

The Tenth Grade Students' Language Features in Descriptive Texts Writing: a written discourse analysis at a private senior high school

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Abstract: The aim of this research was to describe the language features in descriptive texts written by the tenth grade students at a senior high school (MA Unggulan Nuris) in Jember. The research design was descriptive qualitative research in the form of case study. The respondents of the research were chosen purposively. Fifteen students were chosen as the participants of this research based on the latest score of English subject examination. The data was collected by the students' writing assignment and interview. Then the collected data were analyzed in the form of table and description, and the result of showed that the students still had difficulties in applying correct language features of descriptive text especially in simple present tense and adjectives.

Keywords: Writing, Language Features, Descriptive Text

1. Introduction

Writing is very important for the students to master in the process of learning a language. As Campbell and Rutherford (1983:3) state that writing helps students to learn more especially about how to write descriptive texts that the main concern in this research. Based on the curriculum, descriptive text is one of text genres taught in even semester to the tenth grade students at a senior high school. In other words, by writing practice, students are expected to write descriptive texts well.

Being good writers requires good skill, extensive knowledge and many practices. This is because writing is considered to be the most difficult skill among the other skills the students have. Analyzing students' text can be a way to find out the

students' knowledge in writing descriptive text. Language features as a major unit of the text will affect the content of descriptive text. So, it is very important for the students to master the language features before starting to write. If the students have good knowledge of language features of descriptive text, they might be able to produce a well-written text. Therefore, investigating the students' knowledge of language features in writing descriptive texts by analyzing their texts was the main concern in this research

By analyzing the students' texts, the teachers were expected to know their students' ability and difficulties in developing language features of descriptive text so that they can plan and determine an effort in teaching process to minimize the students' errors in their writing.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Writing theories

According to Sokolik (in Nunan, 2005:98), "writing is a combination of process and product". The process refers to the act of the gathering ideas and working with them until they are presented in a manner that is polished and comprehensible to readers. Meanwhile, the product itself is a final piece of writing which has grown out of many steps that make up the process, such as a book (Nunan, 2005:98). However, the students have to focus not only on the product, but also on the process in learning writing.

Even though writing is not easy thing to do, the students need to learn and practice more to master it. The students have to learn how they can generate the ideas as well and how to state them in organized way on their paper. Thus, their writing can be clearly understood by the readers. Wardiman, Jahur, and Djusma (2008:46)

define a descriptive is a text which describes a particular person, place, or thing. The generic structures of descriptive text are identification and description. Wardiman, Jahur, and Djusma (2008:46) state that in the identification part, the writer identifies phenomenon to be described. While in the description part, the writer describes parts, qualities, and characteristics.

Descriptive text has its own language features. This research is intended to analyze the language features of descriptive text in the students' writing. The most language features found in descriptive text are: a specific participant, simple present tense, linking verbs, and adjectives.

By writing descriptive text, the students write anything they can see, feel, hear, touch, smell, or taste about a thing, person or a place. They will learn to observe any subject with their senses and put it in the form of descriptive text. Here is the example of a descriptive text. There are some language features of descriptive text the researcher evaluated in this research, such as: a specific participant, simple present tense, linking verbs, and adjectives. Those language features have their own characteristics.

When the students begin to write, the first thing they have to do is deciding the topic sentence. Boardman and Frydenberg (2008:4) define the topic sentence is actually the subject of the paragraph. Knapp and Watkins (2005:66) add, "the subject is a person or thing in a sentence or clause that 'operates' the verb". Therefore, the students need to pay attention on the object they are going to describe because they have to be aware of the use of specific rather than general descriptive words in descriptive text. It is because a specific participant will allow the students to explore and develop their writing easier.

Simple present tense is very essential for the students to master in writing descriptive text. According to Knapp and Watkins (2005:94), “factual descriptions are generally written consistently in the present tense, whereas narratives and arguments can move between present and past tense.” It means that when the students write descriptive texts, they have to use simple present tense to describe about daily habits or usual activities.

Another part of language features in descriptive text evaluated here is linking verb. Merriem-Webster (2016) mentions a linking verb is a word or expression (such as *appear, be, become, feel, grow, or seem*) that connects a subject with an adjective or noun to describe or identify the subject. So, linking verbs only relate the subject of the verb to information about the subject itself.

In writing descriptive texts, students are expected to be familiar with the existence of adjectives. Adjectives are used to describe colors, shapes, sizes as well as tastes, sounds, smells, and feelings. Murphy (1994:194) states that there are many adjectives which end in **-ing** and **-ed**. While the **-ing** adjectives explain about the job, the **-ed** adjectives explain about how someone feels (about the job).

Murphy (1994:196) also explains that there are *fact* adjectives and *opinion* adjectives. *Fact* adjectives (new, large, round, long, etc.) give factual information, while *opinion* adjectives (nice, beautiful, delicious, interesting, etc.) just tell about what someone thinks of. The *opinion* adjectives should go first before *fact* adjectives. In addition, Savage and Shafiei (2007:43) also mention some characteristics of adjectives, such as: an adjective can come before a noun. If the noun is singular, use *a/an* or *the* before the adjective. Adjectives have only one

form. Using the same adjective with singular and plural nouns; An adjective can come after *be*. When two adjectives come after *be*, separate them with *and*, nouns can also function as adjectives. Murphy (1994:196) also adds that an adjective can come after verb. The students have to be careful in using language to share their ideas to others in their writing. Otherwise, they will make people get confused on what they are writing about.

