



## Students' Common Errors in Constructing Simple-Past Tense Interrogative Sentences

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### ABSTRAK

*This study analyzes common errors made by students in constructing simple past tense interrogative sentences, focusing on English language learners at STAIN Mandailing Natal who have completed the Intermediate Grammar course. This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze the types of errors that students often encounter when constructing simple past tense interrogative sentences, such as incorrect verb forms after the auxiliary verb "did", confusion between positive, negative, and interrogative forms, and inappropriate placement of auxiliary verbs. The findings indicate that these errors stem from a lack of understanding of tense structures and a lack of practice in constructing interrogative sentences. This study highlights the importance of grammar in effective communication and suggests that teachers implement targeted teaching strategies to address these common errors. By identifying specific areas where students experience difficulties, this study aims to contribute to better teaching methods and improve students' proficiency in using simple past tense interrogative sentences. Ultimately, this study underlines the importance of integrating grammar education into the English curriculum to foster better language acquisition and communication skills among learners.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Analysis, Common Errors, Interrogative Sentence, Simple Past Tense.*

### INTRODUCTION

English is one of the international languages that is most widely studied and used in communicating between nations. This is in accordance with the role of English as a global language because English is studied and used as a means of communication in various countries, both as a first language, a second language, and as a foreign language. In Indonesia, English is the first foreign language studied as a compulsory subject from middle school to university. By having English language skills, we can easily access and obtain information because most of the information is written in English. This happens because English functions as the language of science and technology (Azar, 2021). However, English is often used carelessly without using grammar; therefore, it is important to know how to use correct and good grammar.

Grammar is an important part of effective communication. Grammar serves as the structural basis of the English language, providing the rules and standards for creating logical and meaningful sentences. To avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations, this basic knowledge is essential to ensuring that written and oral communications are clear and precise. A strong understanding of grammar also supports the development of other language skills such as reading, listening, and writing, allowing students to better understand and use language. Understanding grammar also helps you be more confident when speaking (Murphy 2019; Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman 1999; Kolln and Funk 2011).

People who are confident in their grammar skills can speak more fluently and accurately. This self-confidence is very important when speaking, presenting, and interacting with other people. Grammar students also learn about the cultural context in which particular grammatical structures are used. This helps them become more culturally sensitive and understanding. Overall, the function of grammar is to provide students with the ability to communicate English in a precise, effective, and confident manner (Maamari, 2010; Nassaji & Fotos, 2011).

One aspect of grammar that is often focused on is tense, especially the simple past tense. The simple past tense is used to express actions or events that have occurred in the past. When constructing interrogative sentences using the simple past tense, students often face difficulties and make various errors. A good understanding of these errors is essential for educators to design more effective teaching strategies (Azar, 2021; Richards & Schmidt, 2013). Therefore, we need to know how to compose interrogative sentences in simple past tense form in a structured and correct manner.

Forming interrogative sentences in simple past tense requires a good understanding of changes in sentence structure from declarative to interrogative. Usually, students have to place the auxiliary verb 'did' at the beginning of the sentence and change the main verb back to its base form. Common errors that often occur include using the past form of the main verb after the auxiliary verb 'did' (for example, Did he went instead of Did he go), the inability to distinguish between positive, negative, and interrogative forms in the simple past tense, as well as errors in placing the auxiliary verb 'did' in interrogative sentences (Azar, 2021; Richards & Schmidt, 2013).

Students' errors in completing simple past-tense interrogative sentences can occur due to several factors. One of the main factors is students' lack of understanding of the concept of time used in interrogative sentences. Students often have difficulty understanding the required time and using it appropriately when answering questions. Apart from that, student errors can also be caused by students' lack of practice and exercise in composing simple past-tense question sentences. Students who are less active in practicing and practicing in preparing these questions tend to experience difficulty in solving more complex questions (Brown, 2000).

This research aims to determine the types of common errors in constructing simple past tense interrogative sentences made by STAIN Mandailing Natal English students who have taken the Intermediate Grammar course in constructing simple past tense interrogative sentences. The research technique used is qualitative research, with a descriptive analysis approach (Creswell, 2014).

