

STUDENTS' LEXICOGRAMMATICAL PROBLEMS IN WRITING A DESCRIPTIVE TEXT: A STUDY AT GRADE XI STUDENTS OF SMA N 1 BATIPUH

Rini Hendrita dan Gusmaizal Syandri

Fkip, Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Barat, Nagari Gunuang Rajo, Kec. Batipuh,
Kab.Tanah datar

email: rinihendrita@gmail.com

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Abstrak.

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui kemampuan siswa dalam menulis *descriptive text*, masalah-masalah *lexicogrammar* yang dihadapi siswa dalam menulis *descriptive text* dan penyebab masalah tersebut. Penelitian ini adalah penelitian deskriptif. Subjek dalam penelitian ini adalah siswa kelas XI IPA SMA N 1 Batipuh. Instrumen yang digunakan sebagai alat pengumpul data adalah tes menulis dan wawancara. Data kuantitatif diperoleh dari tes menulis yang dilaksanakan di kelas. Data kualitatif diperoleh dari wawancara yang dilakukan terhadap siswa dan guru bahasa Inggris. Data kuantitatif dan kualitatif tersebut dikelompokkan berdasarkan indikatornya masing-masing. Hasil dari analisis data kuantitatif dan kualitatif diinterpretasikan dan menjadi temuan penelitian. Dari hasil penelitian, ditemukan bahwa kemampuan siswa dalam menulis *descriptive text* adalah cukup dengan nilai rata-rata 1.53. Meskipun nilai rata-rata siswa dikategorikan cukup, siswa juga menghadapi masalah dalam menulis *descriptive text*. Masalah-masalah mereka berhubungan dengan penggunaan *adjective*, *linking verb*, *attributive have and has*, *simple present tense*, *pronoun*, *adverb*, *preposition*, dan *noun*. Penyebab masalah tersebut adalah *interfensi bahasa pertama*, kurangnya pengetahuan siswa tentang *grammar*, *kosakata*, dan rendahnya frekuensi tugas menulis.

Abstract.

This research was aimed to find out the students' ability in writing *descriptive text*, the students' *lexicogrammatical problems* in writing *descriptive text* and the causes for the problems. The design of research was descriptive. The subject of the research was the students of class XI IPA in SMA N 1 Batipuh which consisted of 7 boys and 19 girls. Instruments used to collect the data in this research are quantitative data and qualitative data. The quantitative data were from the writing test conducted in the class. The qualitative data were from the result of interview done to 20 students and 2 English teachers. The quantitative and qualitative data were grouped based on the indicators. The result of quantitative analyzing and qualitative analyzing were interpreted to get the result of the research. From the result of the research, the writer found that the students' ability in writing *descriptive text* was fair. The average score of the students in writing *descriptive text* was 1.94. Although the students' ability was fair, the students also faced some problems in writing *descriptive text*; they are: the use of *adjective*, *linking verb*, *attributive have and has*, *simple present tense*, *pronoun*, *adverb*, *preposition*, and *noun*. It was found that the factors which caused the students' problems were *interference of first language*, *lack of knowledge about grammar structure*, *lack of vocabulary*, *students' carelessness*, *students' low motivation*, *lack of use of media*, and *low frequency of writing task*.

Key Words: *Descriptive Text; Lexicogrammatical Problem; Writing*

INTRODUCTION

Writing is essential to be mastered by English learners because this is a form of thinking. It means that writing is one of the language skills to express idea, thought, feeling and opinion in written form. According to Leo, et.al (2007), writing is a process of expressing ideas or thoughts in words. Writing can be very enjoyable as long as we have the ideas and the means to achieve it. Barnett and Stubbs (1990), add that writing is not only a way to express ideas, but also a way to acquire the ideas when it is put on paper. Writing skill becomes more important because of the progress of knowledge, information, and technology. In this information era, people intensify their communication throughout the world for doing business, politic, social relationship, and culture exchange. Those who can write well will be able to build good relationship with others and pursue their goals.

Since writing is important, there are some types of text which are stated in syllabus for SMA students. One of them is descriptive text. Descriptive text has been taught at SMP and SMA grade ten, so that grade eleven students of SMA are expected to be able to produce this text. According to Fulwiler (2002), descriptive text is a text that describes a person, place, or thing. It's to create a verbal image so that readers can see what you can see, hear what you hear, and taste, smell, and feel what you taste, smell, and feel. Also, Wardiman, et al (2008) states that a descriptive text as a text that describes the features of someone, something, or a certain place. From the arguments above, it can be inferred that descriptive text is a text which describes characteristics of particular place, people or thing. Writing a descriptive text means

that the writer pictures the images of object being described to the readers. Then, by reading the text, the readers get a clear picture of the object being described.

