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## ANALYZING THE COMMON MISTAKES HIGH SCHOOLERS MAKE WHEN USING THE SIMPLE PRESENT AND PRESENT CONTINUOUS TENSES

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### ABSTRACT

Learning English can be challenging due to the 16 tenses in English grammar, which describe events happening at different times. The most important tenses for English students to grasp are the simple present tense, which describes facts and recurring events, and the present continuous tense, which describes ongoing events. English is taught from elementary school to university level. This current research aimed to reinforce and expand students' knowledge of English, particularly focusing on the simple present tense and present continuous tense. Various teaching methods are employed in this learning process. This research serves to help teachers, students, future researchers, and anyone interested in teaching these tenses to identify common mistakes made by high school students. The research is based on students' work during the process of teaching and learning sessions at GKI Lachai Roi Hom-Hom Wamena, Papua Mountains, and the findings were analyzed qualitatively, supported by Ellis' error theory analysis method (2003). The research identified common mistakes in the use of the simple present and present continuous tense that need to be addressed by English students and teachers.

**Keywords:** Simple present, Present continuous, High School Students

### ABSTRAK

Mempelajari bahasa Inggris tidaklah mudah. Terdapat 16 tense didalam tata bahasa Inggris yang menjelaskan tentang kejadian yang terjadi pada waktu-waktu yang berbeda. Tense yang paling umum dan yang paling penting di ketahui seorang pelajar bahasa Inggris adalah simple present tense; yang menjelaskan tentang suatu fakta dan kejadian yang berulang terjadi, dan Present continuous; yang menjelaskan kejadian yang sedang berlangsung. Bahasa Inggris sudah diajarkan mulai dari tingkat sekolah dasar hingga perguruan tinggi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memperkuat dan mengeksplor pengetahuan bahasa Inggris yang sudah diketahui sekolah, terutama pengetahuan akan simple present tense dan present continuous tense. Dan didalam pembelajaran, digunakan beberapa metode pembelajaran yang berbeda. Juga, penelitian ini membantu guru, siswa, peneliti dimasa depan, dan siapa saja yang ingin mengajarkan kedua tense ini, agar melihat setiap kesalahan kesalahan umum yang sering dilakukan oleh siswa SMA. Penelitian ini berdasarkan hasil pekerjaan siswa selama belajar pada setiap minggu di GKI Lachai Roi Hom-Hom Wamena, Papua Pegunungan. Hasil penelitian ini diproses dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif dan didukung metode teori kesalahan analisis oleh Ellis (2003). Didalam penemuan penelitian ini ditemukan beberapa kesalahan umum yang dilakukan dalam penggunaan simple present dan present continuous tense yang perlu dipertahankan oleh siswa dan guru bahasa Inggris.

**Kata Kunci:** Simple present, Present continuous, Siswa/i SMP

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### INTRODUCTION

Learning the present tense and present continuous tense is crucial for understanding English. These tenses help us understand how

events and situations occur in the present. The present tense is used for expressing facts, habits, and general situations, while the present continuous tense is used for events happening at

the time of speaking, adding a dynamic feel to conversations.

English is a global language used for communication between people from different parts of the world. It is considered a lingua franca or an international language. As stated by Krisifu & Ferdinandus (2021), English is a foreign language included in national education curricula, taught from junior high school to university. Crystal (2003), as quoted in Wiraman (2022), emphasizes the importance of English in education, economics, tourism, and daily communication. Competency in grammar is crucial as it can prevent misunderstandings and communication problems (Greenbaum & Nelson, 1998; Widayanti, 2008).

Tense, as defined by Greenbaum & Nelson (1998), is a linguistic element that conveys the timing of events by modifying the verb. Apart from vocabulary and pronunciation, Suri (2020) highlights the significance of learning tense in English. Rosyidah et al. (2023) define tense as a verb form indicating the timing of an event or situation. Sinaga et al. (2023) conclude that tense is a vital aspect of English for indicating time and events.

English has 16 different tenses, with examples including simple present tense and present continuous tense. A good grasp of these tenses enables clear and precise communication in daily interactions, both spoken and written. Mastery of the present tense allows for expressing everyday events, routines, and habits, while proficiency in the present continuous tense enables the description of ongoing actions or events, adding detail to the communication. Contoh :

Simple Present : She **goes** to the town everyday (Dia pergi ke kota setiap hari)

Present Continuous : She **is going** to the town (Dia sedang pergi ke kota)

It is evident that there are differences in verbs when describing events that are currently happening and events that occur every day (habits). English is indeed quite complex, and tense is an aspect that cannot be avoided and is

very necessary for conveying two events at different times. Therefore, Sinaga and others (2023) emphasize that using tense correctly will make the conveyed message clearer and help avoid communication misunderstandings.