The results of previous research found that students' errors in using the simple past tense could be caused by students' lack of knowledge about verbs and the use of the second form of verbs (Verb 2). Apart from that, research also finds that the reason students make errors in using the simple past tense is students' ignorance about what the simple past tense is.

This research also functions as a self-evaluation for students to recognize and correct errors they make in using English grammar, especially in forming Simple Past Tense interrogative sentences. Thus, it is hoped that this research can contribute to improving the quality of English language learning at various levels of education. So the researcher will research and see what errors occurred in constructing interrogative sentences in the simple past tense.

Based on the background above, the problem that will be solved in this research is what errors students make in constructing simple past tense interrogative sentences and what causes these errors to occur.

## METHODOLOGY

This research is a qualitative descriptive study that aims to describe phenomena in detail and in depth, with a focus on understanding and interpreting phenomena in natural contexts. This research will be carried out at the State Islamic Religious School (STAIN) Mandailing Natal English Language Education Study Program, which has taken an intermediate grammar course with a total of 22 subjects located on JL. Prof. Dr. Andi Hakim Nst, Pidoli Lombang, Kec. Panyabungan, Mandailing Natal Regency, North Sumatra. "Data collection will be carried out in July 2024, with data analysis and research report writing carried out from July to September 2024." Determining a specific location and time will help in planning and carrying out research in a more structured and focused manner. The data source is a written test from second-semester students majoring in English at Mandailing Natal State Islamic Religious College who have taken the Intermediate Grammar course. The student test focuses on forming interrogative sentences in simple past tense.

The data collected was analyzed by using procedures in doing error analysis. The procedures consist of five steps based on Corder's. It consists collecting of the sample, identification of error, describing student's errors after that the explanation of the error. This step attempts to account for why the errors occur. It means to determine the sources (causes) of the errors based on Corder's theory beside that the writer uses interview as supporting data. The next procedure is evaluation of the error which means to distinct which errors will be corrected so the learner, which made an error, will not be stress of getting correction. Corder theory, to do the last step which is quantifying each percentage of error, the formula below is used:

$$P = fn \times 100\%$$

Note:

P: Percentage;

f: Frequency of a type of error;

n: Number of total errors occur.

The data of interview will utilize to strengthen the explanation of the causing factors that prompted the most frequented error to occur. The writer will provide the data in the form of transcripts. Then the transcripts will process through coding technique. Brown (2002), explained that Errors are caused by interference, overgeneralization, ignore of rule restriction, incompete application of rules, false concepts hypothesized, and context of learning. The last writer will explain the causing factors that prompt students most frequent type of error occur.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to analyze the common errors made by students in constructing simple past tense interrogative sentences using yes/no and wh questions and to find out the causes of common errors that occur when students construct simple past tense interrogative sentences. The findings reveal various errors in constructing simple past tense interrogative sentences, which emphasize the need for targeted teaching interventions to improve students' writing skills.

The analysis identified three types of errors made by students, which can be grouped into several categories. A common error was the use of the verb after the verb did, i.e. the base verb (verb 1), which accounted for 9 (53%) of the total yes/no question errors and 7 (15%) of the total WH question errors. These errors often stemmed from a lack of understanding of the verb usage used when constructing simple past tense interrogative sentences, indicating a fundamental gap in students' knowledge of simple past tense interrogative sentences. For example, the incorrect use of the word "watches" instead of "watch" reflects a misunderstanding that the verbs that should be used in simple past tense interrogative sentences should be base verbs (verb 1), while positive and negative simple past tense sentences should use second-form verbs (verb 2).

Similarly, the wrong placement of auxiliary verbs: when constructing simple past tense interrogative sentences using yes/no and wh questions, there were 5 (41%) errors in yes/no questions and 9 (56%) errors in wh questions, which were observed in sentences such as "How feel did you after watching the movie?" should be "How did you feel after watching the movie?" which indicates the incorrect placement of auxiliary verbs, namely the placement of "did", which should be placed before the verb.

