

PROBLEMS OF NINE GRADE STUDENTS AT SMP NEGERI 2 TANAH JAWA IN WRITING COMPREHENSION

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ABSTRACT

Writing is one of the main language skills. It is used in expressing one's ideas, thoughts, opinions and attitudes. By writing, people can share ideas, feelings, persuade and convince others. But , Raimes (1983) thinks that: “When students complain about how difficult it is to write in a second language, they talk not only about the difficulty of finding the right words and using the correct grammar, but also about the difficulty of finding the right words. And express ideas in a new language. (p. 13)” This study is an attempt to investigate writing problems faced by students in junior high schools. The idea is to identify these problems and suggest ways to help students overcome the problems. This study is a case study of students at SMP NEGERI 2 TANAH JAWA. The results of this study are expected to be useful for language teachers, syllabus designers, and junior high schools as a second or foreign language. This research study aims to identify students' writing problems and suggest ways to overcome these problems. The results of the research show that there are various types of writing problems: a) Grammar Problem, b) Sentence Structure Problem, c) Word Choice Problem d) Cognitive Problems.

Keywords : Writing, Problem, Comprehension, Strategies

INTRODUCTION

Writing is one of the main language skills. It is used in expressing one's ideas, thoughts, opinions and attitudes. By writing, people can share ideas, feelings, persuade and convince others. People may write for personal enjoyment or for other purposes. They can speak to an audience of one or more people. The audience may be known or unknown. Taking notes for study purposes is an example of writing for you. Public blogging is an example of writing for an unknown audience. A letter to a friend is an example of writing for a known audience. It is always important to consider one's audience when writing. There are many different writing styles, from formal to informal. There are numerous reasons why writing should be included in a second or foreign language curriculum. One of the most essential reasons is that writing aids learning. This helps them have the opportunity to have an adventure with the language, to go beyond what they have learned (Reimes, 1993). Hedge (1988:5) also states that a lot of writing in English class is done as an aid to learning; for example, to consolidate learning of new structures or vocabulary or to help students remember new language items.

In this context, writing allows students to see their progress and get feedback from the teacher, and also allows the teacher to monitor students and diagnose problems encountered. This shows that writing plays a major role in language learning. However, compared to speech, effective writing requires several things: a high level of organization in the development of ideas and information; a high degree of accuracy so that there is no ambiguity of meaning; use of complex grammatical tools for focus and emphasis; and careful selection of vocabulary,

grammatical patterns, and sentence structures to create a style that suits the subject matter and the final reader (Hedge, 1988). This study is an attempt to investigate writing problems faced by students in junior high schools. The idea is to identify these problems and suggest ways to help students overcome the problems. Based on the background of the research above, the researcher would like to identify the problem as follows: (1) What writing problems do students at nine grade in SMP Negeri 2 Tanah Jawa face when writing in English?, (2) What techniques or procedures can be used to help students overcome this writing problem?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Cognitive Science and Linguistic Theory

Cognitive science and linguistic theory have played an important role in providing empirical research into the writing process and serving compositional pedagogy. As a composition theory, there is some disagreement about the feasibility of tying these two schools of thought into a single composition theory. However, their empirical basis for research and links to compositional process theory and cognitive science warrant their relationship to some extent. Cognitive composition theory can trace its roots to psychology and cognitive science. LevVygotsky and Jean Piaget's contributions to the theory of cognitive development and developmental psychology can be found in the early work linking these sciences to composition theory. Most notably, Linda Flower and John Hayes published "A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing" in 1981, providing the basis for further research on how thinking processes affect the writing process. The theory of compositional linguistics finds its roots in the debate around the importance of grammar in compositional pedagogy. Scholars, such as Janet Emig, Patrick Hartwell, Martha J. Kolln, Robert Funk, Stephen Witte, and Lester Faigley continued this line of thought at about the same time as the theory of cognitive composition developed by Flower and Hayes. These scholars, like those researching cognitively oriented composition theory, focus on research that provides insight into the writing process, but are also committed to providing pedagogical advances that address shortcomings, trends, and insights gained from their linguistic research.

