

STUDENTS' WRITING ABILITY PREDICTION THROUGH GRAMMAR MASTERY

Yocha Falentina Helmy

SMP Negeri 5 Padang Panjang

Jl. KH Ahmad Dahlan No.1A Padang Panjang, Sumatera Barat

E-mail: yochafalentina00@gmail.com

Abstract

Grammar mastery and writing ability cannot be separated each other. Both support one another. This article was intended to see the correlation between grammar mastery and students' writing ability. The design was quantitative research. The population of the research was all second year regular students of English Department of Universitas Negeri Padang registered in 2007/2008 academic year. The sample was chosen based on cluster sampling technique. The data was in form of documenter data and analyzed by using Pearson Product Moment. The result showed that "there is positive correlation between grammar mastery and students' writing ability" was accepted. It indicates that the ability of the students in writing could be predicted through their grammar mastery.

Key words: *correlation, grammar mastery, writing ability*

A. INTRODUCTION

Mastering English is very important for certain group of people in their life nowadays since English is an international language that is used almost in every part of the world. Realizing the importance of English, the Indonesian government includes English as a compulsory subject taught in junior high school up to senior high school.

In Universitas Negeri Padang, there is one department that focuses in teaching English. Many skills are taught there namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. Those skills cannot stand alone, they need another language component to support, that is grammar. Without having good grammar, those skills are imperfect. For example, if a student wants to write such a text but s/he does not understand about grammar, their writing will not be good.

One evidence that proves what has been written above is when I was in the second year at the English Department of UNP. Although my friends and I were in the same major, English, but we got different result at the end of the semester. Some of my classmates got good result in their study result sheet (LHS) but the

rest of them did not. One thing I noticed in general was my classmates who got good in grammar subject also got good mark in writing subject. Here, 'A' and 'B' are considered as good mark. In the contrary, my classmates who obtain bad mark in grammar subject tend to get bad mark too in writing subject. Here 'C' and 'D' are considered as bad mark.

For example, 'W' who got A in grammar 1 also A in writing 1. Another, 'D' who got C in grammar 1 also got C in writing 1. 'R' who got C in grammar 1 also got in writing 1. Last example, 'S' who got A in grammar 1, got B in writing 1.

In the other hand, there are also my classmates whose their achievement in grammar and in writing did not reflect any correlations. For instance, 'M' got B in grammar 1 but she got C in writing 1. Another was 'D' who obtained C in grammar but she got B in writing 2.

According to writing program committee (1991) they may broadly agree that basics errors of grammar and mechanic must be avoided. They well written essay will be free of grammatical and mechanical errors. From the explanation above, it is said that grammar usage, punctuation and spelling are linguistic factors that take an important role in writing ability of the students. This is relevant to what explained by Thornbury (1999) that if a language has no grammar, no systematic ordering of its words in sentences, it could never be learned by a native speaker or by a foreigner, nor could two people understand one another in it. The correct used of grammar is factor that firstly work in writing process of something (text, essay, etc) In other words, grammar mastery has something to do with students' writing ability.

B. RELATED LITERATURES

1. The Nature of Grammar

The role of grammar is very significant in studying English. It has very tied relation to skills of language: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Grammar is the principle of organization language by which sound and meaning are related or structured. Thornbury (1999) points out that a language without grammar is no language at all.

Ur (1991) states that grammar may be roughly defined as a way a language manipulates and combine words (or bits of words) in order to form larger units of

meaning. Doughty and Williams (1992) define grammar as the system of rules which cover the way words are used and grouped together.

In fact, most of the people still need to learn some grammatical rules in order to gain good sense of language. For example, in writing, someone will be declared as a good writer if s/he writes by following some rules of grammar. We also can say that a good sense of language should be in both, writing and speaking. Thornbury (1999) says that the pattern of a language is seen in its grammar (word order, form and structured) rather than its vocabulary.

