ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS’ ABILITY IN USING GRAMMAR IN DESCRIPTIVE TEXT: A CASE STUDY AT EIGHTH GRADE STUDENTS OF SMPN 1 PRAYA IN ACADEMIC YEAR 2014/2015.

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ABSTRACT

The aims of this study is to identify the ability of students in using grammar and the grammatical problems that often occur in students’ writing as well as the sources of the problems in descriptive text. This study was conducted at the eighth grade students of SMPN 1 Praya in academic year 2014/2015. The population of this study was the eighth grade students of SMPN 1 Praya, which consisted of 324 students divided into 10 classes with approximately 33 students in each class. Class VIII-8 was taken as the sample through cluster random sampling. The data were collected by using writing test and interview. Writing test was given in order to know the ability and grammatical problems of students. Meanwhile, the interview was conducted in order to know the sources of grammatical problems. The data were analysis based on the six aspects of grammar; tenses, agreement, structure, pronoun, preposition and word order. The result was that the ability of students was shown in their mean score of 59.31 which was categorized as “poor”. Meanwhile, most grammatical problems faced by students were the application of agreement and pronouns where they were not able to use both of the aspects properly. Based on the result of interview, the problems were caused mostly by the ignorance of the students on grammatical aspects. Many of them never obtained more detailed explanations about basic aspects of grammar from their teacher.

Key words: ability, grammar, grammatical problems, descriptive text.
ABSTRAK


Kata kunci: kemampuan, tata bahasa, masalah pada tata bahasa, teks deskriptif.
Introduction

Background of the Study

English has been assigned as the international language for communication in the world. Therefore, every country should learn English in order to be able to communicate widely. It immediately forces every state to determine the standard of the language that must be acquired beside the mother tongue.

English in Indonesia has become one of the compulsory subjects for students. It is the first foreign language that should be learned by the students from junior high school even elementary school to university. It is even one of the subjects tested in the national examination, besides math and Bahasa Indonesia. The objective of teaching English is to have students be able to communicate using the English language in order to get a bigger chance in global society (BNSP, 2006).

Communication is the primary goal of teaching language. However, true communication means not only capable of producing language in oral form, but also capable of producing language in written form. This is stated by BNSP (2006: 277):

“The ability to communicate in a true meaning is the ability in discourse, i.e. the ability to understand and / produce spoken text and / write which is applied in the four language skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing.”

(translated)

This suggests that students should be able to communicate using English either orally or writtenly. However, written language acquires students to understand basic structure of a language. Therefore, to make written communication accuracy grammar, which studies structure of a language, is needed.

As well as vocabulary, grammar is important since it is the measurement of the acceptable form in language. Grammar holds every unit of words together with the punctuation into a language. Without the use of grammar, communication will not be accurate and effective.

Indeed nowadays communication is less formal because of the existence of social media. Many people often write something in it ungrammatically. However, perfect grammar is still needed and expected in professional settings by the employers (Paul, 2014). Having good estimation of grammar competence is more important than the content of a work for an employee. In other words, someone’s competence can be evinced from his/her grammar ability.
Having good grammar, once again, is really needed by the learners when they enter the world of work particularly when they work in company. Many big companies which have relationship with tourists will send letters via email more often. This makes the employees are demanded to be able to communicate in written form grammatically. Employing letter with inappropriate grammar to the boss or even client, such as “Our company was have big problem,..”, makes the message not effective. It will distract the meaning and cause bad estimate to the writer. This is in line with Subasini and Kokilavani (2013), who says that using language with many errors may slow down the communication and conversation. It finds harder to express the speakers ideas, thoughts clearly and concisely. Of course, the company will not hire the employee with less knowledge of grammar.

As long as the goal of teaching language is communication in accurate and effective way, grammar should be given more attention. Allowing students to make errors in grammar will develop their mindset about grammar. They will make the same errors until they are adult. Errors that are saved in their memory for long time will be difficult even impossible to correct. For example, based on the writer’s experience when conducting teaching practice, senior high school students were not able to get score more than minimum score in writing text/genre particularly descriptive text. Besides, descriptive text was given twice or even three times in junior high school. Lacking of grammar knowledge, makes them cannot write correctly and properly. They tend to make the same errors even though they have been explained.

Based on the interview with the teacher, the students of junior high school of SMPN 1 Praya cannot write properly. Their ability of grammar can be said very poor. They cannot distinguish the use of tenses. For instance, they often write descriptive text using present continuous tense, whereas descriptive text uses present tense. They also cannot apply subject-verb agreement correctly. Many of them do not know about to be and its usage (is, am, are). That is one of the reality of today that the students’ ability in grammar is quite less.