As other text types, descriptive text has special components in form of generic structure and lexicogrammatical features. Wadirman, et.al (2008), Mursyd (2005), Gerrot and Wignell (1994), and Sukismo, et.al (2003) state that there are several lexicogrammatical features of descriptive text, they are (1) focus on specific participants, (2) the use of adjective and compound adjectives, (3) the use of linking verbs, (4) the use of attributive *has* and *have*, (5) the use of simple present tense. Moreover, Sukismo (2003) adds four more lexicogrammatical features of descriptive text. They are, use of pronouns, use of nouns, use of preposition, and use of adverbs.

From the arguments of several experts above, it can be concluded that descriptive text has several lexicogrammatical features. They are (1) focusing on specific participants, (2) use of simple present tense (3) use of nouns, (4) use of pronouns, (5) use of adverbs, (6) use of attributive *has* and *have*, (7) use of linking verbs, (8) use of preposition, and (9) use of adjectives. Lexicogrammatical features of descriptive text above are used as indicators to see the students' ability and their problems in writing descriptive text.

Assessing students' writing is one of important things in learning. Salvia et al. (2007) state assessment as "the process of collecting data for the purpose of specifying and verifying problems, and making decisions about students". To assess the students' writing of descriptive text, the teacher can use scoring rubric. Since the score is given

for each lexicogrammatical feature of the text, the scoring rubric used was adapted from Hamp-Lyons (1992) by using the scale 4-0, and developed based on lexicogrammar of the text.

Since writing is a complex process and has some elements, it cannot be ignored that the students often get difficulty in writing. Coffin, et al (2003) list some common grammatical errors in students' writing. They are; the omission of main verb in each sentence, lack of pronoun agreement in sentences, unclear use of indefinite reference words-pronouns such as *it*, *they*, *that*, and inconsistent use of tenses/modes. In short, EFL or ESL students have different grammatical problems from the native speakers. To see whether students have problems in using lexicogrammatical of descriptive text is by looking at the errors that they made in their writing test.

The students' problems occur because of some factors underlying the problems. Those factors are related to the second or foreign language acquisition since the students learn English as a foreign language in Indonesian context. According to Darus (2009), interference is one of the factors that cause students' problems in writing. Interference is derivations from the norms of both languages which occur in speech of bilingual as the result of familiarity with more than one. This idea is supported by Maros (2007), saying that the interference of first language causes the students get problems in writing. In addition, Hamdi (2008) states that the learners have problems in writing because they do not fully master the grammatical rules of English. They have already learned the grammar rules of English, but they do not fully master them completely. Next, Johana (2010) and Bahri (2008) say that

one aspect that makes students get difficulty in writing because of lack of vocabulary. In order to write a text well, the students should master the English vocabulary. In addition, Bahri (2008) adds that beside having lack of vocabulary, the students have problems in writing because of low frequency of practicing writing. High frequency of practicing writing from the teachers will help the students to practice their writing easily. In contrary, low frequency of practicing writing will cause the problems of the students in accomplishing their writing task. From the theories above, it can be said that there are some factors that cause students' problems in writing, namely, interference of first language, lack of knowledge about grammar structure, lack of vocabulary, and low frequency of practicing writing.

Based on the preliminary data which were taken from students' tasks on June, 4th 2014, there were some problems faced by the students of grade XI of SMA N 1 Batipuh in producing descriptive text. First, the students had problem in using English vocabulary. It was indicated that 19 (73%) of the students used inappropriate words on their writing. Second, the students had problem in using lexicogrammatical features of the text. It was around 20 (80%) of the students made lexicogrammatical errors on their writing. Third, the students also had problems in using generic structure of the text. The data showed around 40% of the students made errors in generic structure.

In order to help students in writing descriptive text, their ability, their problems and the causes of the problems need to be analyzed. Analyzing the students' ability in writing descriptive

text would help to find out their problems and the causes of their problems in writing descriptive text. Therefore, the researcher was interested in analyzing the students' ability in writing descriptive text, their problems and the causes of the problems.

