bunga-bungaku agar tidak layu dan cepat berbunga.*

Capital letters are used as the initial letter within the middle of a sentence.

2. *Setelah berjemur saya menyirami Bunga-bunga yang ada di depan rumah saya.* (BC, Grade VII)

According to the example above, the initial letter of the italicized word that appears in the middle of the sentence should be written in lowercase because it occurs within the body of the sentence. The correct expression is: *Setelah berjemur saya menyirami bunga-bunga yang ada di depan rumah saya.*

The initial letter of the name of a month is written in lowercase.

3. *Pada bulan maret, tanggal 4 keluargaku akan berlibur.* (EK, Grade VII)

Based on the sentence above, the underlined word, which represents the name of a month, should be written with an initial capital letter. The correct sentence is: *Pada bulan Maret, tanggal 4 keluargaku akan berlibur.*

The author realizes that the use of capital letters affects the accuracy of writing, as errors in the use of both capital and non-capital letters may influence the clarity of written expression. This is in line with the view of Fatimah & As'ad (2020), who state that in composing a text, the correct use of capital letters facilitates readers' comprehension of the ideas the writer intends to convey. Based on the data obtained, Pandini (2020) asserts that spelling represents an agreed-upon set of rules governing written language to ensure order and uniformity of form, thereby making the content more understandable to readers. This view is reinforced by Qhadafi (2018), who explains that spelling constitutes a set of conventions for writing letters, words, loanwords, and punctuation marks within a language.

Use of Punctuation Marks

Punctuation marks are symbols that are not related to phonemes (sounds) or to words and phrases in a language. They function to indicate the structure and organization of a written text, as well as the intonation and pauses that may be observed during reading. In addition, punctuation marks are conventionally used to separate various parts of written linguistic units. The language errors made by students related to the use of punctuation marks are as follows:

Errors of Omission of a Period

4. *Setiap pagi saya membersihkan tempat tidur lalu saya mandi* (IH, Grade VII).

The sentence above lacks a period at the end. Since it is neither an interrogative nor an exclamatory sentence, a period must be used at the end of the sentence. This aligns with the view of Fadli et al. (2021), who state that according to proper linguistic rules, a period must be placed at the end of a sentence. The correct sentence is: *Setiap pagi saya membersihkan tempat tidur lalu saya mandi.*

Errors of Omission of a Comma

5. *Disitulah rasa lelah kami terasa masing-masing dari kami pun tertidur.* (EK, Grade VII)

The sentence above should include a comma to separate the clause that appears before the main clause, thereby preventing misunderstanding by the reader. This error is consistent with the explanation of Fadli et al. (2021), who emphasize that the use of a comma is crucial to avoid mistakes in reading and comprehension. The correct sentence is: *Di situlah rasa lelah kami terasa, masing-masing dari kami pun tertidur.*

B. Errors in Word Writing

Writing Prepositions

Prepositions can be identified through the use of words such as *di*, *ke*, and *dari*, which must be written separately from the words that follow them. However, based on the descriptive essays of students at SMP N 1 Gatak, many students still make errors in writing prepositions.

Error in Preposition Use – Case 1

6. *“saya sesampai disana saya melihat orang yang sangat ramai mandi-mandi disana”*

The error in datum (6) lies in the word *disana*. This word should be written separately because it indicates a place; therefore, it must be written as *di sana*. The correct form of the sentence is: *“saya sesampai di sana saya melihat orang yang sangat ramai mandi-mandi di sana.”*

Error in Preposition Use – Case 2

7. *“tempat untuk santai yang di buat khusus untuk paraturis”*

The error in datum (7) occurs in the phrase *di buat*. In this context, the word does not indicate a place; therefore, it must be written as one word: *dibuat*, following correct spelling conventions. The correct sentence is: *“tempat untuk santai yang dibuat khusus untuk paraturis.”*