As the English teacher, paying attention to the grammar ability of students is important. The ability of students is our measurement of knowing our successful in teaching. By knowing students’ ability in grammar, we can decide what method or technique works to the students. On the contrary, if many students lack in using grammar, we can know what they lack in and what material should be emphasized to the students and what method/technique should be used.

Based on the issue above, the researcher is interested in analyzing the ability of students in using grammar and the grammatical problems that often occur in students’ writing as well as the sources of the problems. This study will be conducted in SMPN 1 Praya where the students of eight grades have been taught the descriptive
text. Therefore, the researcher is writing this thesis entitled “Analysis of Students’ Ability in Using Grammar in Descriptive Text: A Case Study at Eighth Grade Students of SMPN 1 Praya in Academic Year 2014/2015.

Statement of the Problem

The research was conducted in order to answer the following question:

1. What is the level of students’ ability in using grammar in descriptive text?

2. What are the students’ problems that often occur in writing descriptive text in terms of grammar?

3. What are the sources of problems that often occur in writing descriptive text in terms of grammar?

Purpose of the Study

Based on the research question above, this study was aimed:

1. To find out the level of students’ ability in using grammar in descriptive text.

2. To find out students’ problems that often occur in writing descriptive text in terms of grammar.

3. To know the sources of problems that often occur in writing descriptive text in terms of grammar.

Scope of the Study

This study focused on the ability of students in using grammar in descriptive text and the grammatical problems as well as sources of the problems that often occur in students’ writing of descriptive text. The grammar was limited to the tenses agreement, structure, pronoun, preposition, and word order. The subject of this study was also limited to the eighth grade students of junior high school of SMPN1 Praya.

Significance of the Study

Theoretically, the finding of this research was expected to provide and to enrich significant information or data containing students’ ability in using grammar in descriptive text. Practically, this study was expected to provide positive information about students' ability in using grammar in descriptive text for teacher, students and
next reseacher. So that, they could get better way in teaching, learning and analyzing grammar to the students.

Review of Related Literature

According to the Richard and Schimdt (2010), grammar is a description of the structure of a language and the way in which linguistic units such as words and phrases are combined to produce sentences in the language. It usually involves the account of the meanings and functions these sentences have in the overall system of the language. Learning grammar is basically learning the rules of a language which is known as sentence patterns. Sentence patterns are very essential in defining meaning and use of a language.

Grammar is an important aspect for students to be mastered. This will prove if they are entering the world of professional work, ‘world’ which requires them to be able to communicate in English not only in speech, but also in writing. Written form for students desperately needs good grammar, especially if they already have a relationship with a stranger that requires them to make a formal letter. Ur (cited in Hamzah and Dourado, 2010) states that a person who understands grammar is someone who is able to express herself or himself in what would be considered as acceptable forms. This suggests that the grammar is much needed to produce language in a written form that can be accepted very well.

Writing has something to do with sentence construction and style used by a writer. Meanwhile, the sentence construction and style relate to the grammar. If writer’s grammar is quite good, then both sentence construction and the style used by the writer will ‘comfort’ for the reader. “If your work is peppered with grammatical mistakes and typos, your readers are going to have a hard time trudging through it.” (Donovan 2010:1)

A good writing contains unity, coherence and completeness. Unity is the relevance among the topic and the sentences even the essays. Coherence relates to the continuity among the sentences or among the paragraphs. Meanwhile, completeness refers to the conclusive development of a point either in the paragraph or in the essay. This argument is noticed essentially by Omole (2006). He says that coherence cannot be achieved without grammar. Several coherence devices are impossible to be taught without knowledge of grammar. Finally, a good writing cannot be produced without the three characteristics above.

Furthermore, the problems that occur when the learners learn the target language are indicated from the errors that they made. Error cannot be separated from the learners in second language learning. This is because error is natural process of
learning. Errors can occur in speaking or in writing. However, the fatal errors often occur in writing. Brown (cited in Putra, 2011) suggests that there are several criterias of errors made by learners in writing:

1. Errors in Tenses: Learners often use wrong tenses in writing. For instance, when they write a descriptive text, they use past tense. Error in tenses includes:
   a. Incosistent: It happen when the students use many tenses in a text.
   b. Incorrect: It happens when the students use one wrong tense

2. Errors in Agreement: Learners usually use incorrect agreement in writing. This involves:
   a. Subject-Predicate: The agreement between subject and the appropriate predicate.
   b. Determiner-Noun: The agreement between the appropriate determine and noun.

