

STUDENTS' INABILITY TO IDENTIFY SENTENCE TYPES AND SENTENTIAL COMPONENTS: What Should We Do with It?

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Abstract

The students of English Department of FKIP Universitas Bung Hatta need to have sufficient grammatical and communicative competence in the English language. It is sure that the ideal expectation should be collectively supported with any resources and programs. Based on a small preliminary research conducted at the English Department in *Grammar IV* class, it was found that many students were not able to identify sentence types and sentential components when they were asked to do such grammatical tasks. There were many 'unexpected' answers given by the students when they were asked to identify sentence types and sentential components. The condition academically reflects the unsuccessful instructions at the English Department. This paper discusses the students' inability issues based on two principle questions, namely: (i) *why are the students unable to identify sentence types and sentential components grammatically?*; and (ii) *what should be academically done to improve their ability to identify sentence types and sentential components as an effective way to shape better model for grammar instruction?* The data presented in this paper are those collected based on a small preliminary research at the English Department of FKIP Universitas Bung Hatta in 2014. The population was the third year students of the department which comprised 104 students. The sample was selected by using cluster random sampling technique and it consisted of 35 students. The analysis and discussion are based on theories on fundamental English grammar and basic principles of learning a foreign language grammar.

Key words/phrases: grammar, sentence types, sentential components, instruction, EFL.

A. Introduction

It is believed that the learning outcomes of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) are the result of the interactions between the academic instructional processes, the human resources of the instructional programs, student factors, and the institutional facilities. In addition, some teaching methodologists also use the term teaching context to refer to the environment set by the teacher and the institution through the course structure, curriculum content, methods of teaching and assessment. The student factors, on another side, may include prior knowledge, ways of learning, motivation, expectation, etc. Both student and teaching presage factors interact in particular and complex ways to produce an approach to learning (Biggs, 1989; and see also Refnita, 2013a, b). Therefore, the learning outcomes are ideally resulted from instructional programs and practical execution in the field.

It has not been questioned anymore that there are many components needed in any instructional programs, especially in a second and/or foreign language instruction. Among the components is building students' linguistic competence particularly on the basic grammatical rules and sentential components of a learnt language. It is primary for the English Department students of FKIP Universitas Bung Hatta because they are academically prepared and trained to be the teachers of EFL at high schools.

The ideal learning outcomes of grammar instruction are not so easy to obtain. Based on the observation executed as the preliminary part of classroom research conducted in 2014 and writer's experience as a lecturer of *English Grammar* and *Writing* subjects at the English Department of FKIP Universitas Bung Hatta, it had been found that there were a lot of grammatical problems faced and made by the learners in doing grammar tasks, even in final-term test. In particular, they were not able to identify sentence types and sentential components when they were asked to do so. Whereas, they should not have had such elementary mistakes as they had taken *Grammar IV* subject as the continuation of *Grammar I*, *Grammar II*, and *Grammar III*. It is assumed that the students did not have sufficient competence on elementary grammar of EFL.

It seems that the students failed to master the basic grammatical features and sentential components of English that they had already learned previously in *Grammar I*, *Grammar II*, and *Grammar III* subjects. They could not integrate the learning materials of the successive grammatical subjects. As the candidates of EFL teachers, however, they should have had sufficient grammatical competence and knowledge of English

grammar in order to support their language skills. They should understand as well that English, in Indonesia, is taught as a foreign language (FL) in which it has academic and socio-grammatical specifications. English is academically and practically taught for multilingual learners. The unique socio-grammatical conditions certainly need serious-academic attention in order to have better learning outcomes.

Although the grammatical mistakes made by the students in oral communication are sometimes permissible, they are not relatively allowed in written one; grammatical mistakes and problems should be avoided in written language. In fact, Students' inability to identify sentence types and sentential components when they are taking final-term test of *Grammar IV* subject is surely not expected anymore. In other side, the facts tell differently; many students of English Department of FKIP Universitas Bung Hatta, Padang got difficulties to successfully identify the sentence types and sentential components when they were taking final-term test of *Grammar IV* subject.