As is well-known, English is a subject included in the Indonesian national curriculum and is taught in elementary schools and universities. Therefore, this community service aims to assess the high school students' ability to use simple present and present continuous, identify common mistakes made when trying to use these two tenses. In other words, this study arises because the author needs to find out, what are the common mistakes high schoolers usually create when using present tense and present continuous tense? Finally, after answering that research question, this study offers some advice to teaching staff and high school students on how to use both tenses effectively.

## METHOD

This study occurs at the same with the community service done by this author. The research takes place in the Sunday school building of the GKI Lachai Roi Hom Hom church, Wamena, Papua Mountains, from March until 2024. This community is held in 16 meetings, every Sunday, from 14:00 to 15:30. The research subjects are students in class XI (11) and XII (12) from Wamena 1 State High School who are Youth Members of the GKI Lachai Roi Church. Initially, 15 people attended the English class, but by the end, only 5 to 7 were actively participating in the 1st and 2nd meetings, and then the attendance became very small. Samples of students' work are taken specifically at the 3rd and 6th meetings (review test) to evaluate their writing, especially identifying any errors. Various methods are used to teach the simple present and present continuous tenses. The material taught includes the formulas for the simple present and present continuous (grammar). By using samples or results of student work at meetings 3, 6, and 7, researchers can identify the mistakes made by each student. These meetings help students to use their ability to use the simple present and present continuous

in different ways to produce a language product, namely translation and descriptive Writing. Therefore, the research method will use the qualitative descriptive approach, assisted by the theory of errors in language learning by Ellis (2003), to describe the common mistakes made by each student in their work.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The research samples were collected from student work during meetings 3, 6, and 7. All three meetings focused on translating two different situations in the simple present and present continuous, as well as writing a description. During the 3rd meeting, the focus was on translating sentences from Indonesian to English in the present continuous. The 6th meeting served as a review week, during which a review test was conducted. The test included a mix of translating tasks, with questions 1-5 focusing on the simple present tense and questions 6-10 focusing on the present continuous tense. In the 7th meeting, students

attempted to produce simple writing using the simple present tense. The results and discussion of student work will be analyzed separately for each meeting and will be discussed using the theory of errors in language learning by Ellis (2023), such as misinformation, omission, and misordering.

### The 3rd Meeting

At this meeting, researchers as well as teachers brought up the topic of "Describing what people are doing". Topics that hone children's abilities in explaining current situations or conditions, or what people around them are doing. Of course, this topic uses the present continuous.

***Present continuous*** (the tense is used to describe events that are taking place now / on going process)

Subjek + to be (are/is/am) + O = I am writing a novel.



The teacher is explaining the importance of using present continuous tense  
(Teacher-Centered Classroom)



Group Working is trying to create sentences in present continuous form  
(Cooperative Learning; group work)



Distributing the translation task to the students to do  
(Task-Based Language Teaching)

The researcher took two students' work samples from an individual assignment (translation task), representing other students who made the same mistakes. These errors will show and explain what errors were made using the theory provided by Ellis (2003).

### Omission

Omission is an error made by a student reducing an important part of a sentence or word.

**a. Do not use the punctuation mark (.) at the end of the sentence.**

This mistake is made by all students. There is not a single student who uses full stop punctuation at the end of the sentences they make. Even though it's just a small mistake, it has a big impact on academic writing. These errors can be seen in the results of student work on the final sheet, student work on individual tasks, and the 3rd meeting.

**Misinformation:**

This is an error made by students when using other grammatical forms and not in

accordance with the target grammatical requirements (Yanti, 2019).

**a. Incorrect use of the present continuous form of "Subject-verb agreement"**

After explanation and practice in using the present continuous formula, students do not understand how to use it, especially for verbs (Verb Ing). After to be (am, is, are), it must be followed by the first verb plus the affix ing, or what we know as the VERB ING. However, what students do is different from grammar or they do not create or replace verbs according to the targeted tense.