METHOD OF THE RESEARCH

This is a descriptive research. The purpose of this research is to gain information about phenomenon in order to describe the existed condition in the field. The phenomena that were investigated in this research were the students' ability in writing a descriptive text, the students' lexicogrammatical problems and the causes of the problems. This research was done at SMA N 1 Batipuh. The participants of the research were the students in class XI IPA 2 at SMA N 1 Batipuh in the year 2014/2015. The data of this research were the words or sentences in English writings for descriptive text made by the students in class XI IPA 2 at SMA N 1 Batipuh. In addition, the data were also the students and teachers' utterances gotten from interview to see the factors which cause the students' grammatical problems occurred in writing descriptive text. In addition, data sources were the students in class XI IPA 2 at SMA N 1 Batipuh and two English teachers.

There were two instruments used in this research. They were writing test and interview guidelines. In gathering the data of this research, the researcher did some steps. (1) The researcher came to the class and asked the students to write descriptive text about people, thing, and place. (2) After finishing the test, the

students' writings were collected. (3) The researcher interviewed the students and teachers about the factors which might cause their lexicogrammatical problems occurred in writing by using an interview guide. (4) The interview was stopped when all of the data needed have been collected.

After the data were collected, the data were analyzed in three parts. Dealing with students' ability, the data were analyzed in several steps. (1) The students' writings were analyzed by using multiple trait scoring. (2) The students' scores were stated in rating qualities. (3) The percentages of students' ability were counted by using a formula. Dealing with the students' lexicogrammatical problems, the data was analyzed based on the indicators of the instruments. (1) The data were identified for any deviation in the use of lexicogrammatical in descriptive text. (2) The researcher classified the lexicogrammatical problems found in the writing. (3) The lexicogrammatical problems found were described by comparing the original sentences from the students' writing with the reconstructed sentences. Furthermore, the data gotten from the interview were analyzed in four steps. The researcher followed the steps explained by Berg (2001). This research was analyzed by using these following steps: (1) data reduction, (2) data display, (3) conclusion and verification, (4) data interpretation and alternative solution.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

There are three parts of the findings. First is what is the students' ability in writing descriptive text concerning their lexicogrammatical features. Second is what the lexicogrammatical problems are faced by

the students. Third is why do the students have such problems. The discussion of these things explained as follow.

1. The Students' Ability in Writing Descriptive Text

The students' ability in writing descriptive text were based on eight indicators; the use of adjective, linking verb, attributive have and has, simple present tense, pronoun, adverb, preposition, and noun. The real score from each scorer were divided into two and the result of those scores was the result from the students' total score. The students' ability in writing descriptive text was fair. It was showed from the average score that the students got was 1.53 in the range score of 1.1-2. So, the students' average score was categorized at fair ability. It indicates that the students' ability in writing descriptive text at grade XI SMA N 1 Batipuh was fair. The explanation of students' ability in each indicator was presented as follow.

First, the students' ability in using adjective was analyzed based on the adjective used by the students in writing a descriptive text. Based on the students' writing, the students' ability in using adjective was fair with mean score 1.71. The students got fair score because some of them didn't know how to use the adjectives appropriately. As stated by Azar (2002), words that describe nouns are called adjectives. In grammar, we say that adjectives modify nouns. The word 'modify' means change a little. Since the adjectives modify nouns, it is stated before the nouns.

Second, based on the students' writing, the students' ability in using linking verb was good with mean score 2.38. It was found that there were still some students that couldn't use linking

verb appropriately. In other word, the students should concern about the agreement between subject and linking verb. As stated by Azar (2002), other verbs like 'be' that may be followed immediately by an adjective are called linking verbs. An adjective following a linking verb describes the subject of a sentence. Since it describes a subject of a sentence, the use of linking verb should be appropriate with the subject used in a sentence.

Third, the students' ability in using attributive have and has was fair with mean score 2.00. The students got fair score since some of them still got confused about the use of between have or has. In fact, the attributive have is used when the subject is plural. And the attributive has is used if the subject is third singular person.

Forth, the students' ability in using simple present tense was fair with mean score 1.30. In writing descriptive text, many of the students didn't know the right verb and tobe used in the sentences. In other word, there was no agreement between the subject and verb, and between the subject and tobe. Huddleston and Pullum (2005) state that simple present tense is used to indicate the present time. Since it is used to indicate the present time, the verb used is verb1 and also tobe used in form of simple present tense.