Knapp and Watkins (2005:94) state that language features are used to enhance the effectiveness of the writing. It shows that language features are very important as indicators of students' control in writing. The students' mastery of the language features in writing will affect the quality of writing. A good quality of writing will give clearer explanation of the information and make the readers easy to follow what the writers have written.

Kelley, Clark, Brown, and Sitzia (2003:265) state that the aim of analysis is to summarize data to make it understandable. This means that different viewpoints or theories provided help the researcher to examine his ideas on the language research study and these details help the readers understand his research. Further, analysis is very important in the language research to study about the students' ability in learning language. It is very useful to predict how far they learn something in language teaching of English.

2.2. Conceptual review

In this research, language features were the research variable that concerned the language forms the students might have used in writing descriptive texts. While, what was meant by a written discourse analysis was that the descriptive texts were

written rather than spoken. In this research, a private senior high school was not a state owned school.

3. The study

3.1. Research Context

This research was conducted at a senior high school, and it was determined purposively. The principal of the school supported the implementation of this research. The English teacher of the school to conduct the research in this school, 2) the researcher's willingness to learn deeply about students' writing at Islamic school because there was no researcher who had conducted a case study dealing with the language features of descriptive text there. Further, the result of the informal interview with the English teacher to the students' problem in having less writing practice.

3.2. Research design

The design of this research was descriptive qualitative in the form of case study because it was to examine a phenomenon as it is, in rich detail (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, and Razavieh, 2010:25). As Sturman (in Sikes, 1999:26) states, "case study is a generic term for the investigation of an individual, group or phenomenon". The qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit (Merriem in Duff, 2008:22). It is clearly defined that descriptive qualitative case study investigates a phenomenon of an individual, a group, or a unit deeply in order to catch holistic understanding. The description in this research focuses on the language features in descriptive texts written by the tenth grade students.

3.3. Research participants

The participants of this research were the tenth grade students of PK A class at a senior that is determined purposively. PK A (Pendidikan Keagamaan Kitab) consists 25 students. The researcher has chosen PK A class as the participants of the research, because PK A class has problem in learning writing as they only got less writing practice among the other classes during the teaching learning process in the classroom.

From 25 students in PK A class, the researcher took fifteen students of which five students represented each level from high, average, and low achievers as the participants of this research. The students' levels were determined based on the English teacher's document of the students' latest score from English subject examination because it showed the real ability how the students learn English.

3.4. Data collection and analysis

The language features of descriptive text written by the tenth grade students were observed in this research. The interview was conducted with the English teacher, and the result showed that she already taught descriptive texts to the students. But she only gave writing assignments once for descriptive texts in the even semester, so that the students rarely got practice in writing descriptive texts.

The second interview was conducted with fifteen students of PK A class representing high, average and low achievers after conducting research. This interview was used to prove that the students had learnt about descriptive text and its language features. From the interview, it was found that most students chose vocabulary and few students chose grammar or the language features of the text as the main part they had to learn in writing for English subject. Most students had known already about descriptive text from their explanations in the interview. Not

only that, the students mostly had same technique in writing their descriptive text by writing it in Indonesia language first. Next, they translated their work into English. Relating to the language features of descriptive text, it was found that the students mostly mentioned at least adjectives and simple present tense.

4. Findings and discussion

The result of data analysis showed that the students did not have big problems in using linking verbs correctly in their descriptive texts. It can be seen from high, average, and low achievers' writing composition that there were only few errors made by the students. The most errors were made by high achievers because they were less careful in paying attention to the singular or plural noun in their sentences. But, overall the use of linking verb in the students' descriptive texts is considered good because most students were able to apply proper linking verbs in their descriptive texts.

Besides, it was found that low achievers created the most errors among the other achievers. There were only three students representing two high achievers and one average achiever who could apply the adjectives in their texts without any errors. It shows that most students still found problems to apply adjectives in their descriptive texts correctly.

Mostly errors the students made in applying a specific participant are in missing the text titles, misspelling words, and disorganizing the capitalization. Those errors still can be understandable because they did not change the meaning of the content written. Overall, the use of specific participant in the students' descriptive texts is considered good, even though many errors found from low achievers' writing result. It is because all achievers were still able to maintain the consistency in their

writing to describe someone they had mentioned in the beginning of their descriptive texts until the end.

From the data analysis, it was found that low and average achievers still got big problems in using simple present tense correctly in their descriptive texts. It can be seen from their writing composition that there are many errors students made related to simple present verbs and subject agreement. The most errors were found in the low achievers' writing composition in which they used so many inappropriate words (verb) in their texts. Meanwhile, high achievers got the fewest errors in their texts which it means that they have a better control than others on using simple present tense. The errors made by the students are particularly the same as they had problems in using appropriate verb and adding prefix *-s* or *-es*.

5. Conclusion

Based on the result of data analysis, the researcher concluded that most students from low and average achievers were still weak in applying the language features of descriptive text. Meanwhile, high achievers made the fewest errors in applying them. It means that they had much better control about the language features of descriptive text than any other achievers. Most average achievers' problems were in applying simple present tense and adjectives, whereas low achievers' problem was only in applying simple present tense. The other language features such as a specific participant and linking verbs were applied much better than simple present tense and adjectives by the students from high, average, and low achievers. In conclusion, low and average achievers were still far from the theory requirements, while high achievers could follow the theory requirements much better than them.

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