**Table 1. "Student 1"**

In Bahasa (No. 6)	Incorrect English Translation	Correct English Translation
<i>Saya sedang ingin mencuci baju.</i>	<i>I am want to washing laundry.</i>	<i>I am wanting to do laundry.</i>

**b. Incorrect use of the formula form "To do / To + V1"**

The following is the grammar of "to do", which basically if there is the word "to", it will be followed by the first verb (V1). For example, to study, to go, to eat. However, the mistake made was using a verb that expresses work that is taking place now (Verb Ing), not the basic verb

(V1). As shown in table 1 above, the translation error is "I want to wash laundry.", and it should be "...to do laundry."

**c. Incorrect vocabulary choice)**

The mistake made is using a verb form that is far from the meaning of the word intended in the sentence.

**Table 2. "Student 2"**

In Bahasa (No. 3)	Incorrect English Translation	Correct English Translation
<i>Sisi sedang menari dan ....</i>	<i>Sisi is seeking and ....</i>	<i>Sisi is dancing ....</i>

**The 6th Meeting**

The 6th meeting is a week of material repetition (review). The teacher uses the first few minutes to review the material from meeting 1 to meeting 5. Throughout the five meetings, students have been taught material about the use of the simple present and present continuous tense.

**Present continuous**

(tense used to describe events that are taking place now / on going process)

Subject + to be (are/is/am) + Object =  
She is riding a motorbike.

**Simple Present**

(tense used to explain habits, general information and facts, and scientific truth, Sinaga, and others, 2023)

Subject + V1/Vs/es + Object = She studies everyday.

There were five students who attended the 6th meeting, review test. The researcher took the work results of the five students to be used as research samples. The results of the student's

work will be described using the same method used in the results of the student's work at the 3rd meeting (in the discussion above).



Reviewing the last material which are about simple present dan present continuous  
*(Teacher-Centered)*



The students are working on the translation review test  
*(Task-Based Language Teaching)*

**Omission**

**a. Do not use the punctuation mark (.) at the end of the sentence**

Many students are still making the same mistake. Not a single student is using a period at the end of their sentences. The teacher has emphasized the importance of punctuation, specifically the use of periods at the end of sentences. These errors are evident in the students' work on each table and in the final review test during the 6th meeting.

**b. Omission of an important word in a sentence**

In one of the sentences, there is a missing object or noun, as well as an adjective that describes the noun.

According to English grammar rules, adjectives must be placed before or in front of nouns. For example, "pretty girl" is translated as "beautiful girl." However, in this case, the student omitted these two words, resulting in a translation that did not match the original words in Indonesian. These errors are visible in the table below.

For additional information on English words that have different usage than their literal meaning, such as "doing assignments" instead of "working homework," the usage has been explained and practiced in class. However, as a student, I am not accustomed to using language in this way. These errors can be seen in the table 3 below.

**Table 3.** "Student 3 and Student 1 work"

In Bahasa (review test No. 2)	Incorrect English Translation	Correct English Translation
	I am not working my math (no period .){Student 1}	

Saya sedang tidak mengerjakan PR Matematika.		I am not doing my math homework.
	I am not <b>working</b> my homework. {Student 3}	

- c. **Removal of the letters "s" and "es" in the VERB (verb) when using the simple present tense (singular subject)**  
Like the formula or grammar that has been taught about the simple present tense. For

subjects such as third person or singular subject: he, she, it, the correct verb to use is the basic verbs (V1) plus the letter *s* or *es*, for example: studies, goes, takes, and many more.

**Table 4.** "Student 4 and Student 5 work"

In Bahasa (review test No. 7 & 10)	Incorrect English Translation	Correct English Translation
(7) Ricko selalu pergi ke Bali.	Ricko always <b>go</b> to Bali ( <b>no period (.)</b> ) {Student 4}	Ricko always goes to Bali.
(10) Bapa saya suka memancing.	My father <b>like</b> fishing ( <b>no period (.)</b> ) {Student 5}	My father likes fishing.

- d. **Missing one letter and adding (Additional) letters to a word (Misspelling)**  
Students often make mistakes; misspelling, resulting in letters being

removed or letters added in the words written. There are also errors in adding other words to the translated sentence so that the meaning is not exactly the targeted meaning.