In addition, another common type of student error that occurs when constructing simple past tense interrogative sentences is not using the auxiliary "did" there are 3 (64%) errors in yes/no question sentences and 30 (65%) errors in wh question sentences. Sentences that do not use the auxiliary "did" such as "You forget your phone?" should be "Did you forget your phone?" in yes/no question sentences and "Why does he cry?" should be "Why did he cry?" in wh question sentences. The error of not using the auxiliary "Did" in simple past tense interrogative sentences further highlights the challenges students face when constructing these simple past tense interrogative sentences with the conventions of written English, indicating that greater emphasis on these aspects is needed in writing and constructing simple past tense interrogative sentences using both yes/no

and WH questions.

As for the causes of errors from the results of the research studied, one of the main factors causing errors in composing simple past tense interrogative sentences using yes/no and WH questions is the delay in understanding the concept of time used in interrogative sentences. Many students have difficulty in understanding what is asked in a question and how to construct the correct interrogative sentence. This can be caused by a lack of practice in constructing complex simple past tense interrogative sentences. Lack of Practice is very important for students to be more proficient in making interrogative sentences. However, if students are less active in doing exercises and problems, then students' ability to make interrogative sentences will get worse. This factor also contributes to students' difficulties in solving more complex problems.

Students also often have difficulty in understanding the rules of tenses, especially the simple past tense. The inability to understand the rules of the simple past tense, such as the use of regular and irregular verbs, can lead to errors in using the correct tense. For example, errors in changing the verb tense from present tense to past tense, such as "She slept" to "She slept", without proper changes.

Emotional factors and learning motivation also play a big role in student errors. Stress, nervousness, and depression can interfere with concentration and memory. The hormone cortisol, which increases during stress, can affect the part of the brain responsible for memory. In addition, low learning motivation can cause students to be unwilling to put in the effort to understand and memorize past tense rules correctly.

Overall, the findings of this study emphasize the importance of grammatical understanding and active practice in learning English, particularly in constructing simple interrogative sentences in the past tense. purposeful writing instruction that addresses the three common types of errors students make and the underlying causes of these errors. By focusing on specific areas such as verb tense consistency, auxiliary placement, and the use of "did", educators can equip students with the skills needed to improve their writing proficiency. In addition, strategies that encourage careful writing and awareness of grammar rules will be crucial in helping students improve their overall performance in English writing tasks. Future research could explore more comprehensive interventions designed to address these identified needs, fostering a stronger foundation for students' English writing ability.

Thus, the combination of all the above factors leads to common mistakes in making yes/no questions and WH questions simple past tense among students. The causes of common errors made by students in composing yes/no and WH question simple past tense sentences are one of them because they forget and are not focused, or students experience confusion in determining the verbs used.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of two problem formulations regarding students' common errors in constructing simple past tense interrogative sentences, this study found that students at STAIN Mandailing Natal often experience errors in constructing simple past tense interrogative sentences with the correct sentence structure. First, the most frequent error is the use of the wrong verb form after the auxiliary verb "did" with a percentage of 53%. In addition, the misplacement of the auxiliary verb ("did") is also quite significant, which is 29%, and not using the auxiliary verb at all is another error experienced by students with a frequency of 18% when composing simple past tense interrogative sentences using yes-no questions. Then in the WH question, the most dominant error is not using the auxiliary verb ("did"), with a proportion of 65%, the error of placing the auxiliary verb ("did") is also found with a lower frequency, namely 20%, and the error of using the verb after the auxiliary verb ("did") in the WH question is 15%.

From the results of the data analyzed, the causes of errors were around 21% of students admitted to forgetting the proper structure, while 38% experienced a lack of vocabulary, which hindered their ability to convey ideas clearly in interrogative sentences. Secondly, factors contributing to these errors also included a lack of practice and focus while studying, with 4% of students admitting to never practicing enough and another 21% not focusing while making sentences. In addition, confusion between positive, negative and interrogative forms was also an issue, with 4% of students experiencing misunderstandings in these sentence structures. These findings confirm the importance of integrating grammar education in the English curriculum as well as the need for more targeted teaching to help students understand and correct their errors in forming simple past tense interrogative sentences. Thus, this study is expected to make a significant contribution towards improving the quality of English language teaching at various levels of education.

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