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An Analysis of Errors in the Use of Formal Language in Narrative Writing of Students at SMP Negeri 1 Samudera

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Abstract: This study is entitled "The Use of Formal Language Variety in Narrative Writing of Students at SMP Negeri 1 Samudera" and was conducted in the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. The study aims to identify errors in the use of formal language variety in narrative texts written by eighth-grade students during the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. The research was carried out at SMP Negeri 1 Samudera in April 2025. A qualitative descriptive method was employed in this study. The data source consisted of narrative texts written by eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri 1 Samudera in the 2024/2025 academic year. The most common errors found in students' narrative writing were the use of informal words resulting from spelling deviations, particularly in the use of the preposition *di-*. These errors were predominantly committed by students of class 8.3. Students in class 8.4 also made similar errors, mainly due to the use of non-standard spellings. These mistakes occurred because students paid insufficient attention to, and in some cases underestimated, formal writing conventions. Informality caused by vowel and consonant omission or substitution occurred less frequently; however, errors involving consonant substitution were highly prevalent, especially in the word *"poto"* instead of *"foto."* This phenomenon is attributed to students' habitual pronunciation of *"foto"* as *"poto,"* which subsequently influenced their written production. The factors contributing to informal language use in students' narrative writing include: (1) vowel substitution, (2) vowel omission, (3) consonant substitution, (4) consonant omission, and (5) spelling-related distinctions.

Keywords: Formal Language, Narrative Writing, Indonesian Language Learning.

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INTRODUCTION

Language is a tool used by humans to exchange information in everyday life. For human beings, language is an essential element. Humans possess the ability to communicate through language in order to convey information, news, facts, and opinions. They are able to communicate both orally and in written form with anyone, either directly or indirectly,

by using appropriate and accurate language. Without language, social interaction and various human activities would be severely hindered.

According to Gorys Keraf (1997, p. 1), language is a means of communication among members of society in the form of sound symbols produced by the human speech organs. There are two types of language objects of study, namely spoken language and written language. Spoken language refers to language expressed orally, whereas written language refers to language expressed in written form. Language plays a major role in students' intellectual, social, and emotional development and serves as a key factor in achieving success across all areas of learning. In order to speak Indonesian properly and correctly, individuals must study it; therefore, the government has established an Indonesian language curriculum that is compulsory at all levels of education, from elementary school to higher education.

According to Kosasih and Hermawan (2012, p. 83), the formal variety of language is used in formal contexts, such as ceremonies, speeches, and official correspondence, and must comply with standardized linguistic rules, including the Indonesian Spelling System (PUEBI), formal grammar, and the *Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language* (*Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* / KBBI). Formal language must be stable while remaining sufficiently open to systematic changes in the lexicon and domains of use, as well as to various variations and styles at the sentence level. Its meanings continue to develop in line with changes in the functions and contexts of communication.

Writing is a thinking process that begins with formulating ideas to be conveyed. It is a form of conversation in written form without intonation, facial expressions, body movements, or other non-verbal elements that usually accompany spoken interaction. Writing is a form of communication that requires interpretative symbols, rules, spelling, and punctuation. One component of language skills is writing ability, which plays an important role in expressing thoughts, ideas, opinions, and feelings. Writing is a productive and active skill and constitutes one of the basic language competencies that students are expected to master in order to express ideas in written form clearly and correctly.

In the process of learning writing skills, students are introduced to various types of texts. The objective of this instruction is to enable students to express their ideas in accordance with the intended purpose of writing. The types of texts studied include descriptive, expository, argumentative, and narrative texts. In the context of this study, the type of text produced by students in classes VIII/3 and VIII/4 is narrative writing. Keraf (2010, p. 135) states that narration is a form of discourse whose primary purpose is to arrange and organize actions into a sequence of events occurring over time.

Narrative writing is an appropriate type of writing skill to be taught to students in classes VIII/3 and VIII/4 because it emphasizes chronological elements, allowing students to create stories based on sequences of events they know. However, in practice, learners of Indonesian still face many obstacles, particularly in writing. Through writing activities, students can develop language skills, including proficiency in formal language. In this regard, especially concerning formal language usage, students are required to apply standard forms in every word that constructs a sentence in accordance with the rules stipulated in the *Enhanced Indonesian Spelling System* (EYD/PUEBI).

Orthography, also known as spelling, was refined in 1972 as an update to previous spelling systems. Prior to that, the spelling system used was the Van Ophuijsen spelling system, first introduced in 1901. This system, which was based on Dutch orthography with minor adjustments, was later replaced by the Soewandi spelling system in 1947 after Indonesian independence. Subsequently, the reformed spelling system was introduced in 1956, followed by the Melindo spelling system in 1961 as a result of cooperation between Indonesia and Malaysia; however, this system failed to be officially implemented due to political tensions between the two countries. The Literary Spelling system was applied in 1967, and the *Enhanced Indonesian Spelling System* (EYD) was implemented in 1972 with the aim of simplifying Indonesian spelling rules. In 2015, the *General Guidelines for Indonesian Spelling* (PUEBI) were introduced as a further development of EYD.