This paper, which was developed based on a part of research results conducted in 2014/2015 academic year at the English Department of FKIP Universitas Bung Hatta, Padang, discusses: (i) *why are the students unable to identify sentences types and sentential components grammatically?*; and (ii) *what should be academically done to improve their ability to identify sentences types and sentential components as an effective way to shape better models for grammar instruction?* The data are students' grammatical problems/mistakes found in their answers of final-term test of *Grammar IV* subject. The data were collected at the time when the final-term test of *Grammar IV* subject took place at the English Department of FKIP Universitas Bung Hatta in 2014. The data analysis presented in this paper is still preliminary stage in order to know the general problems faced by students in learning English grammar.

B. Brief Review of Related Theories

1. Grammatical Theories and Language Teaching

Linguistically, human language consists of four main layers: form, meaning, function, and value. The four layers interact in natural-systematic ways and used by human beings as a main instrument of verbal communication. Human beings acquire and learn the four layers in their first, second, or foreign language(s). Theoretically, it is believed that languages are learnable and teachable due to the fact that they are systematic and regulated. The regulations and rules governing the language forms are simply referred to as grammar (see Lyons, 1987; Stern, 1994). Grammar, in simple way, can be said as the abstract rules governing the forms and meaning of language so that it can be communicatively used. Thus, it is on a right point to say that grammar in any type should be taught and learnt in order to have linguistic competence as a primary foundation for communicative skills.

According to Lyons (1987: 133), the term grammar originally goes back to a Greek word which may be translated as "the art of writing". But quite early in the history of Greek scholarship, this word went to a much wider sense and come to embrace the whole study of a language. In recent development of linguistic theories, grammar is particularly referred to morphological and syntactical levels of language. Stern (1994) argues that linguistic theories and grammatical concepts and descriptions have been giving significant contributions to the theories and practices of language teaching. It is not questioned anymore that teaching directly implies learning with a further implication that language teaching should be treated as the activities which are consciously intended to bring about language learning.

By means of some reasons, grammatical theories and descriptions should be accommodated in order to have successful language teaching and learning. In this sense, Stern (1994: 166) furthermore states that the idea that language teaching theory implies the theory of language and that of linguistics had a direct contribution to language pedagogy become more and more accepted. Based on Spolski's, Stern (1994) adds that the relations between linguistics and language teaching as dual: 'applications and implications'. The descriptions of language made by linguists can be 'applied' in the sense that they provide the data needed for writing about teaching grammars, course books, and dictionaries. The need for grammar teaching in any form and level of language teaching and learning is not only for the first language (L1) and the second language (L2) but of course for foreign language (FL). According to Brown (2001: 65), one thing that must be concerned with is the language itself and how learners deal with complex linguistic systems. The linguistic systems, described by linguists as grammar, are those making humans' languages possible to learn and to teach. Therefore, the grammatical rules and other related matters should be brought into any language learning programs.

The teaching-learning of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Indonesia at university level belongs to the teaching-learning of EFL for adults. Learners of English at university are ideally not beginners anymore because they have been learning the foreign language for at least six years at high schools. Related to the age of learners in foreign language learning, the experts in language teaching have different opinions about the critical and better ages for FL learning. Stern (1994: 366-367) says that language learning may occur at different maturity levels from the early years into adult life. No age or stage stands out as optional or

critical for all aspects of an L2 or an FL learning. For decisions on the best age for language learning a strictly developmental balance sheet, based on psychological studies, cannot be the only consideration. A language can be taught (and learnt) from any age upwards. Thus, it may be argued that the grammar learning, as reducing form linguistic description, is highly essential for EFL learning in Indonesia.

In accordance with the need for linguistic theories and grammar learning, Brown (2001: 90-91) says that adults have superior cognitive abilities that can render them more successfully in certain classroom endeavors. Their needs for sensory inputs can rely a little more on their imaginations. Their level of shyness can be equal to or greater than that of children, but they usually have acquired a self-confidence not found in children. The followings are some points related to the teaching-learning of an L2 and/or an FL for adults.

- (i) Adults are more able to handle abstract rules and concepts;
- (ii) Adults have longer attention spans for material that may not be intrinsically interesting to them;
- (iii) Sensory input needs not always be quite varied with adults, but one of the secrets of lively adults classes is their appeal to multiple senses;
- (iv) Adults often bring a modicum of general self-confidence (global self-esteem) into a classroom; and
- (v) Adults, with their more developed abstract thinking ability, are better able to understand context-reduced segment of language.

