Understanding Parts of Speech by EFL Students to Ease Them in Constructing an English Sentence

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Abstract

Grammar is one important English component that need to be mastered starting from identifying and understanding parts of speech. Parts of speech are English basic component in which words are recognized and classified based on their lexical functions. They consist of eight major parts of speech, such as nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions and interjections. Each part of speech has certain role in composing a sentence. In other words, it is important to be understood by EFL students in order to help them to construct a correct sentence. By considering the importance of understanding parts of speech, this study was done to find out how the students' understanding of parts of speech ease them to compose a sentence. It was a qualitative study. There were 31 students who took Basic grammar class as the participants of this study. The data were collected by English test and open-ended questionnaire. The data were analysed narratively to describe how the students' understanding of parts of speech can ease them to construct a sentence. Nouns, pronouns, and prepositions were three parts of speech that most of the students still classified them incorrectly. It also was found that the three parts of speech were often used inappropriately in the sentences. Based on the results of the research, it can be stated that the students' understanding of parts of speech could facilitate the students to compose a sentence.

INTRODUCTION

In last couple of years, teaching grammar has been a discursive issue in which expert such as Krashen (1981) believes that the focus must be on the input rather than on explicit grammar. The discrepancy on this view leads to two approaches of teaching grammar; implicit or explicit instruction (Ellis, 2009). Despite the difference on how grammar should be taught, it should be acknowledged that grammar has an essential role on the students' English competence as it serves as the foundation for every English skill.

One of the topics in English Grammar is part of speech. Part of speech is a term used in traditional grammar for word classifications based on their functions (Nordquist, 2020). Moreover, British Council (2022) states that parts of speech depict the categories which every word is specified based on what grammatical or lexical function the word has. In addition, the word classes such as nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions, determiners and interjections are included as part of speech (Finegan, 2008 & Nordquist, 2020). In contrast, Waghmare (2022) acknowledge only eight in which determiner is excluded.

Each word class has its own form and function, and knowledge of lexical category entails a grammatically correct sentence construction (Finegan, 2008). Due to the fact that knowledge of part of speech is deemed necessary, several studies have been done previously to explore this topic in using various research approaches. Khosravizadeh and Pashmforoosh (2012) did an investigation the possible facilitative approaches to learn parts of speech and how to interpret them as functional categories. 38 participants got a treatment by giving them a text, word form chart and pattern practice exercises. Additionally, Abrar and Thamrin (2020) undertook Classroom Action Research to improve students' ability in recognizing parts of speech. Grammar Translation Method was used in teaching part of speech. After doing it for two cycles, the students' ability in recognizing the parts of speech improved.

Moreover, in the area of writing, some studies have been carried out to find out students' ability of using part of speech. Fakhruddin (2019) conducted a study which aimed to figure out students' understanding of part of speech in writing. In this study, three-word classes were tested, which were nouns, pronouns and verbs. The result shows that the students' understanding of parts of speech in writing English is fair. Another study was done by Mardhatillah (2020). She analyzed the students' writing ability toward parts of speech that were used in writing a descriptive text. Nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs were investigated in this research. The results display that the use of adverbs was the most difficult parts of speech in which no student used it correctly in their writing.

A qualitative study investigating the part of speech in TED-Talk video was undertaken by Ulfah and Hidayat (2020). Some highlighted points were revealed. First, the modal verb used by the speakers during the talk made them closer emotionally to the audience. Furthermore, the use of personal pronouns could take up the gap between the speaker and the listeners which also assisted the speaker focus on the topic and relate the words into the true condition. The results of this study indicate that the word selections are able to provide greater impacts on the audience.

Additionally, students' difficulty in understanding and using appropriate part of speech has been explored by Lestari (2020). The objective of this study was to analyze Thai students' understanding of parts of speech. Besides, the possible factors that caused the students' difficulty were also examined. From the finding, it was found that preposition was the hardest one to master. Some factors were found to be contributed to students' difficulty. The factors were lack of vocabulary and the use of several languages simultaneously.