Error in Preposition Use – Case 3

8. *“saya langsung berangkat pulang kerumah”*

The error in datum (8) concerns the word *kerumah*, which should be written separately because it indicates a place. Thus, it must be written as *ke rumah*. The correct form of the sentence is: *“saya langsung berangkat pulang ke rumah.”*

Writing Reduplicated Words

Errors in word writing found in this study include mistakes in writing reduplicated words, errors in writing prepositions, and errors in writing abbreviations. These three types of errors in the students' descriptive essays are explained as follows:

Error in Writing Reduplicated Words – Case 1

9. *“habis makan kami duduk² sebentar seterusnya habis duduk kami pulang”* (EK, Grade VII)

The reduplicated word in the sentence above violates the rules of the Enhanced Spelling System (EYD). Such words should be written in full by repeating the base word with a hyphen between the repeated forms. Therefore, to comply with EYD, the correct form of the sentence is: *“habis makan kami duduk-duduk sebentar lalu kami pulang.”*

Error in Writing Reduplicated Words – Case 2

10. *“karena kami tancap-tancap sampai ditilang polisi”*

The data above show an error in writing a reduplicated word, visible in the word *tancap-tancap*. According to EYD, reduplicated words must be written completely and connected using a hyphen between the repeated base words. However, the intended meaning in this context is not repetition but “driving too fast.” Therefore, to align with proper usage and clarity, the corrected sentence becomes: *“karena kami terlalu kencang sampai ditilang polisi.”*

Error in Writing Reduplicated Words – Case 3

11. *“Saya menfoto foto dengan turis dan akhirnya saya pulang”* (IH, Grade VII)

The data above show an error in writing a reduplicated word, visible in the phrase *menfoto foto*. In accordance with EYD, if the intention is to express a repeated action or multiple objects, the base word must be written completely and repeated using a hyphen. Thus, to comply with EYD, the corrected form is: *“saya menfoto-foto turis-turis dan akhirnya saya pulang.”*

C. Errors in the Field of Morphology

Morphology is a linguistic field that contributes significantly to the formation of new words. Fernando et al. (2021) state that morphology is the process by which a word is formed by combining one morpheme with another, thus creating a word with a new meaning. This view aligns with Nentia (2019), who explains that word-formation errors occur due to linguistic mistakes within the morphological domain. The morphological errors found in students' compositions include the omission of the prefix *ber-*; the omission of the prefix *me-*; the reduction of the morpheme *men-* to *n-*; and the reduction of the morpheme *meng-* to *ng-*.

Omission of the Prefix *ber-*

14. *Setelah berjemur saya menyirami Bunga-bunga yang ada di depan rumah saya.* (BC, Grade VII)

Based on the data above, the underlined word is not used appropriately as a demonstrative word in the sentence. The omission of the prefix *ber-* in the students' writing results in an incorrect form. The appropriate word should be *berada*, meaning "to be located at," indicating the place where the flowers are situated. The correct sentence is: *Setelah berjemur saya menyirami bunga-bunga yang berada di depan rumah saya.*

Omission of the Prefix *me-*

15. *Setelah menyirami bunga saya mencuci piring di dapur setelah itu saya masak nasi di Rice Cooker.* (BC, Grade VII)
The base word *masak* as used in the sentence above is not appropriate in this context. The word *masak* refers to something already cooked or ready to be served, especially food. With the prefix *me-*, the correct verb becomes *memasak*, meaning "to cook" or "to prepare food," functioning as an active verb. The correct sentence is: *Setelah menyirami bunga saya mencuci piring di dapur, setelah itu saya memasak nasi di Rice Cooker.*

Error in Morpheme *men-* Reduced to *n-*

16. *Setelah mandi saya istirahat lalu saya makan habis itu saya nonton TV habis itu saya tidur.* (IH, Grade VII)
The word *nonton* is a nonstandard form derived from the base word *tonton*, which should receive the prefix *men-* to form *menonton*. This reduction occurs due to incorrect affixation in informal communication. The correct sentence is: *Setelah mandi saya istirahat lalu saya makan, habis itu saya menonton TV, habis itu saya tidur.*