Based on the description above, adult or advanced learners, particularly at university level, need to theoretically and academically study grammar in details. The studies and better understanding on linguistic theories and grammatical systems are really needed to build a better foundation of linguistic competence. Learners of English at advanced level have to know the nature of English grammar to support the communicative skills in the FL. Tense and aspect as a part of main grammatical features of English, for instance, should be introduced and taught to university students descriptively and pedagogically. Among the others, introducing and understanding sentence types and sentential components are the basic grammatical theories that should be involved in grammar learning. The theoretical and practical matters of tense, sentence types, sentential components should be comprehended by advanced learners, particularly by those as the candidates of teachers of EFL.

2. Grammar in EFL Learning: How necessary is it for Indonesian?

Linguistically, the nature of grammar in human language is concerned with the rules and systems on the level of sounds, words or lexicons, clauses and sentences, and meaning (see Lyons, 1990; Song, 2001). The nature is tied to a variety of features either universal or unique. If English grammar and the grammar of *bahasa Indonesia* are compared, for example, some differences as well as similarities are easily found. One of important differences is that English is a *tensed language*, while *bahasa Indonesia* and the majority of Malay languages are *tenseless language* (see Lyons, 1987; Jufrizal, 2010; Refnita, 2013a, b). Another difference can be seen on aspect, modality, and phrase structure. In English, aspect and modality are expressed in predicate; while in *bahasa Indonesia* they are simply expressed by means of lexical items. In addition, English phrase structure is arranged by having the modifier precede the modified items, while in *bahasa Indonesia* the modified item precedes the modifier (see further Lyons, 1990; Saeed, 1997; Jufrizal, 2010). Such grammatical differences may be parts of important reasons to say that learning EFL grammar is necessary for Indonesian learners.

In addition, linguistic description on sentential constructions concerning with the sentence types and sentential components should be academically mastered by EFL learners in Indonesia in order that they are able to construct and create grammatical sentences when they are speaking or writing. Then, it is also helpful to understand written text when they are reading. For the candidates of EFL teachers, the ability to identify sentence types and sentential components is necessary because they are going to introduce them to the learners. It is not good news, as a matter of fact, if the university students prepared and trained for EFL teachers do not have sufficient grammatical competency to identify the sentence types and sentential components correctly.

Furthermore, Williams in Bygate et.al. (eds.) (1994:109-110) practically explains that there is a considerable difference between teaching grammar to non-native speakers and that to native speakers. Native speakers are already competent in their language varieties. They know the forms and the meanings of language; there is a form-function fusion for them. In teaching grammar to a native speaker of English, then, this communicative rule would not have to be taught – unless one wished to ensure awareness of it. The position of non-native speakers, however, is different. They would have to be taught the meaning associated with the structures. If learners are not taught or given the opportunity to learn, they will never know because the relationship between syntactic form and meaning is as arbitrary as that between lexis and meaning. Knowledge about the difference between *She didn't go* and *She doesn't go* needs to be possessed by non-native speakers because it is an important rule in communicative grammar. The possession of such knowledge helps people 'to say what they mean'.

Another important idea on the significance of teaching grammar in any language learning program, including the EFL learning in Indonesia, is strongly claimed by Tonkyn (in Bygate et al. (eds.), 1994:6). According to him, it is widely believed that a formal grammar instruction can help to prevent the premature fossilization which an excessive emphasis on the performance of communicative tasks may bring. Besides, it can assist learners, especially adults, to learn more rapidly and efficiently. It may happen because adults can better understand abstract rules and draw logical conclusion for communicative purpose.

Grammar instructions becomes more necessary for the students of the English teacher training and education because it is almost impossible for them to have better English language skills if they do not have the grammatical competence and language awareness. The communicative competence in the four language skills are normally supported by good grammatical competence. Well-planned grammatical instructions will give academic effects to better language awareness and ability in the four language skills. Although grammar may have direct and close contribution to writing skill, but it is practically helpful for other language skills (see Uso-Juan et al in Uso-Juan and Martinez-Flor (eds.), 2006:391; Frodesen in Celce-Murcia (ed.), 2001:233 – 239).