A cognitive theory focused on gaining insight into the writing process through the writer's thought process. Composition theorists have attacked the problem of accessing author thought in various ways. Flower and Hayes' essay, "A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing" attempts to describe the author's choice-making during the writing process, and how that choice limits or influences other choices later on. Other research has focused on capturing writers' cognitive processes during the writing process through note-taking or speaking aloud, while some early research by Birdwell, Nancrow, and Ross was conducted with a computer to record the writer's keystrokes during the writing process. Linguistic composition theory has traditionally focused on sentence and paragraph level composition, with the aim of providing instructors with insight into how students at different proficiency levels produce writing. Stephen Witte and Lester Faigley used detailed syntactic analysis to redefine the importance of cohesion and coherence in assessing the quality of writing. Paul Rodgers and Richard Braddock focused on paragraph structure, in a separate study, to dispel misjudgments about the importance of traditional paragraph structure. As briefly mentioned in the previous section, cognitive and linguistic composition theory is closely related to process theory. Cognitive theory and linguistics have been instrumental in providing respected empirical research in the field of composition theory, but have tended to move away from making pedagogical

suggestions. In contrast, research in this area is usually intended to inform process theory by providing analysis of data regarding the writing process, and by bringing scientific research into the field.

Social Constructionist Theory

The main idea of this theory is that knowledge is constructed by group discourse. People build their sense of self from communal ideas and attitudes. Language is a means of discovering and articulating its own uniqueness. Language is a means of finding one's identity by voicing all cultural-based understandings that are people's experiences. So "We" as "subjects" of our experience are combined entities that are articulated in the language of our communal experience. Four Research Paths:

1. Community discourse: group talk generates meaning.
2. Sociology of science: the development of forms.
3. Ethnography: Relates to the context of language situations.
4. Marxist: the politics of production.

Knowledge is built through collaboration and agreement. Opposition must be included or there is a reversal to individualist constructs that return to the definition of individuals as instruments of language that define them (cognitive processes). The central question for deciding which camp to follow: Do we control language, or does language control us? Social constructionists see the interaction of the individualizing forces of thought and the collective social authority of language as reciprocal and as the essential dynamics from which we make meaning. Relationship to Poststructuralist theory: writers, readers, and texts are socially constructed entities, shaped by broad interpretive frameworks. Language is a "web of meaning". There is no underlying truth. We exist as a relationship between words. There is no relationship between the signifier (content) and the signified (object).

Approach To Writing

Product Approach

The product approach to writing focuses on the finished product of the writing work rather than the process. Nunan (1989) states that the product approach in writing focuses on the final result of the act of composing, namely letters, essays and so on. Writing teachers who use a product approach will pay attention to see that the final product is legible, grammatically correct and adheres to discourse conventions relating to main points, supporting details and so on.

According to Getnet (1994:9), the product approach is an orientation whose main focus is the end result of what students produce. Formal accuracy and correctness in grammar, spelling, vocabulary usage, layout conventions, etc. Completely prioritized. According to Byrne (1988:21), the product approach to writing is an accuracy-oriented approach that focuses on controlling errors to eliminate them from written work. Raimes (1983:6) writes "in a control approach to teaching writing students are given sentences to copy and manipulate grammar and correct with very limited opportunities to make mistakes." Hedge (1988:8) suggests several points that students should include in the product writing approach. This includes:

- a. Get the grammar right.
- b. Has a diverse vocabulary.
- c. Mention with meaning.
- d. Use layout conventions properly.

- e. Spelling accuracy.
- f. Use a variety of sentence structures.
- g. Connect ideas and information across sentences to develop topics.
- h. Develop and organize content clearly and convincingly.

Process Approach The process approach to writing focuses on the writing process rather than on the final written product. Encouraging students to have a sense of purpose and audience, when writing about a particular topic, is the main task of teachers who teach in line with the process approach. Hedge (1988:9) states that good writers seem to go through a certain process that leads to successful writing. He has proposed the following steps that good writers follow in their approach to the writing process.

- a. Writers start with the overall plan in their heads.
- b. They think about what they want to say and who they are writing for.
- c. They then put together sections of writing and as they work on them, they are constantly reviewing, revising, and editing their work.

Student Writing Problem

Byrne (1988:4) argues that due to the absence of prosodic features in the writing, the writer should compensate for these features by keeping the channels of communication open through his own efforts by choosing an appropriate structure and by using appropriate linking devices so that the text can be interpreted independently. Similarly, Hedge (1988: 5) thinks that as a writer to compensate for the absence of prosodic features in writing, he must write with a high level of organization, careful choice of vocabulary and use of complex grammatical tools. Grammatical problems, mechanical problems, sentence structure problems and diction problems are linguistic problems that hinder students in writing effectively in English.

Grammar Problem

Learners have a number of problems in their attempts to write in a second language. “As verbs take different forms depending on the tense and the subjects they use, they create problems for second language writing students” (Tyner, 1987). Similarly, Kharma (1987) in Melese (2007:12) states that students have problems with subject verb agreements, pronoun references, and connectors.

