



MISTAKES WITHIN THE DESCRIPTIVE TEXTS PRODUCED BY UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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Abstract

Learning a target language is actually a process of trial and error, whether as the first, the second or even foreign language. This study is aimed to find out the mistakes within the descriptive texts. The method used in this study was a qualitative approach, and the design was discourse analysis. The data were taken from the 27 descriptive texts written by the fourth semester students of English Department, while the technique of analysis was based on the error analysis theory, involved: collection of a sample, identification, description and explanation. The generic structure result showed that the students could write well in the identification and aspect part, but not in conclusion part. In case of lexicogrammatical features, the use of verbs caused the most number of mistakes, or 132 mistakes (30.07%), while the fewest ones was the use of adjective, found only 4 times (0.91%) of the total mistakes. Generally, the students used the lexicogrammatical features in their writing, even though still need to be improved. The causes of students' mistakes were mostly due to the interlingual aspect.

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INTRODUCTION

The first languages used by people to communicate are commonly called as mother tongue (L1) or the first language. According to Brown (2001: 21), the acquisition of mother tongue happens naturally, that is why some people sometimes do not realize it as the process of language acquisition. Actually, through natural setting, people learnt their mother tongue since they were babies. Corder (in Richards, 1974: 20) added the learning of mother tongue is inevitable, and as a part of whole maturational process of the child.

Krashen (1985: 1) emphasized the two independent ways of developing ability in second language acquisition. He defined those two ways as acquisition and learning. According to him, acquisition is a subconscious process identical in all important ways to the process children utilize in acquiring their first language, while learning is a conscious process that results in "knowing about" language.

After acquiring the first language, many people do not stop to learn the second, the third or even the fourth languages. Ellis (1997: 3) stated that the languages which are learnt subsequent to the mother tongue are called "second language". Here, the second language is not referred to the learning of second language only, but also the learning of the third, the fourth languages, and even the foreign language learning, while James (1998: 3) suggested the use of "target language" (TL) for describing the language to be learnt after the mother tongue. He preferred to use the term "target language" in order to be neutral, rather than using the terms second or foreign language. Nemser (1971:1) defined the target language (TL) is that in which communication is being attempted, in case of a learner, it is the language he is learning, when he uses it.

Ellis (1997: 3) defined the second language acquisition as the systematic study of how people acquire a second language. Widdowson (in Ellis, 1997: 3) concluded the second language acquisition as the way in which

people learn a language other than their mother tongue, inside or outside of a classroom. Adapted from Ellis' definition, the foreign language acquisition also can be defined as a systematic study of how people acquire a foreign language. In line with Ellis, Johnson (2004: 3) stated that the current models of the second language acquisition are linear in nature. They go from the input into the intake to the developing system of the output. Corder (in Richards, 1974: 20) added that the learning of second language normally begins only after the maturational process is largely completed. Later on, the study of those languages, both the second and the foreign, often referred to as the study of L2.

As known, English in Indonesia is taught as a foreign language, rather than a second language. It influences the process of teaching and learning the language, especially how the English is learnt by the learners. The process of learning mostly occurred inside the school environment only, and dominated by the classroom setting. Ellis (1994: 214) defined it as the educational setting. In educational setting, especially in Indonesia, providing the natural setting of English learning for the English learner is not easy, even it is impossible. It happens because the English is learnt as the foreign language only, and it is not used for daily communication by most of Indonesians.

Language learning is actually a process of trial and error, in which a learner form a hypothesis and later on prove it, abort it, or adjust it (Huang, 2003: 19). It means, when the learners learn the second language, probably, they meet many kinds of second language learning problems dealing with pronunciation, vocabularies, language structures, language interpretation, misuse, non-English constructions, misspelling, and so on. Some of the learners might be able to overcome those problems, but for some learners, they might be unable to overcome them, and those who are unable to fix them, they will make a number of mistakes and even the errors. Moreover, according to Bloom (as cited in Ellis, 1994: 47)

even the children also make errors when they learn their first language.

Adapted from the theory above, Hariri (2012: 4856) stated that the process of learning English as a foreign language is actually a process of making errors, correcting errors and promoting the acquisition level. Lado (as cited in Ellis, 1994: 43) stated that the students' errors are strongly influenced by their L1, while Ellis (1994: 49) stated the process of making errors can be influenced by a variety of factors, such as the learners' mother tongue (L1), lack of vocabularies, lack of target language knowledge, and so on. Those factors will lead and influence the L2 learners in making the mistakes, even the errors. Later on, due to this fact, Corder in the 1960s has developed the device to analyze the L2 learners' errors, and it is called error analysis.