Ur (2000) defines that grammar is the way words are put together to make correct sentences. From some opinions about grammar we can see that grammar is very important rules for sentence in making language because without grammar is the System of rules governing the conventional arrangement and relationship of word in a sentence.

Krashen (1987) says that some foreign language theories have assumed that one can only learn the language before acquiring it. It means that acquiring English can only be achieved by learning it. In this case, the students should learn the rules of language and use them correctly. So that they will gradually recognize them in order to acquire them. He also says that both teacher and students are convinced that study of formal grammar is essential for second language acquisition and the teacher is skilled at presenting explanations the target language so that the students understand.

We cannot ignore grammar since it is the backbone of a language. It means that knowing the system of rules which underlie the language and the process of sentence construction is necessary for the students in learning the language. It will help the students express the idea and meaning correctly. After having some definitions above, we can say that grammar is the important element in language to make good sentences either in written or spoken language.

2. Measuring the Mastery of Grammar

In acquiring a language, one should learn the grammar of the language and master it. However grammar becomes a problem for student who learn English as a second language. Krashen (1987) says that some foreign theories have assumed that the language can only be learned before acquiring it. One should learn the rules of the language and use them correctly so that they will gradually recognize

them in order to acquire it maximally, one should master the rules of the language. English students who have purpose to master English should master the grammar of English.

Students' mastery of grammar can be measured by giving Test. Hughes (2004) suggests several techniques presenter for testing grammar: gap filling, paraphrase, completion and multiple choices. Gap filling is the technique using one gap in a full sentence to fill by the students. Ideally, gap filling should have just one correct response (Hughes, 2001). Completion is the technique that can be used to test a variety of structure. Multiple choices technique has many forms.

There are four procedures when administering a test as suggested by Hughes (2004). The first procedure is preparing the testing environment. This involves arranging the place of testing, materials and equipment, personnel and time of testing. The second procedure is communicating the instruction. It intends to see whether the test taker understands the instruction. Maintaining a supportive testing environment is the next procedure. This includes avoiding distractions due to temperature, noise, excessive movement, etc. The last procedure is collecting the test.

3. The Nature of Writing

In a spoken language, one can communicate with other people without worrying whether or not their listener understands. In speaking process, there is a direct interaction between a speaker and a listener; the speaker directly knows whether his listener understand him or not. As Raimes (1982) says that in speaking everyone can use their voices (pitch, stress, and rhythm), bodies and dialect variation which facilitate him in conveying the ideas.

The ability to express one's idea in written form in second language and to do so with reasonable accuracy and coherence are the major achievement. Byrne (1982) says that writing is much more than a production of graphic symbol. It is a kind of effective activity to arrange some sentences in order to link them together in certain ways. Writing is an essential aspect of teaching languages since it involves the encoding message that is one translates his thought into language.

In addition, Murcia (1991) views writing as an act of communication suggest an interactive process takes place between the writer and the reader via a text. Bell and Burnaby add that writing is a very complex activity in which the

writer is required to demonstrate the control of number of variables simultaneously. At the sentence level, it includes the control of content, vocabulary, sentence structure, format, punctuation and spelling. Beyond the sentence level, a writer has to be able to organize the ideas and present the information in the form of cohesive and coherence paragraph and texts. To achieve that, the writing process involves many parts of the writer's body

According to Raimes (1983) writing is not simply writing on paper. In this case, the writer has to consider many aspects in it, such as spelling, grammar, punctuation, vocabulary, that they have learned, the way how to Express The idea and how to organize it intelligently. Then, Hamps and Heasley (1987:1) say that writing is the process of generating ideas in language and composing the idea into a written structure.

From the definitions above, it is fairly obvious that in writing, the ability of transferring thought, ideas and feeling are required by the students in order to be able to select relevant information. They can arrange the sentences into a correct order, so they can be understood by the reader clearly.