3. Errors in Structure: Learners often make errors in the structure which involves:
   a. Omission subject: The learners omit the subject in a sentence.
   b. Omission predicate: The learners omit the predicate in the sentence.

4. Errors in Pronoun: Learners choose inappropriate pronoun. This error includes:
   a. Incorrect pronoun: Learners use wrong pronoun.
   b. Unnecessary pronoun: Learners use pronoun which is not important in a sentence.

5. Errors in Preposition: Learners usually make error in choosing preposition. This error involves:
   a. Incorrect: Learners use wrong preposition.
   b. Omission: Learners omit the preposition in a sentence.

6. Errors in Word Order: Learners often arrange the sentences or phrases in wrong way. This includes:
   a. Phrases: Learners cannot arrange phrase correctly.
   b. Sentence: Learners cannot make sentences in correct order.
Research Method

This study used quantitative method and qualitative method. Qualitative method was used in analyzing the ability of the students in using grammar. Meanwhile, qualitative was used in describing grammatical problems and the sources of the grammatical problems faced by students.

According to Arikunto (2006), population is the whole subject of observation. Therefore, the population of this research was all of the students of eighth grade of SMPN 1 Praya. The students were divided into ten classes where each class consisted of 31-34 students. Thus, the total number of population was 324 students. In this study, the sample was taken through cluster random sampling. As the result, class VIII/8 came out as the sample.

This study used two kinds of instrument. The first instrument was writing test given to the study in order to know the ability and grammatical problems of the students. The second instrument was the result of the interview with the students used for knowing the sources of the grammatical problems. The students’ writing was scored by using this following formula in order to know the ability of students in using grammar:

$A = \frac{T}{6 \times 0.5}$

Furthermore, to get the mean score of the students, this following formula stated by Arikunto (2006) was used:

$M = \frac{\sum Fx}{N}$

In analyzing the grammatical problems and the sources, identification, classification, description, and explanation were applied. In the classification of grammatical problems, the criterias of errors in writing in terms of grammar by Brown were applied. The criterias were stated in review of related literature above.

Findings and Discussion

Students’ Ability in Using Grammar

Based on the scores gained, the highest score gained by the one student was 86.67 and the lowest score gained by one student was 26.67. Meanwhile, the students’ mean score was 59.31. It was concluded that the students’ ability of VIII-8 class was in the “poor” category which was based on the classification of students’ score range. It was shown from the table 2 that the largest number of students was in
“poor” category. There were 10 or 30.30% from 33 students who got scores 50-59 categorized as “poor”. Table 2 also described that 3 (9.09%) students got scores 80-89 categorized as very good. 3 (9.09%) students got scores 70-79 categorized as good. 4 (24.24%) students got scores 60-69 categorized as fairly good, and 9 (27.27%) students got scores 0-49 categorized as very poor. However, there was no student got “excellent” for scores 90-100.

**Students’ Grammatical Problems**

Some grammatical problems can be seen from the errors that students made. The errors were:

1. Determining tense

   Commonly, descriptive text uses simple present tense. However, many students used present continuous tense in their writing. Besides, there were also students who used past tense in their writing. Present continuous tense and past tense are allowed to be used in writing a descriptive text. Yet, in this case, students used these two tenses which were not appropriate. It indicated that students were not able to determining tense.

2. Agreement

   Students mostly made errors in applying correct agreement. They had big problem with applying agreement between subjects and predicates. In present tense, the agreement between subject and predicate is little bit difficult to understand. When the subject is the third person singular, then the predicate must be added suffix –es/s. However, they were not able to apply it in their writing.

3. Structure

   Almost all of students had the ability to make a complete sentence. There were only a few students who omitted the subject and predicate in a sentence.

4. Pronoun

   The ability of students in using correct pronoun was not good. It was because almost all of them used improper pronoun. Error in pronoun tends to be caused by the mother tongue. Indonesian language does not have many kinds of pronoun in sentence. The pronoun in Indonesian language does not change if it is as a subject or even an object. On the other hands, English has many kinds of pronoun. It has not been considered yet by the students.
5. Preposition

Preposition is also errors that are always influenced by the negative transfer from first language. It can be seen from the errors of students. Student still could not distinguish the usage of correct preposition. Usually prepositions in Indonesian and English are not much different. However, the selection of the appropriate preposition to the verb in English is very different. There are certain verbs which have prepositions that have been determined and cannot be replaced by other prepositions.