Based on the elaboration of the previous studies, having knowledge on lexical category and ability to use it correctly are necessary to build English competence. Hence, it is really important to be concerned especially for English department

students due to the fact that prior studies seemed not to discuss it in details. As a matter of fact, figuring out the students' ability in understanding part of speech, particularly English Department students, certainly facilitates the students to learn every skill as it is a base for all language skills and other content courses learning. Therefore, this research focused on students' understanding of parts of speech to facilitate them in constructing a grammatically correct sentence.

RESEARCH METHOD

This qualitative research aimed to examine English Department students' understanding of part of speech. 31 English department students enrolled in English Language Education who were taking Basic Grammar class were the subject of this research. The participants have been informed beforehand and agreed to take part. Moreover, the instruments used in this research were the specific English test about the use of parts of speech and open-ended questionnaire which has been validated by the experts and considered reliable. The test was used to investigate closely on how students' understanding of parts of speech could ease them in constructing a sentence. There were 8 parts of speech investigated- noun, pronoun, verb, adjective, adverb, preposition, conjunction and interjection. The test consisted of two parts; determining the part of speech of the italic word in the sentence and arranging jumbled words into a grammatically correct good sentence. The second instrument, the open-ended questionnaire, aimed to find out students' understanding on the concept and difficulty in understanding part of speech. This questionnaire was distributed online.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Finding (tentative)

Finding 1. Categorizing words into the correct part of speech

From the data analysis of 31 students, the result of the students' understanding in categorizing words into the correct parts of speech can be seen in the chart as follows:
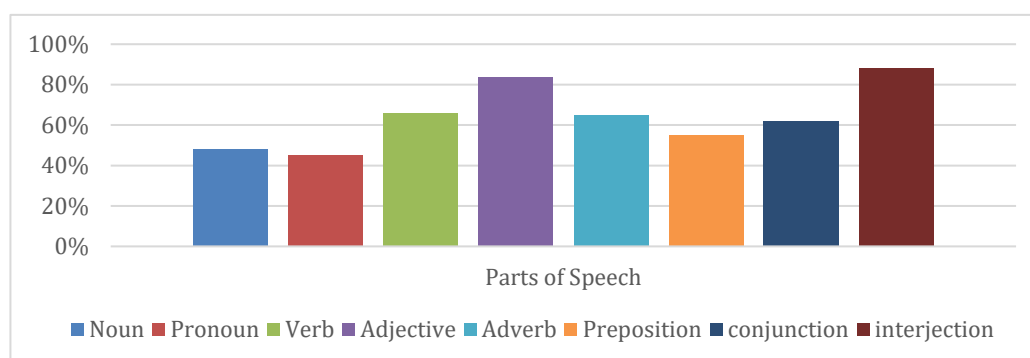
Graph 1. Students' understanding in categorizing words into correct parts of speech

Based on the graph above, the students' understanding in classifying words into the correct parts of speech can be described. In identifying nouns, there were only 48% of words that could be classified as nouns by the students correctly. It took the

second position of the eight parts categorized incorrectly most. It was assumed that the students still do not really know all types of nouns yet.

The second part of speech classified was pronouns. The percentage of categorizing pronouns was slightly different from nouns. There were merely 45% of pronouns could be identified accurately. Pronouns were a part of speech that the students mostly categorized them inappropriately. It might happen because the students are still not familiar with all kinds of pronouns.

The next part of speech categorized was verbs. There were more than half of the students could classify words functioned as verbs. There were 66% of verbs identified accurately. The students' understanding in classifying verbs better than their understanding of nouns and pronouns. It was presumed that the students have been familiar with types of verbs.

Adjective was the fourth part of speech investigated. Based on the chart, it was assumed that adjectives were a part of speech easily identified by the students. There were 84% of adjectives that the students could classify appropriately. It means that most of the students have already been able to categorize words functioned as adjectives.

The fifth part of speech was adverbs. From the chart, there were 65% of adverbs that could be categorized accurately by the students. This finding resembled with the finding of the students' understanding in classifying correct verbs. Although, it was regarded that the students might have been good enough in identifying any adverbs, there were some students that still had difficulties to categorize them.