As additional idea, Leech (in Bygate et al. (eds.), 1994:18) states that knowledge of language, especially grammar, needs to be possessed by a language teacher. Accordingly, a 'model' teacher of languages ideally should: (i) be capable of putting across a sense of how grammar interacts with the lexicon as a communicative-cultural system (both 'communicativeness' and 'system' will need independent attention); (ii) be able to analyze the grammatical problems the learners encounter; (iii) have the ability and confidence to evaluate the use of grammar, especially by learners, against criteria of accuracy, appropriateness and expressiveness; (iv) be aware of the contrastive relations between native language and foreign language; (v) understand and implement the processes of simplification by which overt knowledge of grammar can be best presented to learners at different stages of learning.

3. Pedagogical Grammar in EFL Learning

The term pedagogical grammar is commonly used in language learning as the addition to descriptive and prescriptive grammar. The three terms are theoretically derived from linguistic studies and analyses, particularly in the senses of grammatical description. As stated by Lyons (1987:42 – 43), descriptive linguistics studies and describes the language phenomena as what they are. Through descriptive grammar, linguists try to describe the grammatical systems of human languages and to develop general linguistic theories. In contrast, prescriptive linguistics explains the language phenomena as what they should be; it is a kind of normative grammar. Prescriptive linguistics discusses the "purity" or "correctness"; it is about "right" and "wrong" in language uses. Following the ideas, the terms descriptive grammar and prescriptive grammar are well-known among grammarians and linguists. In particular cases, these terms are also used in language teaching and language planning theories.

Furthermore, Lyons (1987: 43 – 44) argues that the linguists' first task is to describe the way people actually speak and write their language, not to prescribe how they ought to speak and write. The idea claims that linguistics is descriptive, not prescriptive (or normative). However, it does not mean that linguists have to say 'no place' for prescriptive studies on language. In some positions, the ideas of prescriptive grammar are academically needed. In particular, there are of course obvious administrative and educational advantages in having a natively unified literary standard. It may be strongly stated that the descriptive grammar as one form of descriptive linguistic works contributes to theories and frameworks in linguistics, meanwhile the prescriptive grammar may be useful in literary uses of language such as language in school, standardization, administrative language, or language planning.

The pedagogical grammar, in addition, is another type of grammar which is academically needed in language learning. For the academic purposes in practice, there are, at least, three types of grammar necessarily introduced. They are (i) academic grammar for university students, (ii) teachers' grammar, and (iii) grammar for learners. The academic grammar for university students should be theoretical and descriptive. It seems that the academic grammar is the grammar for advanced learners. The grammar for learners, in other side, is intended to be practical, selective, sequenced, and task-oriented. The learner grammar is written and composed based on learners' levels and academic needs. Then, the teachers' grammar may be in the matter of academic and learners' grammar (Leech in Bygate et al. (eds.), 1994:17). Leech adds that the types and levels of grammar for academic purposes at schools should be practically and academically selected.

In related ideas, Chalker in Bygate et al. (eds.), 1994) introduces one more type of grammar called pedagogical grammar. The idea of pedagogical grammar introduced by Chalker can be said as the accommodation of the ideas of academic and learners' grammar by making pedagogical modifications in order to achieve specific and practical goals in learning a language. The main aim of learning grammar in pedagogical sense is to enable learners to be skillful in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The term

grammar in this case does not refer to theoretical and complex phenomena as linguistics tells; it simply refers to rules. In addition, Odlin in Odlin (ed.) (1994:1, 11) says that the term pedagogical grammar usually denote: the types of grammatical analysis and instruction designed for the needs of second (and foreign) language students. It is a practically oriented hybrid drawing on work in several fields. The ideal form of pedagogical grammar is not static; it may be develop and designed based on dynamic aims and description of language uses.