**Table 5.** "Student 4, student 5, student 3, and student 1 work"

In Bahasa Indonesia (review test No. 1, 3, 6, & 4)	Incorrect English Translation	Correct English Translation
(1) Dani sedang menggelap kaca dan Firna sedang tidak menonton TV.	Dani is <b>wipeing</b> glass and Firna is not watching a TV ( <b>no period (.)</b> ) {Student 4}	Dani is wiping glass and Firna is not watching a TV.
(3) Kami sedang berenang dikolam berenang dan mereka sedang duduk didalam mobil.	We are swimming in swimming pool and they are <b>siting up car</b> ( <b>no period (.)</b> ) {Student 5}	We are swimming in swimming pool and they are sitting in the car.
(4) Paman sedang memperbaiki mobil dan saya sedang menggosok gigi saya.	Uncle is <b>repaing</b> car and I brush my teeth ( <b>no period (.)</b> ) {Student 3}	Uncle is repairing car and I am brushing my teeth.
(6) Teman saya dan saya pergi ke Pantai.	My friend and I <b>are</b> go to the beach ( <b>no period (.)</b> ) {Student 1}	My friend and I go to the beach.

**e. Not using the important component "To Be" in the present continuous sentence**

Like present continuous tense grammar, the role of to be is very important. Therefore, there is no *to be* in the present

continuous sentence will result in misunderstanding or miscommunication. The meaning that is targeted will be received differently from misrepresentation.

**Table 6. "Student 3 work"**

In Bahasa (review test No. 4)	Incorrect English Translation	Correct English Translation
(4) Paman sedang memperbaiki mobil dan saya sedang menggosok gigi saya.	Uncle is repaing car and I brush my teeth (no period (.)) {Student 3}	Uncle is repairing car and I am brushing my teeth.

**Missinformation**

**a. Common Mistakes in Subject-Verb Agreement**

One of the most common mistakes made by students in this review test is the incorrect use of verbs, especially the -ing form. After the verb "to be" (am, is, are), it should be followed by the first verb plus the -ing suffix, which is known as the gerund form. However, students often fail to do so and do not conjugate or replace verbs according to the targeted tense. Another error is related to subject-verb agreement when using the present

tense. For example, when the subject is "she," "it," or "he," the auxiliary verb used is "has." On the other hand, for the subjects "I," "you," "we," and "they," the auxiliary verb used is "have" in the simple present tense. Another common error is the inability to differentiate between actions that occur repeatedly or facts and actions that are currently happening. In other words, when sentences contain factual information, students should use the simple present tense, but instead, they often use the present continuous. These errors are summarized in the table 7 below.

**Table 7. "Student 4, student 5, student 3, and student 1 work"**

In Bahasa	Incorrect English Translation	Correct English Translation
(3) Kami sedang berenang di kolam berenang dan mereka sedang duduk di dalam mobil.	We are swimming in the swimming pool and they are sit in the car (no period(.)) {Student 4}	We are swimming in the swimming pool and they are sitting in the car.
(4) Paman sedang memperbaiki mobil dan saya sedang menggosok gigi saya.	Uncle is repaing car and I brush my teeth (no period (.)) {Student 3}	Uncle is repairing car and I am brushing my teeth.
(5) Virna mempunyai seekor anjing putih.	Virna have a white dog (no period (.)) {Student 5}	Virna has a white dog.
	Ricko is always go to Bali. {Student 1}	

(7) <i>Ricko selalu pergi ke bali.</i>	<i>Ricko always going to bali (no period (.))</i> {Student 3}	<i>Ricko always goes to bali.</i>
(10) <i>Bapa saya suka memancing.</i>	<i>My father is like fishing (no period (.))</i> {Student 1}	<i>My father likes fishing.</i>

### 7th Meeting

This session focuses on encouraging students to practice producing written English using the simple present tense. The teacher aims to test the students' writing skills by assigning topics that require them to use the simple present, along with adjectives. Specifically, students will be writing about a pet (by student 4) and a favorite cousin (by student 1). In the previous

meeting, students learned a lot about the use of adjectives. The teacher creates topics that use both the simple present and adjectives, namely describing an object, animal, or person. Two writing results will be produced by the two students: the first article is about a description of a pet (by student 4) and the second article is about a description of a favorite cousin (by student 1).



The teacher review the formula of using simple present and how to use adjective in a sentence  
*(Teacher-Centered)*



The students are writing the description of the favorite cousin and favorite pet  
*(Task-Based Language Teaching)*

To easily assess each student's abilities and prevent collaboration, the teacher assigns two different tasks to two students. One student describes their favorite cousin, while the other describes their pet. Both students make similar mistakes in their work, including omitting

important aspects of words and sentences and adding information that doesn't align with English grammar. More details about the students' mistakes can be found in the explanation and table below.