James (1998:1) defined error analysis as the process of determining the incidence, nature, causes and consequences of unsuccessful language. Ellis (1994: 47) defined error analysis as the study of errors, especially in the second/ foreign language learning. Brown (2000: 218) characterized the error analysis by its examination of errors attributable to all possible sources, not just those resulting from negative transfer of the native language.

This study is aimed to find out (i) the organization of generic structure in the descriptive texts, produced by the fourth semester students of English Department of *STKIP PGRI Ponorogo*, (ii) the use of its lexicogrammatical features, (iii) the frequencies of mistakes, both in terms of its generic structure as well as the lexicogrammatical features, (iv) the causes of the students' mistakes, and (v) the pedagogical implication of the study for the language acquisition area in Indonesia.

Descriptive Text Writing

The word 'writing' seems very simple and easy to be understood, but many students still find the difficulties to do it. Writing is not a spontaneous skill, but a skill to be learnt and practiced all the time. Of course, these activities

requires some conscious mental efforts when we think about the way of arranging and combining the words, phrase and sentences into a good text. Valette (1997: 4) stated that by writing gradually the writer will master the elements of writing, as well as improves the acquisition of new vocabularies and grammatical aspects. Due to its significance as mentioned above, practicing writing from time to time is a must for the language learners. In case of writing descriptive text, Wishon and Burks (1980: 379) stated that descriptive writing reproduces the way of looking, smelling, tasting, feeling, hearing a particular thing. Callagan (1988: 138) added that the descriptive text creates a clear and vivid impression of person, place or thing.

When the writer writes the description, he/she should use a concrete and detail words, so the readers understand well what the writer is actually telling about. In describing the object, the writer may use imaginative words, comparison, and images to make the readers easily understand the object being described. The writer must be careful to choose the words and then arranges them correctly. Besides using imaginative words, the writers of descriptive text often use figurative language. In the second language area, the intention of the text represents the second language writer's attitude to the subject matter (Newmark, 1988: 12). It means that the texts produced by the second language learners will show the learners' competence level in learning language.

Ideally, the descriptive text writing should involve the correct generic structure and the lexicogrammatical features. Generic structure is a series of stages or steps of genre which help to achieve the purpose of the text. It refers to the staged, step by step organization of the text. Hyland (2007: 33) classified the schematic structures of descriptive text into three parts, identification, aspect and conclusion. Besides the generic structure within the text, the descriptive text also has the common linguistic features, which refer to the way meanings get encoded or expressed in a

semiotic system. Anderson & Anderson (2003: 93) have characterized the linguistic features of descriptive text into: (i) focuses on specific participant, (ii) uses of attributive and identifying processes, (iii) frequent use of epithets and classifiers in nominal groups, and (iv) uses of simple present tense.

METHOD

Considering the objective of this research and the nature of the problem, this research is designed as a descriptive qualitative research, which involves the collection, analysis, and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual (i.e. non-numerical) data to gain insights into a particular phenomenon of interest (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2011: 7). The researcher used the qualitative study because it is suitable for investigating the literary writing skills, computer text-analysis skill and so forth. The design of this study is discourse analysis, which specifies on analyzing the students' mistakes in writing descriptive text, both in terms of its generic structure and the lexico-grammatical features. The sources of the data were taken from 27 descriptive texts, written by the fourth semester students of English department of *STKIP PGRI Ponorogo* during April-June 2014. The data were collected through the giving of assignment to the students and the units of analysis in this study were words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs, taken from the students' descriptive texts. They were given an instruction to write the descriptive texts, with the impromptu topic about local culture, that was *Reog*. The topic is chosen because all of the students know well about that local culture art. So, in this case they had the same background of knowledge regarding to the topic.

In this study, the researcher used test sheet and questionnaire as the instrument. The test is given to the students in the written form and then, the result of the test is analyzed by using descriptive analysis. The questionnaires are used to find out the causes of students' mistakes. The study focused on the generic

structure of descriptive text and the lexicogrammatical features in students' descriptive texts. The researcher used Hyland's category (2007) to analyze the generic structure of descriptive text, which consisted of three aspects: identification, aspect and conclusion. While the lexicogrammatical features were analyzed by specifying into the categories, as follows: specific participant (SP), wrong action verbs (WAC), wrong tenses (WT), conjunction and mechanic mistake (CM), adverbials of mistakes (AD), wrong adjective (WA), misspelling (MS), the absence or mistake of finite (AF) and the absence or mistake of article (AM). The researcher modified the categorization of the mistakes in order to accommodate the mistakes committed by the students. After identifying and quantifying the mistakes, the writer interpreted the findings based on the error analysis theory, as Corder suggested.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The result of analysis showed that only a half of the students who are able to write well in terms of generic structure. There were 13 students who were able to write the text according to the generic structure which is required, and the rest failed. In percentage, the students were able to write the generic structure well were equal to 48%, while the rest 52% weren't. Totally, there were 100% of texts which provided identification part, 100% texts provided aspect part, and only 13 texts or equal to 48%, provided conclusion part. In terms of generic structure, the mistakes were all in the conclusion part. The students failed to sum up the aspects of description in such a way, and many texts were ended by unfinished description, so that, there were a few texts which had unexpected ending. Of course, after reading a particular text, people expect that they will get important information as they required before. In this case, the writer actually didn't need to provide the conclusion in many sentences, or even in a long paragraph, but as

