

THE EFL ACQUISITION ORDERS OF TENSE-ASPECT OF THE STUDENTS

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Abstract: The EFL Acquisition Orders of Tense-Aspect of The Students. This study was intended to investigate the orders of the English tense-aspect acquisition of the junior high school students. 15 students of Srijaya Negara Junior High School, consisting of 5 students from each level – the first, second, third levels) had to write fifteen sentences in simple present, present continuous, and simple past. The results show that one form of tense-aspect system is acquired earlier than the others, and of the three English tense-aspect systems—present, past, and continuous—continuous is easier for the students, therefore, it is acquired earlier; and simple present is the most difficult for the students, therefore, it is acquired last.

Keywords: acquisition, continuous tense, simple past, simple present

Abstrak: Susunan Kalimat Siswa dalam Akuisisi Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mempelajari pemerolehan susunan kalimat bahasa Inggris bagi murid sekolah menengah pertama. 15 murid Sekolah Menengah Pertama Srijaya Negara, terdiri dari 5 murid untuk masing-masing tingkat/kelas, menuliskan lima belas kalimat berbahasa Inggris yang berbentuk *simple present*, *present continuous*, dan *simple past*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa salah satu bentuk susunan kalimat diperoleh lebih awal dibandingkan dengan bentuk susunan kalimat lainnya, dan di antara tiga bentuk susunan kalimat – *present*, *past*, dan *continuous*- bentuk susunan *continuous* lebih mudah bagi murid untuk dikuasai, bentuk ini dikuasai paling awal; dan *simple present* merupakan bentuk yang paling sulit dikuasai oleh murid, sebagai akibatnya, bentuk ini dikuasai terakhir.

INTRODUCTION

It is belief that a learner acquires certain aspects of a language in a certain orders--one component is acquired before or after another component and the changes are continuums. Traditionally, some experts of contrastive analysis, (Fries, 1952; Lado, 1974) believe that the orders are due to the difficulties faced by the language learners. The difficulties are derived from the different systems of the first language and those of the language being learned (a foreign language).

However, the ideas of these experts are challenged by some experts in error analysis.(Corder, 1981; Dulay, 1982). They believe that the difficulties are not due to the different systems of the two languages, rather they are due to the students' internalized process of the new language. The learners'

language learner is a transitional language (Corder, 1981).

In relation to this transitional language, which Slinker (Corder, 1981) terms it as inter-language, the writer tried to investigate the orders of the English tense-aspect acquisition of the junior high school students.

However, this study was more on learning, since the English here serves as a foreign language—it is one of the school subjects just as the other subject, therefore, the students had a very limited time to use it. Ellis (1986:6) says that acquisition is used to refer to picking up a language through exposure, whereas the term learning is used to refer to the conscious study of a language, that is, second or foreign language. In learning, the learners monitor their language.

In this the focus is more on the English grammar. Linguists make a distinction

between two types of descriptive grammars: formal and functional grammars (Larsen-Freeman, 2001:34). Furthermore, Larsen-Freeman (2001:3) differentiates the two types of grammar as the following:

Formal grammars take their starting point the form or structure of language, with little or no attention given to meaning (semantics) or context and language use (pragmatics). Functional grammar, conversely, conceive of language as largely social interaction, seeking to explain why one linguistic form is more appropriate than another in satisfying a particular communicative purpose in a particular context.

One of the formal grammarians is Charles C. Fries known as structural linguist. Fries (1952) bases his work on the assumption that grammatical categories should not be established in terms of meaning, but rather in terms of the distribution of structures in sentences. The school of psychology or behaviorism pioneered by Skinner (Larsen-Freeman, 2001:34-35) views all learning as a form of conditioning, brought about through repetition, shaping and reinforcement. This characterization of learning was thought to apply to language acquisition as well, since language was conceived as verbal behavior.

However, the conception of language and language acquisition as a form of conditioning was challenged by Noam-Chomsky (Larsen-Freeman, 2001:35), who pointed out the limitations of a language-as-behavior view. Chomsky's primary concern was with grammatical competence: the knowledge of a finite system of rules that enables an ideal language user in a homogeneous speech community to generate and understand an infinite variety of sentences. Chomsky sought to describe the underlying grammatical system (i.e. speakers' competence), rather than what speakers say or understand someone else to say (i.e. their performance). Chomsky's transformational-generative grammar posited the existence of a deep structure that determined the semantic interpretation of a sentence and a surface

structure that realized the phonetic form of sentences. The two were linked by a set of transformational rules (Thomas, 1965:9).