Errors in spelling are still frequently found in written language. Several factors contribute to this phenomenon, including insufficient mastery of spelling rules, lack of habitual application, and environmental influence. Spelling errors constitute a type of linguistic error in written form and can reduce the quality of a piece of writing. A composition with excellent content is not necessarily a good composition if it contains many spelling errors. If such errors are not corrected, the message of the text cannot be conveyed clearly and accurately to the reader.

Based on classroom experience and observation, students are often found to encounter difficulties when writing. When writing lessons begin, students frequently do not know what to do. At times, they also experience difficulties in applying correct spelling in their texts. These difficulties motivated the present study to investigate the various types of errors found in students' narrative writing. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify the extent of formal language usage errors found in the narrative writings of students at SMP Negeri 1 Samudera.

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach. The qualitative approach was selected to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomena experienced by the research subjects, including their behaviors, perceptions, motivations, and actions, which are examined through language within a natural context using naturalistic research procedures. This is consistent with Moleong's view that qualitative research aims to understand phenomena holistically from the perspective of the participants.

Furthermore, this study is descriptive in nature as it focuses on systematically and factually describing the research object within a specific period of time. Descriptive research is intended to collect and present information concerning the conditions, characteristics, and behaviors of the research subjects as they naturally occur. Therefore, this descriptive qualitative study seeks to comprehensively portray the phenomenon of errors in the use of formal language found in students' narrative writing based on the actual conditions observed during the research process.

RESULTS

The findings of this study are presented descriptively and focus on the use of standard Indonesian spelling in narrative texts written by eighth-grade students of classes VIII3 and VIII4 at a junior high school. The analysis reveals that students frequently made various types of spelling errors, indicating limited mastery of formal language conventions. These errors include vowel substitution, vowel omission, consonant substitution, consonant omission, and incorrect use of the preposition and prefix *di-*.

Errors involving vowel substitution were commonly found in students' narratives. One example is the use of the word *kemaren*, which should be written as *kemarin* (yesterday). This error occurred due to the replacement of the vowel *i* with *e*. The word *kemarin* is a standard adverb of time referring to the previous day and should be used in formal writing. Another example is the use of *roko* instead of *ruko* (shop house). This error resulted from the substitution of the vowel *u* with *o*. The word *ruko*, derived from *rumah toko* (house–shop), refers to a building with dual functions as a residence and a business place and represents the correct standard form.

In addition to vowel substitution, vowel omission was also frequently identified. For instance, students wrote *bruntung* instead of *beruntung* (fortunate), omitting the vowel *e*. Similarly, the word *segla* was used instead of *segala* (all), due to the omission of the vowel *a*. These omissions altered the orthographic structure of the words and rendered them nonstandard according to Indonesian spelling conventions.

Consonant substitution constituted another common category of error. The word *kejabian* was used instead of *kejadian* (incident or event), caused by replacing the consonant

d with *b*. Likewise, students wrote *kelusakan* instead of *kerusakan* (damage), substituting the consonant *r* with *l*. Another example is *terdadi*, which should be written as *terjadi* (to occur), resulting from the substitution of the consonant *j* with *d*. Such errors indicate phonological interference and insufficient attention to standard orthographic rules.

Consonant omission was also prevalent in the students' writing. The word *menganguskan* was used instead of *menghanguskan* (to burn completely), due to the omission of the consonant *h*. Similarly, *airan* was written instead of *aliran* (flow), omitting the consonant *l*. Other examples include *udah* for *sudah* (already), *angus* for *hangus* (burnt), and *abis* for *habis* (finished). These forms reflect characteristics of informal spoken language that were transferred into written texts, resulting in nonstandard spelling.

Another major source of error concerned the incorrect use of *di* as a preposition and as a prefix. In many cases, students incorrectly combined the preposition *di* with nouns indicating location, producing forms such as *diruko*, *dilokasi*, *didesa*, and *diJungka Gajah*, which should be written separately as *di ruko*, *di lokasi*, *di desa*, and *di Jungka Gajah*. According to Indonesian orthographic rules, the preposition *di* must be written separately from the following word when it denotes place.

Conversely, students also incorrectly separated *di* when it functioned as a prefix forming passive verbs. Examples include *di padamkan*, *di selamatkan*, and *di huni*, which should be written as *dipadamkan* (extinguished), *diselamatkan* (rescued), and *dihuni* (inhabited). In these contexts, *di-* operates as a bound morpheme and therefore must be attached to the verb.

These findings demonstrate that students still face considerable difficulties in applying standard spelling rules, particularly in distinguishing vowels and consonants accurately and in understanding the grammatical function of *di-* as either a preposition or a prefix. This condition highlights the need for more systematic and intensive instruction in standard Indonesian orthography, especially in narrative writing activities, to improve students' written language accuracy and formality.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that eighth-grade students still experience substantial difficulties in applying standard Indonesian spelling conventions in narrative writing. The dominance of vowel and consonant substitution, omission of letters, and incorrect use of the preposition and prefix *di-* reflects not only limited orthographic knowledge but also strong interference from spoken language patterns. This result supports the view that students at the junior high school level often transfer informal oral language habits into written form, especially when explicit instruction in formal language conventions is insufficient (Chaer, 2015; Alwi et al., 2017).