short as they could. It doesn't matter if the conclusions consisted of two or three sentences, as long as it involved the aspects which have been described before, but in fact, most of them failed.

In terms of lexicogrammatical mistakes, the students made several mistakes that have been categorized before. There were nine categories which used to specify the students'

mistakes, as mentioned in the previous part. The statistical data in this study are functioned only as the supporting data. It doesn't mean that this study totally used the statistical data as the basis of analysis. To have a clear description on students' lexicogrammatical mistakes, the researcher has tabulated them into the following table.

Table 1. Students' Lexicogrammatical Mistakes Result

No	Category of mistakes	Number of Mistakes	Percentage
1	Misuse	53	12.07%
2	Wrong action verbs	132	30.07%
3	Wrong tenses	60	13.67%
4	Conjunction and mechanic mistake	57	12.98%
5	Adverbial mistake	8	1.82%
6	Wrong adjective	4	0.91%
7	Misspelling	53	12.08%
8	The absence or mistake of finite	54	12.3%
9	The absence or mistake of article	18	4.1%
	Total	439	100%

From the table above, it is clear that the most common mistakes on students' descriptive texts are in using verbs, while the fewest ones are the use of adjectives. There are 132 mistakes in using verb or equal to 30.07% of total mistakes, while the fewest ones are 4 mistakes, equal to 0.91% in case of using adjective. It means that the students still have many problems in using verbs in the sentences. It should be the concern of the teacher when teaching writing, because the use of verbs plays an important role in organizing the sentence. Some categories of mistake were found in nearly the same number between one and

another, such as wrong tenses 60 times, equal to 13.67%, misuse 53 times, equal to 12.07%, conjunction and punctuation mistakes 57 times, equal to 12.98%, misspelling 53 times, equal to 12.08% and the absence or mistake of finite 54 times, equal to 12.3%.

In the previous subsections, the researcher has identified and explained the categorization of lexicogrammatical mistakes committed by the students. To be fair, the researcher tries to correct some of the students' mistakes and presented them into a table, as the alternatives of improving the students' writing, as follows:

Table 2. The correction of lexicogrammatical mistakes

Types of mistakes	Identification of mistakes	Correction of mistakes
Misuse	<i>Heavy of this mask can reach 50 - 60kg Anothers figures in Reog Ponorogo performance are:</i>	<i>The <u>weight</u> of the mask reaches 50 - 60kg. Another figure in Reog Ponorogo performance are</i>
Verb	<i>Ponorogo people <u>keeps</u> this heritage by performing and developing it. Reog <u>become</u> the icon of Ponorogo city.</i>	<i>Ponorogo people <u>keep</u> this heritage by performing and developing it. Reog <u>becomes</u> the icon of Ponorogo city.</i>
Tenses	<i>Bujanganom also wearing a mask is an acrobatic dancer. The heavy mask bringing by its dancer with teeth.</i>	<i>As an acrobatic dancer, Bujanganom is also wearing a mask. The dancer brings the mask by his teeth.</i>
Conjunct. and mechanic	<i><u>the</u> school teaches some young people for fighting and ... The <u>Reog characters</u> usually perform it in the annual festival, national days, full moon performance, and other occasions.</i>	<i><u>The</u> school teaches some young people for fighting and ... The <u>Reog's characters</u> usually perform it in the annual festival, national days, full moon performance, and other occasions.</i>
Adverbial	<i>He is a king <u>didn't</u> never gives up. The theatre is known <u>wide</u> over the country. There is a peacock <u>at above</u> the tiger's head.</i>	<i>He is a king <u>who</u> never gives up. The theatre is <u>widely</u> known over the country. There is a peacock <u>on</u> the tiger's head.</i>
Adjective	<i>It is very <u>unwishdom</u> if everyone is forgetting this culture. Warok is <u>identic</u> with...</i>	<i>It is very <u>unwise</u> if everyone in Indonesia is forgetting this culture. Warok is <u>identical</u> with...</i>
Misspelling	<i>Reog dance tells about the struggle of a prince who <u>propuse</u> to a lovely princess. Reog Ponorogo is a <u>unik</u> traditional dance.</i>	<i>Reog dance tells about the struggle of a prince who <u>proposes</u> to a lovely princess. Reog Ponorogo is a <u>unique</u> traditional dance.</i>
Finite	<i>Reog Ponorogo usually staged in Ponorogo anniversary, Grebeg Suro or new year of Javanese. There are many types of Reog in Indonesia, but the most notable ones <u>are</u> Reog Ponorogo.</i>	<i>Reog Ponorogo <u>is</u> usually staged in Ponorogo anniversary, Grebeg Suro or new year of Javanese. There are many types of Reog in Indonesia, but the most notable ones is Reog Ponorogo.</i>
Article	<i>Barongan is dance equipment that is most dominant in the Reog Ponorogo art. Characteristic of the Singo Barong is...</i>	<i>Barongan is the dance equipment that is most dominant in the Reog Ponorogo art. The characteristic of Singo Barong is...</i>