Pedagogical grammar, according to Chalker (in Bygate et.al (eds.), 1994: 32-33), is grammar for pedagogues. Based on Greenbaum's, she describes that pedagogical grammars (that is, grammar books) teach the language and not about the language. They are inherently prescriptive, since their purpose is to tell students what to say or write. A pedagogical grammar is a course book, intended for self-help and offering comprehensive coverage. Such kind of books has five desirable characteristics, namely:

- (i) it must be constrained by the length of class lessons;
- (ii) it should be determined on psycholinguistic grounds (i.e. in accordance with the best methods for learning a foreign language);
- (iii) grammar topics and material should be graded;
- (iv) learners should be helped by having their attention drawn to general rules; and
- (v) it should be provided for practical applications (possibly with exercises in a separate book).

It may be argued that pedagogical grammar is not merely as grammar for learners, but as a specific type of course book. Pedagogical grammars are the books specifically designed for teaching a foreign language, or for developing an awareness of the mother tongue. Therefore, the pedagogical grammar is appropriately designed and used in EFL learning at high-school levels (beginners) or in the first year of learning English grammar at university (intermediate level) in multilingual societies as in Indonesia.

D. Data Analysis and Discussion

The data presented and discussed in this paper were derived from a part of students' answers of final-term test of *Grammar IV* subject (Part C of the whole test). In the Part C, the students were asked to identify: (i) the type of sentence (whether the sentence is incomplete, simple, compound, or complex one); and (ii) sentential components (to determine subject and verb (predicate) of the sentence). There were 20 (twenty) sentences that had to be identified by the students concerning with sentence types and sentential components; (5 items for incomplete sentence, 5 for simple sentence, 5 for compound sentence, and 5 for complex sentence). Concerning with the students' ability to identify sentence type, whether a sentence is incomplete (just in form of dependent clause), simple, compound, or complex sentence, it can be described as the followings.

Ten out of 35 students failed to identify whether a group of words is a dependent clause or a simple sentence. 7 out of 35 could not identify simple sentences correctly; 7 out of 35 students were not able to identify compound sentences correctly; and 14 out of 35 students were in serious problems to identify complex sentences (see Table 1). The data showed that the students found it difficult to the types of sentences.

Table 1: Students' Inability to Identify Sentence Types

	Incomplete Sentence					Simple Sentence					Compound Sentence					Complex Sentence								
	Number of Mistakes					Number of Mistakes					Number of Mistakes					Number of Mistakes								
	0	1	2	3	4	5	0	1	2	3	4	5	0	1	2	3	4	5	0	1	2	3	4	5
Total Student	1	4	2	4	3	3	1	9	0	4	3	0	2	4	3	0	4	3	1	6	3	6	2	6
s	9						9						1						2					

Based on the detailed information of students' inability to identify the sentence type depicted in the Table 1, it is academically reasonable to say that some students of English Department of FKIP Universitas Bung Hatta who were taking *Grammar IV* subject were not able to identify sentence types in English. This inability reflects that the students were lack of basic grammatical competence.

In addition to students' inability to identify sentence types, the students also found difficulties to determine sentential components correctly. Based on the data collected, most students were not able to identify and/or to determine the sentential components (subject and verb/predicate of a sentence). This fact was "worse" than the previous one; there were more grammatical faults made by the students. Again, it may be reasonable to assume that they were in serious problems in understanding basic English grammatical features. Details of information of the students' inability are summarized in the Table 2.

Table 2: Students' Inability to Identify Sentential Components

Incomplete	Simple Sentence	Compound Sentence	Complex Sentence
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	Sentence					Number of Mistakes					Number of Mistakes					Number of Mistakes								
	Number of Mistakes					Number of Mistakes					Number of Mistakes					Number of Mistakes								
	0	1	2	3	4	5	0	1	2	3	4	5	0	1	2	3	4	5	0	1	2	3	4	5
Total Student	1	3	1	4	4	1	3	6	5	8	6	7	6	7	5	4	3	1	1	3	3	6	4	1
3	3					0												0						8