Fifth, related to the use of pronoun, the students' ability was good with mean score 2.84. They got good score since some of them used pronoun appropriately. However, some of the students couldn't use the pronoun appropriately. As stated by Azar (2002), the pronoun is a word that can be substituted for a noun, whether a noun is a person, idea, place or thing.

Sixth, related to the use of adverbs, the students' ability was good with mean score 2.96. The students got good score because many of them used adverb appropriately. However, some of them still used the adverb inappropriately. They didn't know where they should put the adverb in a sentence. They just arrange it like Indonesian language. According to Azar (2002), adverbs modify verbs. Often they answer question "how?". In addition, adverbs are also used to modify adjectives (to give information about adjective).

Seventh, related to the use of preposition, the students' ability was good. As supported by the average score of preposition was 2.73. The students got good ability in using preposition because many of them could use the preposition correctly. However, some of the students still couldn't use the preposition correctly. They couldn't differentiate the use of among at, in, on, and other preposition.

The last one, related to the use of noun, the students' ability was fair. As supported by the mean score of the use of noun was 2.0. The students' ability in using noun was fair because some of the students didn't use noun appropriately. Some of them couldn't differentiate between plural and singular noun. They just put them inappropriately. Azar (2002) divides nouns into count nouns and noncount nouns. It means that the nouns can be seen when they can be counted and can not be counted. Therefore, the nouns can be in the form of singular and plural.

2. The Students' Problems in Writing Descriptive Text

From the result of the students' writing, it can be said that the students had problems with all lexicogrammatical features of descriptive text. The students' problems in each indicator was explained in the following part. The students' problems were listed from the lowest score up to the highest score.

First, the students had problems in using simple present tense. Their problems were related to: (1) lack of agreement between subject and main verb be, (2) lack of agreement between subject and main verb, and (3) lack of agreement between main verb be and object, (4) also, the students had problems in choosing appropriate verb in the sentence. In other word, the students got problems in choice of words. Based on the data, the use of simple present tense was the most dominant problems faced by the students with the number of errors 204 of 609 errors (33%). This result of the research is same with the result of the research done by Zawahreh (2012). He states that the most predominat errors among tenth grade students in Aljoun Schools within morphology were errors of lack of agreement between subject and the main verb be.

Second, the students had problems in using adjective. Their problems were: (1) in arranging between noun and adjective. (2) The omission of main verb be before an adjective. (3) The students did not know the appropriate collocation of adjectives used. Based on the data there were 111 errors (18%) of 609 errors made by the students in using adjective. Azar (2002) states that in grammar, we say that adjectives modify nouns. Since it modifies noun, the adjectives come immediately before noun. Then, some of the students didn't state main verb be

before adjective. In fact, the adjectives follow main verb be.

Third, based on the finding of the students' writing descriptive text, it was found that many of the students had problems in using attributive have and has. Based on the data, there were 61 errors (10%) of 609 errors made by the students in using attributive have and has. Some of the students still used attributive have for the third singular person subject. In fact they should use attributive has. In other word, there was no agreement between subject and attributive have and has.

The forth dominant problem faced by the students was the use of noun. Based on the data, the number of the students' error in using noun was 78 (13%) of 609 errors. The students got problems in using noun because they couldn't differentiate between singular and plural noun. Azar (2012) divides nouns into count nouns and non count nouns. It means that the noun can be seen when they can be counted and cannot be counted.

Fifth, the problem faced by the students in writing descriptive text was related to the use of linking verb. Based on the data, the number of the students' errors was 40 (7%) of 609 errors. In other word, there was no agreement between subject and linking verb. Also, some students used more than one linking verb in one sentence. Linking verb is a verb that connects the subject to the compliment. As stated by Azar (2002), other verbs like "be" that maybe followed immediately by an adjective are called linking verbs.

The sixth problem found in students' writing was related to the use of preposition. The students' problem was; they could not differentiate the use of

among in, on, at and other preposition. Based on the, the number of students' error in using preposition was 32 (5%) of 609 errors. The result of this research was quite the same from the result of the research done by Darus (2009). The result of his research shows that there are six common errors committed by the participants. One of them is the use of preposition. In addition, the research done by Coffin, et al (2003), they list some common grammatical errors in students' writing. One of them is the use of preposition.