Sentence Structure Problem

Sentences reflect various syntactic structures (Reid, 1983). However, learners who are not able to use runon sentences, are wrong, and fragmented (West 1966, in Tsegaye 2006:16). Kharma (1986) stated that students who have problems in writing good sentence structure cannot produce longer sentences that require subordination and coordination. According to Zamel (1983:22), cohesive devices are very important in writing. However, connecting devices have been found to be a problem for English language students.

Word Choice Problem

A good writing or composition should consist of an appropriate and varied range of vocabulary used along with proper grammar and a varied range of sentence structures (Norish, 1983; Alamirew, 2005). According to Reid (1983) in Melese (2007: 13), when writers practice vocabulary choices that reflect the reader's attention and purpose of writing, the compositions written by students will make sense to the readers. . However, writing in a second language

using the right words in the right places is a problem for students. For example, White (1980) stated that usually students use 'big words' in their essays to impress their readers, their teachers. Attempts to impress the reader lead to diction problems.

Cognitive Problems

Cognitive problems faced by students include problems of punctuation, use of capital letters, spelling, content and organization.

- ✓ Punctuation Problem
- ✓ Capitalization Problem
- ✓ Spelling Problem
- ✓ Content Issues
- ✓ Organizational Problems

Causes Of Learner's Problem In Writing

The Nature of the Writing Process Writing is a complex process as it requires mastery of grammatical tools, conceptual thinking and judgmental elements (both purposeful and activating) (Byrne 1988, Heaton 1990). Byrne (1988: 4) classifies the complexity of writing into psychological, linguistic and cognitive problems. Grabe and Kaplan (1996:6) argue that since writing does not come naturally but rather is acquired through continuous effort and lots of practice, it becomes a complex skill.

Lack of Student Motivation

According to Zamel (1997) writing classes must take into account the students' goals for writing. Writing assignments can thrive when students' attention and interest are recognized, when they are given many opportunities to write, and when they are encouraged to become participants. Davies (1998:25) argues that students will be motivated to write if the writing task motivates them and keeps them interested. According to Leki (1991, p. 9), the desire on the part of the writer to communicate something is very important because it is much more difficult for students to write about something they are not interested in. Silva (1997) in Thomsan (2003) believes that it is 'reasonable and motivating' to allow students to choose their own topics and when students are given this freedom, their work is more successful. Similarly, Hudelson (1989) in Thomsan (2003:25) found that the quality of writing was better when students were allowed to make decisions about their topic. In addition, Pincas (1982: 4) argues that for all ages and levels, motivation increases when writing is placed in a realistic context. Byrne (1988:2) argues that most writers write poorly if they are obliged to write about something they do not want to write.

Lack of Exercise

According to Davies (1998:25), "writing is fundamentally a creative process and good writers must learn to communicate their ideas clearly to an unseen audience. This takes a lot of practice. Grabe and Kaplan (1996:6) believe that writing does not come naturally but rather is acquired through continuous effort and lots of practice. In addition, learners must take responsibility for their learning if meaningful learning is to occur. He also adds that the best way to learn any skill is to practice it. To become a good driver, the best way is to drive. Similarly, to become a proficient writer, the best way yet is to write a lot. Furthermore, Hedge

(1988:11) states that "my own experience tells me that to be a good writer, a student needs to write a lot."

Teacher Feedback

Zamel (1985: 79) states that teacher feedback can be effective if teachers respond to student writing as sincere and interested readers rather than as judges and evaluators. Similarly, Byrne (1988:29) thinks that if we are to truly be readers rather than judges, we may have to look not so much at what learners have failed to achieve, but at what they have actually succeeded in doing. This might help student writers to appreciate receiving comments and using them in their revisions.

METHOD

The research sample consisted of 20 students who studied English as their main specialization. They were randomly selected from a junior high school. All subjects spoke Indonesian as their mother tongue. Two English teachers were also randomly selected from this school to check the students' writing. The data analysis tool is content analysis. This method is included in the descriptive research method. The research paradigm is a positivist research paradigm. Subjects were instructed to write a composition of about 100 to 150 words. They were asked to describe their hometown/town. Writing is done in class. It took about an hour. Each student's work is read and checked, marked twice by two different teachers. This is to achieve objectivity. The data consists of students' writing work. Initially they were asked to write a description of about 100 to 150 words about their house or Hometown. So, the data has 20 compositions. It was marked twice by 2 English teachers. The teacher identifies errors, and provides comments on the work as a whole. Writing errors are summarized in bullet points.