Error in Morpheme *meng-* Reduced to *ng-*

17. *Jam 18.00 saya mandi lalu habis mandi saya makan setelah itu saya mabar.* (IH, Grade VII)
The word *ngaji* is an example of a nonstandard word formed by reducing the morpheme *meng-* to *ng-*, as in the standard form *mengaji*. However, in the sentence above, the student uses *mabar*, which is slang for *main bareng*, meaning "playing together in the same game with friends." The correct sentence is: *Jam 18.00 saya mandi lalu habis mandi saya makan, setelah itu saya mabar.*

Morphology is a linguistic discipline that examines morphemes and how they form words (Nafinuddin, 2020). This view is in line with Nisa (2018), who states that morphological processes involve the arrangement of word units to form base structures. Morphology consists of three main processes: first, affixation; second, reduplication; and third, compounding.

D. Errors in the Field of Syntax

The following section presents syntactic errors found in students' writing, including ambiguous sentences and the misuse of redundant or inappropriate diction.

Ambiguous Sentences

18. *Setelah mandi saya berangkat ngaji pada pukul 17.00–20.00.* (BC, Grade VII)
Setyawati in Sari (2017) states that an ambiguous sentence is one that possesses multiple interpretations, making it difficult for readers to understand. The sentence *saya berangkat ngaji pada pukul 17.00–20.00* is ambiguous because it may produce more than one meaning. The sentence contains two possible interpretations: the time required to travel to the study session is three hours, or the religious study session begins at 17.00 and ends at 20.00. The correct sentence is: *Setelah mandi saya berangkat ngaji pada pukul 17.00 dan pulang pada pukul 20.00.*

Inappropriate Diction in Sentence Construction

19. *Jam 04.40 saya bangun dan saya berdoa syafaat.* (AD, Grade VII)
The use of the word *dan* (and) in this sentence is not appropriate to connect the subsequent action. The correct word is *untuk* (to), which indicates the reason for waking up. The correct sentence is: *Jam 04.40 saya bangun untuk melaksanakan doa syafaat pagi.*

Redundant Words (Pleonasm in Syntax)

20. *Setelah Adzan isya saya dan teman-teman saya melaksanakan sholat isya.* (BC, Grade VII)
The underlined phrase is an example of redundancy. A redundant sentence contains unnecessary repeated information. In this case, the phrase *saya dan teman-teman saya* can be replaced simply with *kami*. The correct sentence is: *Setelah Adzan isya kami melaksanakan sholat isya.* Based on the data obtained, syntactic errors—in line with Ramadhiyanti (2020)—are violations, mistakes, or deviations at the syntactic level, involving phrase structure, clauses, sentence arrangement, and relationships between words and larger linguistic units.

E. Errors in the Field of Semantics

One semantic error identified in the students' writing is the occurrence of pleonasm.

Pleonasm

21. *Lalu saya sarapan pagi bersama keluarga.* (AD, Grade VII)

The phrase above contains pleonasm, specifically in the expression *sarapan pagi*. It is more appropriate to use only the word *sarapan*, as the term already refers to the first meal of the day taken in the morning. This observation corresponds to Reistanti (2018), who states that pleonasm is unnecessary in contexts where emphasis or stylistic effect is not required. The correct sentence is: *Lalu saya sarapan bersama keluarga*. Thus, following Himawan et al. (2020), semantics is a linguistic discipline that investigates meaning in order to identify language errors found in students' writing.

Implications for Indonesian Language Instruction

The findings of this study carry several important implications for Indonesian language instruction, particularly in the teaching of descriptive writing at the junior high school level. The high frequency of orthographic and punctuation errors suggests that students possess theoretical knowledge of spelling conventions but struggle to apply these rules accurately in written contexts. According to Febriana et al., (2025) Indonesian language instruction must emphasize contextual and practice-based learning rather than relying solely on rule memorization. Lessons on PUEBI should be integrated into authentic writing tasks, enabling students to internalize conventions while producing meaningful texts.