6. Word order

Ability in word order involved making phrases dealing with the noun and its modifier and constructing sentences in correct order. In making phrase, students could not make it well. They often made errors in the modifier where should precede the nouns. Meanwhile, in constructing sentences, students could not arrange sentences well. They tend to translate the sentences into English by following their first language. It was shown from the sentences they made. Those sentences were still in Indonesian order.

Looking at the grammatical problems that have been identified, most of students got problems in agreement then followed by pronoun. According to Boardman and Frydenberg (2008:18-27) one of characteristics of a good writing is cohesion. Cohesion involves connection which is called cohesive devices. Two of the fourth cohesive devices are personal pronoun and demonstrative pronoun. In this case, mostly students made mistakes in pronoun which they were not able to use pronouns correctly. As the result, the writing they made became ambiguous and was not related to each other. In line with Boardman and Frydenberg (2008), when writing has good cohesion, then the supporting sentences or paragraph sentences or paragraphs are connected very well to the topic/ideas. However, the writing they made was not connected very well to the topic or ideas.

Moreover, writing has something to do with sentence construction and style used by a writer. Meanwhile, the sentence construction and style relate to the grammar. If writer’s grammar is quite good, then both sentence construction and the style used by the writer will ‘comfort’ for the reader. In this case, students’ writing could not comfort the reader (researcher) because they used grammar aspects inappropriately. The researcher as the reader could not catch the idea very well because there was lots of “mess” in students’ writing. This is also stated by Donovan (2010) that “If your work is peppered with grammatical mistakes and typos, your readers are going to have a hard time trudging through it.”
Sources of Grammatical Problems

Based on the answer of question number 3, most of the students did not know and cannot mention the example of pronouns, to be, preposition or tenses, even worst, they did not know anything about it. Moreover, they never got drills from their teacher about pronoun, to be, etc. As a result, they became unfamiliar with pronoun and to be. Since using pronoun is difficult to be understood, the students tend to over generalize it.

Meanwhile, some students who admitted to get instruction on pronouns, to be, and others, were never taught again. The teacher never discussed further and more detailed about their use. Students were only given a table for pronouns and to be. Moreover, they claimed that if there was a task the teacher never corrected the mistakes they made. Therefore, they kept making the same mistakes.

Another factor is many students did not like English. They felt that English is difficult to learn, beside math. It made them did not care with English. They tend to think that English was not important. Since the students did not like and did not care about the English, they did not take an English course, so that they did not get tutoring from outside. This means that students only got English lessons from school.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Conclusion:

1. The ability of the eighth grade students of SMPN 1 Praya in using grammar in descriptive text is poor. It can be seen from the result of analysis that average scores shown in the number 59.31. Furthermore, the largest number of students (10 or 30.30%) was in poor category. On the other hand, only 3 or 9.09% students could achieve very good level in the scores 80-89.

2. The errors in terms of tense reflect that mostly students could not distinguish between the use of simple present tense and present continuous tense. Another error mostly made by students is the use of pronoun, in which students tend to over generalized it. The next errors that students made in the agreement were in terms of subject-predicate. Most students did not follow the rule of addition of suffix – s/es in the verb that followed by 3rd person singular. Furthermore, the error that students made is the use of preposition. Many students who used wrong prepositions were caused by the negative transfer of the first language. The errors were also made of the negative transfer of the first language is the constructing sentences. Many students made sentences based on their first language so the sentences were in Indonesian’s word order, not in English.
3. The sources of students’ grammatical problems were mostly caused by students’ ignorance about basic grammar. Their teacher never taught them more detail. Some students who have been taught claimed that their teacher never corrected the mistakes they made so they kept repeating the same errors. Furthermore, their mindset about grammar is bad. They always think that grammar is difficult lesson because English is not their mother tongue. That was why students were not serious in learning English. It also made the students lazy to take English courses outside so that they only learned English in school.

**Suggestion:**

1. For teacher
   a. The teacher should find out the interesting method in teaching grammar to the students and pay attention to the students’ writing errors in terms of grammar.
   b. The teacher should pay attention to the students’ writing errors in terms of grammar.
   c. The teacher should correct and discuss students’ errors in writing in terms of grammar to the students in order they do not make similar errors.

2. For students
   a. The students should practice their ability in writing texts and pay attention to the aspects of grammar.
   b. The students should learn grammar seriously and be active in asking the problem they get in terms of grammar to the teacher.

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