4. Writing A Paragraph

As we know that there are two kinds of writing. They are writing a paragraph and writing an essay. Writing a paragraph is shorter than writing an essay. Paragraph consists of sentences but essay consists of paragraph. Oshima and Haque (1983) say that paragraph is a basic unit of organization in writing in which a group of related sentences developed one main idea and a paragraph can be as short as one sentence or as long as ten sentences.

According to Blanchard and Root (1994), paragraph is a group of sentences about the same topic. The main idea of the paragraph is usually given in the first sentences. It introduces the topic and control the information given in the other sentences. The other sentences add details to the topic and called supporting sentences.

Blanchard and Root (1998) add that a paragraph is a group of sentences about one main idea. Paragraph is part of an essay that consists of many sentences that develop one main idea. Paragraph usually contains many different kinds of information to the reader. It could contain a series of brief examples or a single long illustration of a general point. It might describe a Place, character or process;

narrate a series event; compare or contrast two or more things; classify items into categories; or describe causes and effect. Regardless the kind of information they contain, all paragraph share certain characteristics.

Mc. Whorter (1992) says that a paragraph is the structure of three essential elements: the topic, the main idea and supporting details. It means that paragraph must have a topic in order to make the reader know what the paragraph is about. The purpose of main idea in paragraph is to assist the reader in focusing and organizing their thought and anticipating the development of the message. Writers, therefore, often provide general and organizing statements to state the main idea of the paragraph. The sentences that state clearly the main idea is called the topic sentences. In a paragraph a writer includes detail that explain, support or provide further information about the main idea.

According to Mc. Crimmon (1963), the function of the paragraph is to develop a unit of an outline, every sentence in the paragraph should clearly relate to that unit, and the sum of the sentences should make the reader feel that the unit has been effectively developed. There are four requirements of a good paragraph according to Mc.Crimmon:

1. Completeness

A paragraph is a complete when it does all it was intended to do. It provides information well enough developed to convince the reader of its truth.

2. Unity

A unified paragraph should be linked in some way. every sentence in a paragraph contributes to developing one Central idea.

3. Orderly Movement (Sequence of sentences)

If the paragraph is to be an organic unit, its Organization of information in a paragraph is presented in a desirable sequence.

4. Coherence

Each sentence in a paragraph is closely related to the next. It takes the reader logically and smoothly from one sentence to next.

Furthermore, Cannon (1996) states that a good paragraph has to include cohesion and coherence. Cohesion is determined by lexically and grammatically overt inter sentential relationship whereas coherence is based on semantic relationship.

5. The Relationship Between Grammar Mastery And Writing Ability

In the previous explanation, it is said that grammar is one among many components in writing that plays an important role to determine the quality of one's writing. Writing is a written language that is used to deliver messages from the writer to the reader. Because of that, the use of correct grammar is really necessary there. As Thornbury (1999) says that if a language has no grammar, no systematic ordering of its Words in sentences, it could never be learned by a native speaker or by a foreigner, nor could two people understand one another in it.

The idea is also supported by Simich (1989) that says in classrooms with a focus on grammar, students are first taught the part of speech, part of sentences, types of sentences etc. The purpose of this approach is to help the student to produce a good writing. Therefore, this research tried to reveal whether there is a correlation between grammar master and writing ability.

C. RESEARCH METHODS

This research is a correlational design, a relationship which tells about the relationship between one variable with another variable. It involves collecting data in order to determine whether and to what degree, a relationship exists between two or more variables. The purpose of a correlational research is to determine the relationship between variables or to use these relationships to make prediction how much the correlation among the variables quantitatively (Gay, 2003). This research was correlational because it was done to see the relationship between grammar mastery and writing ability.

The population of this research was all second years students of the regular program of the English Department of UNP registered in 2007/2008 academic year which consists of four classes. The sample of this research was class A. it consisted of 30 students. The sample was taken by applying cluster sampling technique, using lottery that is choosing already existing class randomly. Cluster sampling is used because the students of the regular classes almost have the same characteristics in other words their abilities are not do different. According to Gay (1987) the samples of correlational research minimally 30 students.