Another implication concerns the persistence of errors in word formation, especially those related to reduplication, prepositional use, and affixation. These patterns indicate that students require explicit instruction in morphological processes and standard word formation. Incorporating exercises that focus on affixes such as *me-* and *ber-* as well as correct reduplication can strengthen students' awareness of how words are constructed and how meaning shifts based on affix usage. Morphological competence should not be taught in isolation; instead, it must be embedded in writing activities so that students apply linguistic rules appropriately.

In addition, the presence of syntactic errors, including ambiguous sentence structures and redundancy, highlights the need for instruction to focus on developing students' ability to construct effective and coherent sentences. Teachers should utilize model texts and text-based approaches to help students understand how ideas are logically organized within descriptive writing. Direct instruction on sentence clarity, cohesion, and paragraph development can assist students in producing compositions that reflect accurate linguistic structure. Thus, following Cahyo, (2025) furthermore, to address recurring errors, writing instruction should incorporate direct corrective feedback. Instead of evaluating student work solely based on final output, teachers should guide students through revision processes, offering feedback targeted at specific linguistic issues. This approach encourages student reflection and reinforces learning through repeated practice.

Finally, formative assessment must be aligned with the types of errors identified in the study. Assessment instruments, such as rubrics, should include indicators related to orthography, morphology, syntax, and semantics. Such alignment ensures that evaluation not only measures student performance but also informs instructional planning and remediation. Overall, the implications of this study underscore the importance of instructional approaches that are explicit, contextual, and feedback-driven. By grounding instructional strategies in students' actual linguistic challenges, teachers can better support the development of accurate, coherent, and communicative descriptive writing skills.

Table 2. Language Skills and Learning Outcomes

Error Domain	Related Language Skill	Indonesian Language Learning Outcomes (Junior High School)	Contribution of the Study
Orthography & punctuation	Writing texts according to PUEBI conventions	Students edit and write texts using accurate spelling, capitalization, and punctuation	Provides error categories that can serve as assessment indicators
Word formation (affixation & reduplication)	Morphology and standard word formation	Students understand word formation and apply standard forms	Identifies dominant error types to guide instructional focus
Syntax & sentence effectiveness	Constructing effective sentences in descriptive texts	Students produce coherent and well-structured paragraphs	Provides real examples of errors for instructional material
Semantics (pleonasm & unclear meaning)	Semantic accuracy and diction selection	Students select words appropriate to meaning and context	Supports development of enrichment material
Phonology	Correspondence between spoken and written forms	Students understand the representation of sounds in written text	Serves as a reference for oral-written language comparison

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study on language errors in descriptive essays written by seventh-grade students of SMP N 1 Gatak, it was identified that the errors fall into four main categories: orthography, prepositional writing, syntax, and semantics. Orthographic errors were the most frequent, particularly in the use of capital letters and punctuation marks, such as the failure to capitalize the initial letter of a sentence and the omission of periods and commas, which resulted in ineffective sentence construction. In addition, errors involving the writing of prepositions commonly occurred, especially in the separation of the prepositions *di*, *ke*, and *dari* from the words that follow them, indicating a limited understanding of the rules set forth in the Enhanced Indonesian Spelling System (EYD).

Meanwhile, errors in the syntactic domain included the use of ambiguous sentences and redundant expressions, which led to unclear or excessive meanings. In the semantic domain, pleonasm was identified, such as in the phrase *sarapan pagi* ("morning breakfast"), which is considered inappropriate due to its redundant meaning. Overall, the results of this study suggest that students still require intensive guidance in aspects of grammar and orthography to produce compositions with accurate structure and meaning. Indonesian language instruction is therefore expected to place greater emphasis on the contextual application of linguistic rules so that students not only understand the theoretical aspects but are also able to apply them effectively in well-constructed written texts.

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