Prepositions were the sixth part of speech. The chart illustrates that there were 55% of prepositions identified correctly by the students. It means that there were only half of the students that could classify the prepositions appropriately. From the results, some students still found difficulties in categorizing the prepositions correctly. It might happen because there were still words as prepositions that the students were not close to them.

The seventh part of speech was conjunctions. In classifying conjunctions, there were 62% of conjunctions that could be categorized by the students accurately. It was more than half of the students that have already understood this part of speech. Yet, the rest of the students still got troubles with identifying conjunctions.

The last part of speech investigated was interjection. The result reveals that 88% of interjections classified correctly by the students. It was the most part of speech that the students could identify accurately. There were only a few students who still got troubles with this part of speech. Thus, it was presumed that the students have been familiar with the words included as interjections.

Based the results, it can be concluded that nouns, pronouns, and prepositions were three types of parts of speech that still considered as problems for many of the students.

Finding 2. Constructing a sentence by arranging provided words

In the second part of the test, there were fifteen test items of jumble words provided in the test that the students had to compose into correct sentences. The results can be seen as follows.

Table 1. The number of the students in constructing good sentences by arranging the provided words.

	The number of the students can arrange words into the good sentences		
The number of the good sentences	1 up to 5	6 up to 10	11 up to 15
	10 students	17 students	4 students

From the table, it can be revealed that there were ten students who could arrange the provided words into one to five correct sentences. Moreover, seventeen students got six to ten correct sentences that they could compose. Meanwhile, only four students who could arrange more than ten correct sentences in which they could compose eleven to fifteen good sentences.

To see how the students' understanding of parts of speech could ease them in constructing a sentence are explained as follows:

1. *P4* arranged the provided words in the test item number 1(studies-and-Biology-Tom-on-Maths-Wednesdays). The arrangement was as follows
   Tom and Maths studies biology on Wednesday.
   From the sentence arrangement, it was assumed that the student still did not know types of nouns and understand about subject and verb agreement. It might be he or she still did not know exactly that the noun used as the subject in the sentence was singular and the verb form used was also for singular subject. Hence, the true arrangement of the sentence was *Tom studies Biology and Maths on Wednesday.*

2. *P8* composed the offered words in the test item no.6 (always-puts-in-soup-her- salt-Susan-a little)… The arrangement of the sentence was as follows:
   Susan always puts salt in soup her a little
   From the arrangement of the sentence, it was assumed that the student did not know yet where the pronoun, *her*, was supposed to be placed. The pronoun should be followed by a noun. As a result, it influenced him/her in composing the sentence from the given words in the test item. Hence, the best sentence composition was *Susan always puts a little salt in her soup.*

3. *P13* arranged the available words in the test item no.6 (didn't- last-fish-any-catch-George-night). The sentence composition was as follows
   George didn't any last fish catch night
   From the sentence arrangement, it was assumed that the student did not know which word functioned as a verb. Consequently, it was placed in the wrong position in the sentence. The correct composition was *George didn't any last fish catch night*

4. *P12* made up the provided words in the test item no.2 (in-has-glorious-Mr.Lewis-company-very-a-the-city). The sentence arrangement was as follows

   Mr.Lewis has a company very glorious in the city.

   From the composition of the sentence, the word *glorious* was stored in the wrong position. The word functioned adjective in the sentence. It had to explain the noun, *company*, in the sentence. Therefore, the good composition of the sentence was *Mr.Lewis has a very glorious company in the city*

5. *P1* arranged the provided words in the test item no. 4 (zestily-is-protester-up-the-speaking-building-ambasador's-the-in front of). The arrangement of the words was

   Zestily is protester speaking in front of ambasador's building up.

   The sentence arrangement was incorrect. One of the problems was the P1 put the word zestily as a subject in the sentence. In fact, it is categorized as an adverb in the parts of speech. Meanwhile, a subject of a sentence has to be a noun or pronoun. Therefore, the correct sentence was *The protester is speaking up zestily in front of the ambasador's building*. The function of the adverb *zestily* was to explain the verb speaking up, so it was commonly put after the verb explained.