There were two variables of this research. They were grammar mastery (X) was as independent variable, while writing ability (Y) was as dependent variable. The data was secondary data that was obtain from second hand. The data of this

research was collected through documentary study (the result of students' grammar test and the result of students' writing test). The written document that were got from the lecturers of the two subject related (grammar and writing). The data was the result of Grammar 1 semester test and Writing 1 semester test. The data was as a valid data.

The data was analyzed by using Pearson r formula. If r calculated is greater than r- table, it indicates significant correlation within two variables. A correlation coefficient is a decimal number between .00 and +1.00 and -1.00. when the value of r is +1.00, the two variables are positive correlated in which the students who have high score on grammar test will also obtain high score on writing test.

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Presentation of the sample' grammar mastery data

As mention before, the students' grammar mastery was measured through grammar test. The test was grammar 1 semester test which was held in the second semester (January-June 2007). The result of students' answer was transferred to quantitative data.

There were 30 samples answering the test. The lower score reached was 38 and the highest one was 85, to make it clear, students' grammar master is a presented to the following table

| <i>Score Obtained</i> | <i>Number of Samples</i> |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| 38 – 44 | 2 |
| 45 – 51 | 1 |
| 52 – 58 | 3 |
| 58 – 65 | 4 |
| 66 – 72 | 7 |
| 73 – 79 | 6 |
| 80 - 86 | 7 |

Table 1. Grammar master score

2. Presentation of the samples' writing ability data

The students' writing ability was also measured through test. It was writing 1 semester test. In this test, the students are assigned to write a paragraph. The test

was held in the second semester (January-June 2007). The result of students' answer was transferred to quantitative data.

There were 30 samples joining the test. The lower score reached was 50 and the highest one was 85, to make it clear, students' writing test is presented to the following table :

| <i>Score Obtained</i> | <i>Number of Samples</i> |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| 50 – 55 | 1 |
| 56 – 61 | 8 |
| 62 – 67 | 2 |
| 68 – 73 | 6 |
| 74 – 79 | 5 |
| 80 - 85 | 8 |

Table 2. Writing ability test

From the result of the test, it was got that the coefficient correlation (r_{xy}) between variable X and Y was 0.5824 while the r table was 0,3494. In other words, the coefficient correlation got between students' grammar mastery and students' writing ability was higher than r table. It means that there was significant correlation between grammar master and writing ability in English Department of UNP.

Positive result score indicates positive direction of the correlation. It means the higher students' result in grammar, the higher quality of students 'writing will be. The lower students' result in grammar, the lower quality of their writing will be. In other word there is a significant correlation between grammar mastery and writing ability. So it can be concluded that there is a positive correlation between grammar mastery and writing ability of the second year students of the English Department of UNP.

The data has supported the research hypothesis stated that "there is a significant correlation between grammar mastery and writing ability for the second year students of the English Department of UNP". The result has showed that the hypothesis was accepted, which described that there is significant correlation between grammar master and writing ability of the second year students of the English Department of UNP. The coefficient correlation (0.5824)

could show that if a students' mastery of grammar is good so there is a tendency that their ability in writing will be good. On the contrary, if students' mastery of grammar is low so their writing ability will be low as well. It can be concluded that students' grammar mastery has significant correlation to their writing ability.

There were some probabilities that can be seen from the result of the research. First, the students learnt grammar and writing almost 4 hours a week (3 hours and 20 minutes). Second, the students learnt grammar and writing continuously. Third, the students have learnt grammar since they were in junior high school. Last one, the students did many exercises both grammar and writing.

E. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of data and its finding, the following conclusion can be drawn. There was a significant correlation between grammar mastery and writing ability of the second year students of the English Department of UNP. It means that a students who obtains a high score in grammar tends to be good in writing. This implies that the students' mastery is one important factor which influences students writing. It also can be stated that grammar mastery gives contribution to writing ability.

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