To summarize, a central aim or formal grammars is to explain syntactic facts without resource to pragmatics, i.e. strictly on the basis of formal grammatical properties of sentences.

Functional grammarians start from a very different position. Although there are different models of functional grammar, theorists share the conviction as stated by Dik, (1991:247) cited by Larsen-Freeman (2001:35) that:

The language system ... is not considered as an autonomous set of rules and principles, the uses of which can only be considered in a secondary phase; rather it is assumed that the rules and principles composing the language system can only be adequately understood when they are analyzed in terms of the conditions of use. In this sense the study of language use (pragmatics) precedes the study of formal and semantic properties of linguistic expressions.

Thus, in the case of active and passive sentence, for example,

a) *Welly kicked the dog.*

b) *The dog was kicked by Welly.,*

The formal grammarian explains how the passive sentence is formed: *sentence b.* is derived from sentence a., that is by *interchanging* the subject with the object, *inserting be* and the *past participle* and the *preposition by* before the displaced subject.

A functional grammarian is more interested in explaining the difference in use between these two according to the notion 'perspective'. A functional grammarian assumes that both sentences describe the same event, but that this event is presented from the participant's viewpoint in (1) and from the viewpoint of the result in (2). He or she is then interested in determining what contextual features influenced the speaker's choosing one version over the other.

Biber, et al. (1999) captures the difference between formal grammars and

functional grammars succinctly: although grammar consists of a set of rules, what is of interest to the functional grammarian is not that the rules generate grammatical sentences, but rather that the production of rule-governed sentences is the means to coherent communication. Given this communicative orientation, functional grammar's unit of analysis extends beyond the sentence (see Murcia: 1997; Hedge: 2000) and the explanation for various grammatical structures is sought at the level of discourse. For example, sequences of verb tense and aspect can only be explained at the discourse level. Analysis of spoken and written texts reveals that factors such as information structure and interpersonal patterns of interacting influence grammatical structure (see Biber, et al., 1999)

Functional grammarians see meaning as central, i.e. grammar is a resource for making and exchanging meaning (Halliday, 1978, in Larsen-Freeman, 2001). In Halliday's systemic-functional theory, three types of meaning in grammatical structure can be identified: experiential meaning (how our experience and inner thoughts are represented), interpersonal meaning (how we interact with others through language) and textual meaning (how coherence is created in spoken and written texts).

The simple distinction between formal and functional approaches is reflected in language education. The former is the 'structural approach' (Widdowson 1990), and its adherents assume that communicative ends are best served through a bottom-up process: through practicing grammatical structures and lexical patterns until they are internalized. The application of structural approach that includes pattern practice and structural drills in order to internalize the language structure, through, for example, the audiolingual method, widely practiced in the 1950s and 1960s and in Indonesia until 1970s. However, in 1970s, partly due to the influence of transformational grammar, materials featured sentence-based linguistic rules with exercises

asking students to transform one sentence pattern into another (Larsen-Freeman, 2001:36).

"The ability to communicate effectively in English is now a well-established goal in ELT" (Hedge, 2000:44). This goal contributes the shift include: observation of learners' difficulties in transferring the grammatical structures learned in class to communicative contexts outside, furthermore, calls to broaden linguistic study from grammatical competence to 'communicative competence'. Hymes (1972:278) cited by Hedge (2000:45) states that

... rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless. Just as rules of syntax can control aspects of phonology, and just as rules of semantics perhaps control aspects of syntax, so rules of speech acts enter as a controlling factor for linguistic form as a whole.

The influence of functional grammar leads language-teaching theorists and practitioners to embrace a new approach to language instruction, i.e. to focus initially on language use rather than formal aspects of language. Initially this translated as advocacy for notional-functional syllabuses rather than ones based on linguistic units. The commitment to teaching language use remained and was manifest in the 'communicative approach', which is characterized by, for example, role-playing, question-answer activities, information-gap activities, and others. There is, however, little attempt to control the structural complexity to which learners are exposed.

This major shift in language pedagogy received additional impetus from second language acquisition (SLA) researchers who sought to account for grammatical development by examining how meaning was negotiated in learner interactions (Larsen-Freeman, 2001:36)

In the study of second and foreign language learning, errors have been studied to discover the process learners make use of in learning and using language. Language

learning is like any other human learning. The learners of foreign language cannot avoid making errors. Brown (1987:170) says that the learner will make errors in the process of learning.