DISCUSSION

Findings

Subjects were instructed to write a composition of about 100 to 150 words. They were asked to describe their hometown/town. Writing is done in class. It took about an hour. Each student's work is read and checked, marked twice by two different teachers. This is to achieve objectivity.

1. Let me introduce myself, whose name Aldo Saputra Sinurat. (**Grammar : missing a verb : Whose name is Aldo ...**)
2. Hi, **i wanna introducing my self** my name is Crysoli Tiara Simanjuntak I'm from class XI-I. (**Spelling : I**), (**Informality : want to**), (**Grammar : introduce**), (**Spelling : myself**)
3. Here I will tell a little about my hometown. (**Grammar : Pronoun, I will tell you a little ...**)
4. Such as sweet, spicy, salty and others. (**Punctuation : ... salty, and others.**)
5. **hai**, my name is Dilam Ade Algifahri. (**Capitalization & vocabulary**)
6. **me** and my friends often steal people from people.... (**Grammar : subject pronoun : I**)
7. I plan if I **ceed** in the future I will my hometown that is **batter** than now and more modern. (**Spelling : need**), (**Spelling : Better**)
8. in my village there are many palm trees **surronding** it and around my house. (**Spelling : Surrounding**)
9. There is also a rice field to the **ringh** of my house. (**Spelling : right**)

10. There is also **aggrave** on the left side of the house and many more beautiful views around my house. (Spelling : a grave)
11. I am **verry** happy to go to the rice fields where I can help **opung** to plow the fields. (Spelling : very), (Vocabulary : Grandmother)
12. I my village most of **them are** muslim. (Grammar : I), (word choice : them are)
13. I live in tanah jawa **wiht** my parents. (Spelling : with)
14. ... but **may vilage** is not so **crou dea** or quit. (Spelling : my), (Spelling : Village), (word choice : croudea)
15. Every day **I work helping** my mother **clen** the house and **olhers**. (Sentence Structure : I am helping), (Spelling : clean), (Spelling : others)
16. ... and lucky to have a good mother **to me**. (Sentence Structure : to me)
17. ... and many also help their parents to the fields. (Sentence Structure : and helping their parents to the fields)
18. In my village **there are also many children my age**. (Sentence Structure : there are also a lots of kids the same age as me.)
19. ... I ordered a chocolates **dring**. (Spelling : drink)
20. **Helo** my **frieds** here I want to tell you **abut** my hometown. (Spelling : Hello), (Spelling : friends), (Spelling : about)
21. My house is in bahkiset near my house there is a bridge. (Sentence Structure : my house near to the bridge.)
22. and in my house there are also lots of palm trees. (Word choice & Sentence Structure : in my hometown has a lot of palm trees)
23. Beside pecan tanah jawa there is a beautiful **bath** and many people come there because the water is **clear**. (Word choice : river) (Word choice : clean)
24. I am the last **chilt** in my family. (Spelling : child)
25. **A beatiful** place... but my **vilage** is not so crowded or quiet. (Spelling : beautiful), (Spelling : village)
26. In my village **there are many big and tall tress**. (Spelling : tree), (Sentence structure : there are also a lots of tree.)
27. I was born and grew up in simpang tangsi. (Sentence structure : I was born in simpang tangsi)
28. I my village I am the youngest **childern**. (Spelling : Children)
29. where I live in bah jambi. (Sentence structure : I live in bah jambi)
30. I want to tell you where I live in the hamlet. (Word choice : I want to tell you about my village).
31. You have to go **thougrh**. (Spelling : thought)

Discussion

This study is an attempt to identify the writing problems of a sample of students learning English as a foreign language. Its main purpose is to pinpoint the problem, and suggest a repair procedure. The sample consists of 20 students. They were asked to write a composition describing the village or town of their origin. Their writing results were then analyzed by 2 English teachers. Each composition was analyzed twice by two different teachers. The results of the research show that there are various types of writing problems.

- a. Grammar Problem
- b. Sentence Structure Problem

- c. Word Choice Problem
- d. Cognitive Problems

CONCLUSION

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- a. Grammar Problem
- b. Sentence Structure Problem
- c. Word Choice Problem
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In the light of these findings a number of recommendations can be made:

1. English learners should read a lot. Reading will help them improve their knowledge of vocabulary, grammatical structures, and get information; to have knowledge of the world as well.
2. Free writing practice is a good exercise to improve one's writing ability. Writing is a skill and therefore it is learned with practice just like any other skill.
3. Taking notes is also very helpful in improving the way writers generate ideas.
4. Students do not need to panic. Everyone experiences writer's block sometimes. They should be encouraged to get past the writer's barriers and break them. This will help them become more imaginative and creative writers.

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