Why are the students unable to identify the sentence types and sentential components grammatically and correctly? To answer this question, direct-incident interview with 5 students randomly selected outside the formal class was done. Based on the interview and writer's experience as a Grammar teacher at the English Department of FKIP Universitas Bung Hatta, at least, there are five causes of students' inability to identify sentence types and sentential components. Firstly, most students had low reading comprehension skill. They did not have high motivation to read and to review their learning materials after formal classes. The condition lead them to have limited information and knowledge on English grammar. The second factor is that most students did not actively initiate to have independent learning or learning in groups. They forgot the concept of credit hours system in which they had to have independent learning in appropriate ways; there were no group discussion, no individual learning, and no time to review the lesson. Thirdly, some students had bad learning habit whenever they had to do assignments; they liked to cheat each other and do the exercise without any purpose of learning. Fourthly, most students failed to apply (or to transfer) their knowledge to the new cases given. They might understand the concepts of grammar with the examples given when learning but they had difficulties to apply them to new cases and further examples; this is the problem of having creative thinking and generalizing. The last one, it seems that most students had low ability to analyze and to synthesize cases, ideas, theories, or concepts. As a matter of fact, university students need to have sufficient ability to analyze and to synthesize those essential matters of science.

What should be academically done to improve the inability to shape better model for grammar instruction? On this occasion, indeed, the writer claims that the students did not have sufficient knowledge on basic grammar of English (lack of grammatical competence) and they did not apply mastery learning strategy as expected in credit hours system or competency-based curriculum. These weaknesses might be the negative effects of unsuccessful learning program of English Grammar subjects in general. Therefore, the answers to this question were collected through a questionnaire distribution to the sample and observation on the learning condition that exists. Based on the data and information on students' inabilities, better model for grammar instruction should be designed and executed in order that the students' problems can be solved. In accordance with the results of interview with several students, writer's experience, and theoretical bases relevantly used, it is pedagogically argued here that there are four academic-practical actions that should be done to develop a better model of grammar instruction, then. Firstly, linguistic-grammatical explanation followed by a lot of various examples is highly needed in the classroom interaction. This instructional-classroom action may build and develop foundation of grammatical competence and knowledge grammatical features. This is also helpful to attract students' attention to have critical thinking and the ability to analyze and to synthesize amount of cases in grammar.

Secondly, the grammar instruction in classroom should be seriously held in the principles of pedagogical grammar, especially those appropriately applicable for EFL in multilingual society, like in Indonesia or in Padang. Grammar instructors have to hierarchically arrange the grammatical features, academic explanation, and related examples in order to overcome the lack of ability to transfer knowledge to new cases (see Odlin in Odlin (ed.), 1994; Chalker in Bygate et al (eds.), 1994). If it is necessary, the use of L1 is relatively allowed to explain the essential grammatical features and support the theoretical explanation with a lot of relevant examples. The third action to do to have better model of grammar instruction at university level is that to apply mastery learning strategy as expected by competency-based curriculum and the standard qualification used. By this way, the learners have to be in the learning condition in which they have mastered particular concepts or theories followed by the practical application needed. The lecturers of English Grammar are responsible for creating a learning atmosphere that help the students achieve the main goals of learning.

The last action to do is that doing remedial teaching/learning whenever necessary. The experience as Grammar lecturer tells that many students are not always successful in understanding the materials of learning at once in the classroom. Some students frankly told the writer that they need remedial teaching managed by the same lecturer(s) or assistance(s) academically pointed. Remedial teaching-learning psychologically may have positive effect towards the students' mastery on particular items because it is an activity with low academic and psychological pressure. In remedial teaching-learning, lecturers and students

are not in high-formal interaction to discuss learning materials. It is a good learning context to achieve the aim of mastery learning and to support students to achieve better learning outcomes in grammar of EFL.

E. Conclusion and Suggestion

The phenomena of students' inability to identify sentence types and sentential components may give several academic messages and warnings for both quantity and quality of learning programs of English grammar at the English Department of FKIP Universitas Bung Hatta, Padang. The learning materials of grammar concerning sentence types and sentential components can be categorized as the basic-elementary ones and those should have been students' competencies when they are in intermediate and in advanced levels of grammar. The fact, however, tells differently. Even though the students had been taking Grammar IV subject, they had not had sufficient grammatical knowledge and competence as the candidates of EFL teachers. The learning programs on grammar and sentential constructions need to be pedagogically evaluated and academically improved in order that such elementary inability may be minimized. Any related matters and context of learning, particular in EFL grammar, should be well improved, then. Accordingly, researches on the improvement of learning grammar at university level are highly suggested to do in any form,

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