The study of learners' errors is very important because some errors have little effect, some causes irritation while others may cause communication difficulties. The study and analysis of the errors made by second and foreign language learners are carried out in order to find out how well someone knows a language, how a person learns a language, and obtains information or common difficulties in language learning as an aid in teaching or in the preparation of teaching materials (Richards at al, 1985:95).

Error analysis is an important support for the teachers of English in understanding and mastering the remedial teaching and regular teaching in the future. By using error analysis, the teacher will be able to know how far their students have come and what they must still learn (Corder, 1981:10). In other words, the teachers of English will be able to identify the acquisition hierarchies of the language structure, which further, determine which parts of the teaching materials should be remedied and which parts should not. Therefore, the teachers of English have to understand the concept of error analysis and how to apply it in his teaching.

METHOD

Fifteen junior high school students of Srijaya Negara Junior High School as subjects, five first year students, five second year students, and five third year students, were used. The subjects were given fifteen sentences in Bahasa Indonesia--five sentences in simple present, five sentences in present continuous, and five sentences in simple past- and they were required to translate them in English. The students' English sentences were classified in terms of the errors found in the sentences. These data were analysed

descriptively to find out the results of the research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The result shows that there were hierarchies in the students acquisition of the

At a glance*, it can be seen that the most difficult form to be acquired by the students was *simple present*. In the sentences made by first year students, there were 23 (92%) sentences in *simple present* that contain errors. This means that most of the first year students made errors in this form. The errors made by the students in *simple present* were mostly on the absence of the inflection of *third person singular marker*, and on the overuse of *be (is, am, are)*. Some students wrote sentences in *simple present* as the following:

- *He study English every week.*
- *He is study English every week.*
- *I is study English every week.*

In the sentences made by second year students, there were 18 (72%) sentences in *simple present* that contain errors. This indicates that *simple present* was also still difficult for them. The errors made by the second year students in *simple present* were mostly on the absence of the inflection of *third person singular marker*, and some of them were on the overuse of *be (is, am, are)*, but with the forms of *be* agree with their subjects. Some students wrote sentences in *simple present* as the following:

- *He study English every week.*
- *He is study English every week.*
- *I am study English every week.*

In the sentences made by third year students, there were 7 (28%) sentences in *simple present* that contain errors. The errors were mostly on the absence of the *third person singular marker*, and only one error was on the overuse of *be*.

The second difficult form of the English tense-aspect systems for the junior high school students was *simple past*. In the

sentences made by the first year students, there were 17 (68%) sentences in *simple past* that contain errors.

* *The number of the sample was too small to make a generalization.*

The errors found were on the absence of the inflection past marker {-ed}, and the overuse of *be* (*is, am, are*). Some students wrote sentences in *simple past* as the following:

- *He study English last week.*
- *He is studied English last week.*
- *He studied English last week.*
- *He is study English last week.*
- *I am study English last week.*
- *I is study English last week.*

In the sentences made by the second year students, there were 12 (48.%) sentences in *simple past* that contain errors. The errors made by the second year students in *simple past* were mostly on the absence of the inflection of the absence of the inflection past marker {-ed}, and some of them were on the overuse of *be* (*is, am, are*), but with the forms of *be* agree with their subjects. Some students wrote sentences in *simple past* as the following:

- *He study English last week.*
- *He is studied English last week.*
- *He is study English last week.*
- *I am study English last week.*

In the sentences made by the third year students, there were 4 (16.%) sentences in *simple past* that contain errors. All of the errors made by the third year students in *simple past* were on the absence of the inflection past marker {-ed}, and none of the errors was on the overuse of *be*.

Relatively the easiest form of the English tense-aspect systems for the SLTP students was *continuous*. In the sentences made by the first year students, there were 8 (32%) sentences in *continuous* that contain errors. The errors found were on the absence of *be* (*is, am, are*), the absence of the inflection {-

ing}, and mismatch of *subject-be* agreement. Some students wrote sentences in *continuous* as the following:

- *He is study English now.*
- *He are studying English now.*
- *I is study English now*
- *I studying English now.*

In the sentences made by the second year students, there were 3 (12%) sentences in *continuous* that contain errors. The errors found were one on the absence of *be* (*is, am, are*), and two errors were on the absence of {-ing}. In the sentences made by the third year students, there was no error found in *continuous*.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis above, some conclusions can be drawn that one form of tense-aspect system is acquired earlier than the others and of the three English tense-aspect systems—present, past, and continuous—continuous is easier for the students, therefore, it is acquired earlier; and simple present is the most difficult for the students, therefore, it is acquired last.

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