The frequent occurrence of vowel substitution, such as *kemaren* for *kemarin* and *roko* for *ruko*, suggests that students rely heavily on phonological perception rather than orthographic rules when producing written texts. According to Tarigan (2013), spelling errors in students' writing commonly arise from the assumption that written language directly mirrors pronunciation, even though Indonesian orthography requires adherence to standardized forms. This tendency indicates that students have not yet fully internalized the distinction between spoken and written registers, which is a fundamental aspect of academic literacy development.

Similarly, vowel omission errors such as *bruntung* for *beruntung* and *segla* for *segala* demonstrate limited morphological awareness. Morphological awareness plays a crucial role in accurate spelling because it enables learners to recognize word structure and affixation patterns (Carlisle, 2010). When students fail to identify the base form and affixes of a word, they are more likely to omit letters that are perceived as phonetically weak or less salient. This finding aligns with previous studies indicating that learners often simplify word forms to reduce cognitive load during writing tasks (Graham & Harris, 2018).

Consonant substitution errors, such as *kejabian* for *kejadian*, *kelusakan* for *kerusakan*, and *terdadi* for *terjadi*, further confirm the influence of phonological processing difficulties. These errors can be interpreted as evidence of incomplete phoneme–grapheme correspondence mastery. Snow, Burns, and Griffin (2016) argue that accurate spelling requires stable mapping between sounds and letters, and weaknesses in this mapping often result in systematic letter replacement. In the context of this study, the replacement of consonants with similar articulatory features suggests that students rely on auditory similarity rather than standardized spelling norms.

The omission of consonants, particularly in words such as *udah*, *angus*, and *abis*, strongly reflects informal colloquial usage. Indonesian spoken discourse frequently drops initial consonants, especially /h/ and /s/, to achieve ease of articulation (Chaer, 2015). When such colloquial forms are transferred into writing, they become nonstandard and reduce the formality of the text. This phenomenon supports the assertion that students' writing competence is closely tied to their exposure to formal written models (Keraf, 2010). Without consistent interaction with standard written texts, students may assume that commonly spoken forms are acceptable in academic writing.

One of the most significant findings concerns the incorrect use of *di* as both a preposition and a prefix. Students frequently merged the preposition *di* with nouns indicating place (e.g., *dilokasi*, *diruko*) and separated it when functioning as a passive verb prefix (e.g., *di padamkan*, *di selamatkan*). This pattern indicates a grammatical misunderstanding of morphological boundaries. According to Alwi et al. (2017), the distinction between *di* as a preposition and *di-* as a prefix is one of the core principles of Indonesian orthography, yet it remains problematic for learners due to its abstract grammatical nature. The inability to distinguish between these functions may hinder students' overall syntactic accuracy and clarity of meaning.

These findings are consistent with previous research showing that spelling accuracy is closely related to explicit instruction and continuous practice (Graham & Santangelo, 2012). When orthographic rules are taught implicitly or incidentally, students tend to rely on intuition derived from speech patterns rather than formal grammatical knowledge. Therefore, systematic teaching of spelling conventions, including contrastive exercises between spoken and written forms, is essential to improve students' writing quality.

From a pedagogical perspective, the results highlight the importance of integrating orthography-focused instruction into narrative writing activities. Teachers should not only emphasize content development but also guide students in revising and editing their texts using standard language rules. As suggested by Hyland (2019), effective writing instruction requires a balance between meaning-making and linguistic accuracy, particularly in academic contexts where formal language use is expected.

The spelling errors identified in this study reflect broader challenges in students' linguistic competence, including phonological awareness, morphological understanding, and grammatical knowledge. Addressing these issues requires structured instruction, exposure to standard written texts, and consistent feedback on language form. Strengthening these aspects will contribute significantly to improving students' narrative writing proficiency and their ability to use formal Indonesian accurately in academic settings.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings on errors in the use of formal language in narrative writings produced by eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri 1 Samudera, several conclusions can be drawn. The most common error identified is the use of informal words resulting from incorrect spelling, particularly in the use of the preposition *di-*. These errors were predominantly found in students from class VIII.3, although similar mistakes were also observed among students in class VIII.4, mainly due to the use of non-standard words in terms of spelling. These errors arise primarily from students' lack of carefulness and their

tendency to disregard established writing conventions. Although the use of non-formal words caused by vowel or consonant omission or substitution occurs relatively infrequently, consonant substitution errors appear quite frequently, especially in the spelling of the word *"poto"* instead of *"foto"*. This phenomenon is influenced by students' habitual pronunciation of *"foto"* as *"poto"*, which is then transferred into their written production. Furthermore, the factors contributing to inappropriate use of formal language and to students' errors in narrative writing include: (1) vowel substitution, (2) vowel omission, (3) consonant substitution, (4) consonant omission, and (5) deviations related to spelling conventions.

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