Seventh, the problem faced by the students in writing descriptive text was related to the use of pronoun. Based on the data, the number of students' error in using pronoun was 54 (9%) of 609 errors. The students could not differentiate among subject pronoun, object pronoun, and possessive adjective. Also, they did not know subject and object pronoun for animal. They still used she/he for the subject of animal. In fact they should use it. The result of this research is same with the result of the research done by coffin, et al (2003). One of common errors in students' writing is lack of pronoun agreement in sentences.

The last problem faced by the students in writing descriptive text was the use of adverb. It can be said that they did not know the position of adverb in a sentence. They just put it like Indonesian sentence. Based on the data, the number of students' error in using adverb was 29 (5%) of 609 errors. According to Azar (2002), adverbs modify verbs. Often they answer the question "how?". In addition, adverbs also used to modify adjectives (to give information about adjectives). If adverbs modify verbs, they are stated at the end of the sentences. Then, if adverbs

modify adjectives, they are stated before the adjectives.

3. The Causes of Students' Problems in Writing Descriptive Text

In writing descriptive text, the students had some problems as mentioned in the previous part. Since they had problems, there must be some factors which were as the roots of the students' problems. Therefore, it was very important to see the factors that caused their problems.

First, interference of first language. In writing descriptive text, interference of first language was the aspect that caused the students' problems. Based on the students' writing, most of their errors were caused by interference of first language. They arranged the words like Indonesian language. Based on the finding, 18 students (90%) said that they thought words in Indonesian language first then translated them into English. They said that it was helpful for them to use Indonesian language before writing English text. As stated by Grenville (2002), interference of first language causes the students get problems in writing.

Second, lack of knowledge about grammar structure. Based on the students' writing, they did not know the rules of English. Based on the students' writing, a lot of errors made by the students were caused by the lack of knowledge about grammar structure. That's why they made some errors in their writing of descriptive text. From 20 students, 18 students (90%) said that they got problems in writing descriptive text because they didn't know the grammar structure used in writing descriptive text. As supported by Yohana (2005: 22), the

lack of grammar structures causes the students' error in writing.

Third, lack of vocabulary. Based on students' writing it can be seen that some of the students' errors were caused by the lack of vocabulary. They could not choose the appropriate word to say something in English. In other word, they did not know the meaning of word based on the context. That's why they made some errors in their writing of descriptive text. Based on the interview done to 20 students, 17 students (85%) said that they got problems in writing descriptive text because they didn't master the English vocabulary. Because the students didn't master the English vocabulary, as the effect they got problems in writing descriptive text.

The last was low frequency of practicing writing. Based on the interview done to 20 students, 20 students (100%) said that the teacher very seldom gives practicing writing in the class. The teacher only asked the students to write if there was a rest of time. High frequency of writing task from the teachers will help the students to practice their writing easily, in contrary low frequency of writing task will cause the problems of the students in accomplishing their writing task. Here, the low frequency of practicing writing from the teacher was the main cause of the students' problems since all of the students (100%) gave the same responses of that.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings above, there are three things that can be concluded. First, the students' ability in writing descriptive text at grade XI IPA SMA N 1 Batipuh was fair. It means that there are some lexicogrammatical features of descriptive text used inappropriately.

Second, there are some lexicogrammatical problems faced by the students in writing descriptive text. Their problems from the most dominant problem up to the least dominant problem were related to the use of simple present tense, adjective, attributive have and has, noun, linking verb, preposition, pronoun, and adverb. The students had problems in using lexicogrammatical features of descriptive text because they didn't use the lexicogrammatical features of the text appropriately.

Third, there were some factors caused the students' problems in writing descriptive text. They were interference of first language, lack of knowledge about grammar structure, lack of vocabulary, and low frequency of writing task.

Based on the conclusions stated above, there are some implications that can be drawn. First, school and National education of Batipuh should prepare the facilities for the teachers and the students to practice the writing in the classroom. Second, there should be a writing competition done by school and national Education of Batipuh at least once a month. Third, the English teachers should give feedback or reward for their students' writing in order to improve the writing ability.

Based on the findings and conclusion of this research, the researcher would like to give some suggestion as follows: (1) it is suggested for the students and teachers to discuss deeply the lexicogrammatical features of text before coming to write descriptive text. (2) It is suggested that the teachers should give feedback or reward for the students' writing. Then, after writing the teachers and the students check the students' writing together. (3) It is also suggested that the teachers should give high

frequency of practicing writing to their students.

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