#### Omission

- a. Does not use the important component, namely "To Be" in the simple present sentence

Table 8. "Students Writing mistakes in using To Be"



	<b>Incorrect English Translation</b>	<b>Correct English Translation</b>
Describe your favorite cousin (Student 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Her name Azahelia</i></li> <li>• <i>Her height maybe 150</i></li> <li>• <i>She the good girl</i></li> <li>• <i>She so funny</i></li> <li>• <i>She</i></li> <li>• <i>She in makassar</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Her name is Azahelia</i></li> <li>• <i>Her height maybe is 150 cm</i></li> <li>• <i>She is the good girl</i></li> <li>• <i>She is so funny</i></li> <li>• <i>She is in makassar</i></li> </ul>
Describe your pet / favorite animal (Student 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Body not too small</i></li> <li>• <i>Bird so fast and smart</i></li> <li>• <i>Can fly and free</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Body is not too small</i></li> <li>• <i>Bird is so fast and smart</i></li> <li>• <i>Can fly and be free</i></li> </ul>

**b. Removal of the letters "s" and "es" in VERBs (verbs) when using the simple present tense (singular subject) and adding other aspects (additional)**

**Table 9.** "Students Writing mistakes on singular subject Verbs and plural nouns"

	<b>Incorrect English Translation</b>	<b>Correct English Translation</b>
Describe your favorite cousin (Student 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>She make me laugh</i></li> <li>• <i>She make mistakes</i></li> <li>• <i>She apoligize firts</i></li> <li>• <i>She always forgive me</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>She <b>makes</b> me laugh</i></li> <li>• <i>She <b>makes</b> mistakes</i></li> <li>• <i>She <b>apologizes</b> first</i></li> <li>• <i>She <b>always forgives</b> me</i></li> </ul>
Describe your pet / favorite animal (Student 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Various color (black, brown, white)</i></li> <li>• <i>Bird have a big wings</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Various <b>colors</b> (black, brown, white)</i></li> <li>• <i><b>Birds</b> have big wings</i></li> </ul>

**Missinformation**

**a. Mistakes in using other forms of words that do not match with the orginal**

There is a sentence that is less understandable in English. However, as Indonesians, we can understand what the student wants to convey in the sentences he writes. There is an error in using the right words to convey the information. He wanted to

make a sentence explaining that his friend was taller than him. The adjective for tall is "tall," and he wanted to compare his friend's height with his own. This can be categorized as a comparative and superlative learning. However, perhaps due to a lack of knowledge in this matter and a lack of vocabulary in English to describe someone, the message or information is not conveyed well. We can see these errors in table 10 below.

**Table 10.** "Student's mistakes on Missinformation"

<b>Incorrect English Translation</b>	<b>Correct English Translation</b>

*She height but I'm so hight  
from her*

*She is tall but I am taller than  
her*

## CONCLUSION

The results of this research on learning English show that learning English is not easy. Many grammar rules must be known and used correctly to convey information or messages perfectly. Despite studying English from elementary school to high school (SMA), small and common mistakes still occur in the use of "to be", auxiliary verbs, singular and plural, and even punctuation marks.

A good understanding of simple present tense and present continuous tense is important for understanding reading texts, conversations, or media content in English. Recognizing the use of these two tenses can help someone easily follow the flow of the story or information being conveyed and understand the context of the time and situation being discussed. The correct use of these two tenses is also important in writing formal texts, such as reports, essays, or letters. Using the simple present tense correctly gives the impression of order and accuracy in conveying information while using the present continuous tense can give a contemporary and dynamic feel to writing.

In line with the importance of knowing the use of simple present and present continuous tense, and the research results obtained, several suggestions are given to English teachers and high school students. For high school English teachers, it is suggested to apply varied learning methods and games to prevent students from getting bored while learning English. Teachers should also provide clear explanations about grammar to students by creating a variety of simple practice questions. For high school students, it is recommended to do lots of practice questions, such as writing, reading, speaking, and listening practice in English, so that the grammar rules taught can be well understood through usage. The more the language is used, the more familiar and facile it becomes.

This research aims to highlight common mistakes that students make when learning about present tense and present continuous tense, which are crucial in everyday life. Teachers strive to train and hone students' abilities in short meetings. The hope is that this research can serve as a learning motivation for high school students to correct mistakes and continue learning English wherever they are. Additionally, it is hoped that this research can provide new information, reminders, and a source of knowledge for English teachers, students, future researchers, and even for English teachers in other educational settings.

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