6. *P9* made up the given words in the test item number 4 (zestily-is-protester-up-the-speaking-building-ambasador's-the-in front of). The arrangement of the words was as follows

   Zestily is speaking the ambasador's protestes up the building in front of.

   From the sentence arrangement, it was assumed that the student did not really understand about the preposition yet. Even, the participant might not be familiar with the preposition yet. It can be seen from his or her sentence arrangement in which the preposition was put at the end of the sentence. Therefore, it was regarded that the student even did not know the functions of it. It influenced him or her to compose a sentence from the words. The correct sentence arrangement was *The protester is speaking up zestily in front of the ambasador's building.* The preposition *in front of* have to be put before a noun phrase, *the ambasador's building*, since the function of it was to describe the position of the protester.

7. *P9* composed the provided words in the test item number 14 (running-although-they-it-hot-went-very-was). The student arranged them as follows

   They it hot went running althoungh very was

   From the sentence arrangement, it was assumed that the student did not really understand yet about the use and function of pronoun, verb, adjective, adverb and conjunction as a single word and in a sentence. In the arrangement, the student put two pronouns to start arranging the words into a sentence. It can be clearly seen that the student did not know which pronoun that should be as the subject. Then, the word *hot* was put directly after the pronouns. It was presumed that the student did not know the use

and function of adjective as a part of speech. After the word *hot*, the word *went* was placed. It was a verb. Yet, it was placed incorrectly. The word *although* was also used in the wrong position in the sentence. It was a conjunction that functioned to connect two clauses, yet it was put in the false place in the sentence. The next part of speech that was used wrongly in the sentence was the word *very*. It was one of words included as adverb. It should be used before adjective or other adverbs. In fact, the student put the word *very* after the conjunction *although* and before the verb *was*. From the arrangement of the sentence, it can be concluded that the student did not really understand the parts of speech yet and it influenced the student in constructing a sentence. The correct sentence arrangement was *Although, it was very hot they went running.*

From the explanation, it can be seen clearly how understanding parts of speech can ease the students in composing a sentence.

Finding 3. Students' Understanding of parts of speech from the open-ended questionnaire

Table 2. Students' responses in the open-ended questionnaire

NO	QUESTIONS	RESPONSES
1	What have you understood about parts of speech? Explain it.	1. P3 explained that *those are words for making a sentence and they have different functions.* 2. P6 explained that *Eight parts of speech in the English language: noun, pronoun, verb, adjective, adverb, preposition, conjunction, and interjection.* 3. P9 stated that *Pronoun* 4. P16 explained that *This is a past tense. Because we can understand verb 2 from understand verb 1* 5. P26 answered that *I have understood about conjunction and preposition because it is the easiest material*
2	Do you still have problem to use parts of speech? What problem do you face about it? Explain it.	1. P4 stated that *the difficulties are to determine when certain part of speech is used correctly in a part of sentence and classify provided words into correct part of speech.* 2. P12 stated that *Yes I do, I am still confused to use parts of speech because it's so many kinds.* 3. P15 answered that *Yes, I often forget about conjunctions and prepositions because they look similar in a sentence, so it's very difficult for me to distinguish between the two when I am asked to find which is the preposition, likewise, there are so many types of pronouns that it is difficult to remember.* 4. P18 explained that *Yes, I do. I have some problems to distinguish between conjunction and preposition, sometimes it can be so confusing for me*