In case of lexicogrammatical features, generally, the students' mistakes can be classified into interlingual, which refers to the mistakes influenced most by the interference of the students' mother tongues. It occurred as a result of the use of elements from one language while speaking another. In more specific types of mistake, the students' mistakes can be classified into: (i) omission, which refers to the absence of an item that must appear in a well formed utterance, such as in the absence of finite and article, (ii) addition, which refers to the presence of an item that must not appear in well formed utterances, such as in the presence of unnecessary preposition *'at above it'*, (iii) misinformation, refers to the use of wrong morpheme or structure, such as in the example *'Anothers figures...*, and (iv) misordering, refers to the incorrect placement of a morpheme or group of morphemes in an utterance, such as in the wrong use of tenses *'Bujanganom also wearing a mask is an acrobatic dancer.'*

After identifying and explaining the students' mistakes, the researcher analyzed the causes of students' mistakes by distributing the questionnaires for them. The researcher asked the students about the problems they faced during the writing activity. Besides that, the researcher also asked about the students' knowledge on the descriptive text, such as the generic structure and lexicogrammatical features, and provided also some exercises to know the students' understanding of lexicogrammatical rules. Based on the result of questionnaires, most of them still have problems in writing, such as: the problems in transferring their ideas into the target language, lack of vocabularies, the use of wrong grammatical rules in writing, the use of wrong words, misspelling and so forth. Even though those problems are actually common for the foreign language learners as them, but are better for the teacher and the language learners to know it in detail. The result of questionnaires also showed that most of the students knew about the generic structure of the descriptive

text, but didn't in case of lexicogrammatical features. Many of them still confuse about it.

The findings and the result of analysis as discussed above had the pedagogical implications to the foreign language learning area. The researcher formulated them into as follows: (i) by error analysis, both the teacher and the language learner will get more knowledge and information about the students' mistakes, whether in spoken or written form. As explained in the previous part, foreign language learning is a process of trial and error, form the hypothesis and then prove it. At those processes, the language learners are possible to make mistakes and errors. The teachers should learn to tolerate it, guide the students and motivate them, (ii) the students' mistakes actually inform the teacher how far the students' progresses in achieving the ultimate goal of foreign language learning. Furthermore, the students' mistakes can be used as the valuable feedbacks for the teacher, and then assess it to determine the level of students' achievements toward the ultimate goal of foreign language learning. With the feedback also, both the teacher and the language learners make harder efforts to achieve the more closely ultimate goals of foreign language learning, (iii) the mistakes are absolutely needed by the learners themselves, because they function as a device of learning the target language. After knowing their mistakes, the students will handle and fix them soon, otherwise, the mistakes will be repeated and fossilized. At the end, the error analysis can keep us to closely focus on specific aspect of languages rather than viewing universal aspects of language.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and the result of analysis, the researcher simply concludes that in case of the organization of generic structure, the fourth semester students of *STKIP PGRI Ponorogo* could write the generic structure of descriptive text in quite good organization, even though it still needs to be improved. Secondly, in

case of lexicogrammatical mistakes, most of the students made the mistakes and needs to be fixed. The use of verbs caused the highest number of mistakes, or 132 mistakes (30.07%), while the fewest ones was the mistakes in using adjectives, found only 4 times (0.91%) of the total mistakes. While the causes of students' mistakes were mostly due to the interlingual aspect, which indicated by the lack of using verbs, failure of using part of speech as well as applying the grammatical rules in written form. But it is important to be noticed, that they have tried to write based on their own limited knowledge of lexicogrammatical features, even though there are still many mistakes in using them.

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