		5. P19 answered that *yes, I'm still often wrong in determining the type of part of speech*
3	What certain parts of speech do you feel confused?	1. P10 stated that *types of pronoun, adverb, etc., because there are too many* 2. P21 answered that *I am confused about the function of the part of speech.* 3. P23 explained that *determine which words or sentences are classified as adverbs and adjectives* 4. P25 stated that *there are many parts of speech so that they are difficult to be memorized.* 5. P27 responded that *Adverb and pronoun*
4.	What make you still feel confused of using parts of speech in your opinion?	1. P1 answered that *due to many types of words in a part of speech, I still feel confused to classify a word into correct part of speech.* 2. P5 explained that *I am still confused because I do not really understand the use and function of each part of speech in a sentence, so it makes me still confused to store a word in correct part of sentence whether it is as a subject, verb, object or adverb, etc.* 3. P22 explained that *because I seldom practice them* 4. P26 said that *I am confused about the use and function of parts of speech.* 5. P29 said that *I still do not really understand yet about the use of verbs and adjectives in a sentence and it makes me confused to store them in a sentence.*

The findings were strengthened by giving open ended questionnaire to the students. There were several questions given to the students. From the students' answers, it can be concluded that some of them have known word classes are there in parts of speech. Whereas, some of them only know a few parts even one part of speech. Although, their answers were not really detail, it was assumed that they have recognized the term of each part of speech. Yet, they were still confused about the use and function of each part of speech as a word and in a sentence. Hence, they still faced difficulties to construct a sentence. It can be stated that the students' understanding of parts of speech gave them a help to compose a sentence.

Discussion

Studies about English parts of speech toward EFL students are one of necessary studies that need to be considered and done by English teachers and lecturers. Some previous researches have been done by considering the importance and role of parts of speech for English competence. In line with Khosravizadeh and Pashmforoosh's research (2012), they explored the possible facilitative approaches to study and how to interpret parts of speech as functional categories in which an interactive model should be employed to mark parts of speech.

Since parts of speech have important role in learning English, this research tried to find out how the students' understanding of parts of speech helps them in

constructing an English sentence. From the findings, the students' understanding each part of speech can be seen clearly. The students still could not categorize a word included as a noun or a pronoun correctly. In accordance with the result of Lestari's research (2020), the students still got difficulties to determine nouns and pronouns. It might occur because they do not master all types of nouns and pronouns yet. Therefore, it would be difficult for the students to store noun or pronoun as a subject or object or complement in a sentence.

Whereas, verb is a part of speech that is not really challenging to be classified by the students. Although, some students still categorized it incorrectly, the findings were not significant. It was supported by the findings of Lestari's study (2020) that there were few students got difficulties in classifying verbs. It might happen because the students have been familiar with almost all types of verbs in English. It also could be caused by the provided words the students need to be classified from the test are common verbs for them.

The students' understanding of adjectives was not really a problem, because many of the investigated students have known which words were categorised as adjectives. Meanwhile, the adverb is the part of speech that the students still faced the difficulties to characterise and use accurately. It might occur because there are many types and various functions of the adverbs in a sentence that the students need to understand. The similar results with the understanding of adverbs also can be seen from the students' understanding of prepositions and conjunctions. It might also happen because of the different types of prepositions and conjunctions. It is in line with Lestari's research findings (2020). It differs from the understanding of interjections in which most of the students could classify them correctly. It can be caused by the familiar interjections that were given in the test.

Based on the research findings, it can be obviously stated that the students' understanding of part of speech influence and facilitate them to use the certain word class into a sentence accurately. In accordance with Kramer's explanation (2021) in which the role of a word that is used in a sentence refers to parts of speech. It is agreed by Finegan (2008) every word class has its own form and function, and knowledge of lexical category entails a grammatically correct sentence construction. Therefore, the students' understanding of parts of speech really eases them in constructing a sentence.

CONCLUSION

Considering how far the students' understanding on parts of speech is very essential especially for English department students. Their understanding of parts of speech can facilitate them to construct a sentence. Due to the basic use and function of parts of speech, it is important to be investigated. After collecting the data by using two instruments, English test and open-ended questionnaire, it can be concluded that the students' understanding on parts of speech really influences and assists them in composing a sentence. The research findings will be beneficial especially for English department students and lecturers. The findings can inform and remind the students the essential role of parts of speech for their English competence. The result of the research also helpful for English lecturers to find the appropriate approaches, strategies and media to teach parts of speech at their classes. It is a good idea for further

researchers to investigate the crucial problems that still become obstacles for the students in understanding parts of speech.

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