The Ability of 10th-Grade Students to Use Past Tenses in Writing Narrative Text in SMA Kartika Jaya 1-4 Pematangsiantar

Betty Sianturi
Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta
Email: bettysianturi91@gmail.com
correspondence: bettysianturi91@gmail.com
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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to investigate how well the 10th-grade students in SMA Kartika Jaya 1-4 Pematangsiantar able to use past tenses in writing a narrative text. This paper uses a descriptive quantitative method in which the data is the students' narrative text consisting of 20 verbs in past tense and past perfect tense. Based on the investigation, it is found that the 10th-grade students in SMA Kartika Jaya 1-4 Pematangsiantar can use past tenses in writing narrative text and their ability is in the medium level. There is one student at the highest level or 2.86%, the students who are able at the medium level ability are thirty students or 85.72%, and the students who are able at the lowest level ability are four students or 11.42%. The mean is 67.57 and the standard deviation is 14.46 where the validity is 0.79 and the reliability is 0.88. By conducting this study, it is expected the teachers get an insight into measuring students' ability to use past tenses in writing a narrative text.

Keywords: narrative text, past perfect tense, past tense, writing

INTRODUCTION

Communication is the process by which participants exchange information, ideas, needs, or desires. The process is an active one that involves "encoding, transmitting, and decoding" the intended message (Owens 2012:10). In communication, people need language. Sells (2007:1) said that language is a system for combining its parts in infinitely many ways. One piece of evidence of the system can be observed in word order restriction. Word order is produced by the subject preceding the predicate (Yakhontova (2003: 48). According to Carnie (2006: 22), Basic English word order is subject, verb, object (SVO). The use of the verb is also different according to its time signals. When activity is in the present time, the verb uses verb present (verb-1) adding –s or es. When the activity is in the past time, the verb uses the verb past (verb-2), and when the action happened before another activity, the verb uses a verb in perfect (verb-3).

Transferring information, ideas, needs, or desires can be done in two ways; spoken or written. In a spoken way, the speaker uses language directly in such a way as speaking. On the other hand, the written way requires information, ideas, needs, or desires transfer in written form. It is quite complex because in transferring ideas, the writer should be able to arrange the

sentences grammatically and structure content information in ways that make it comprehensible (Bruce 2008:4). Moreover, the writer must recognize the real communicative situation of the composition they write. Furthermore, the writer should pay attention to the choice of vocabulary, grammatical patterns, and sentence structures (Hedge, 2005).

Based on the observation conducted by the writer, it was found that the students have difficulties in using the verb. Some of the students used verb-1 in past continuous tense (I **was go** to Medan yesterday), a few of them use inappropriate verb and wrong tense (I **return** home when Rita came to my office). As we know "to be" can be followed by a noun, adjective, adverb, verb-3, and verb-ing. The first sentence is about the progress activity in the past, so it must be followed by verb-ing. These examples show the student's ability in writing a paragraph is low.

Concerning the observation above, this paper aims to investigate how well the 10th-grade students able to use past tenses in writing a narrative. The writer chooses narrative is because the narrative has been such a popular genre in Indonesia's folklore, myth, and legend. Watkins (2005: 220) also says that the genre of narrating or narrative is one of the most commonly read, though least understood of all the genres. Besides, there is a belief that it is a genre that students "pick up and write naturally" (p.55). According to Jordan (1999: 28), verb forms commonly used in a narrative are the simple past active (e.g it organized), simple past passive (e.g it was created), and past perfect active (it had developed). In this paper, the writer focuses on past and past perfect tense because they are quite similar. Both of them tell about the activity that begins and ends in the past but when past perfect tense is used in the same sentence with the past tense, the past perfect tense happens first. The students were sometimes difficult to differentiate between them. They used past tense in telling the two events that happen in the past. By conducting this study, it is expected to give a contribution to students to have the ability to use past tenses correctly in a sentence, to teachers about teaching past tenses in writing narrative, and other researchers to do further research related to this topic.

Writing

Writing is an act of jotting down ideas in a form of a meaningful sentence. Therefore, the writer not only puts an effort into writing but also unites the ideas so that the intended messaged can be understood by the reader. Nunan (2003:88) states that the narrative serves the master desires to express an idea or feeling to the audience or reader which is expressed in certain ways. The ideas are manifested in the "conventional graphics system and grammatical system of language by a visual medium in the form of sentences" (Rosa 2014:79 in). In relation to it, Raimes (1983:73) stated that writing is a skill to express ideas and though arranged in "words, sentences, and paragraphs using sensory organs such as eyes, and hands" (p. 19). Therefore, Oshima (1997:2) said that writing is a progress activity which means that when we first write something down, we have already been thinking about what we are going to say and how we are going to say it. Then often we have finished it, we read over what we have written and made changes and correctness. Thus, writing is never a one-step action. According to Harmer (2005:113), the process of writing consists of planning, drafting, reviewing and editing, and producing the final version. In the planning stage, the writer decides the topic of writing, purposes of writing to the reader, and collects some relevant information related to the topic. In drafting, the writer starts to write ideas in sentences and paragraphs. In this stage, the writer concerns more about jotting down ideas coming to mind rather than word choice and grammatical accuracy. Review and editing is the stage where the writer corrects the word choice, grammatical error, and sequence of ideas. Lastly, producing the final version is the fixed writing in which the ideas have been arranged smoothly.

Narrative Text

The narrative text is a type of text talking about a specific event or phenomenon of a certain person or character. (Asmiyah 2011:164). The narrative gives details of experience or event in the order in which it happened (Fiderer (2002:17). Concerning it, Elliot (2005:3) also says that a narrative can be understood to organize a sequence of events into a whole so that the significance of each event can be understood through its relation to the whole. The purpose of narrative text is to amuse, entertain people, and deal with the actual and vicarious experience in different ways (Gerot 1994:294). The elements of the narrative are orientation, complication, and resolution. Orientation is the introduction of the text. It usually starts to introduce the character of the story, the place, and the time. The time is always in the past. Therefore the verb is in the past (verb-2). Complication tells about the problem faced by the character and the other figures. Complication provokes a reader's curiosity about the way the character will solve the problem. Resolution is the stage where the character solves the problem. Resolution is the ending of the story. It can be a sad or happy ending. Linguistic features of the narrative text are as follows:

a. The character is the first person (I, we) or third person (she, he, and they)
b. Using simple past. For example, he chose the slowest animal in the country.
c. Using time conjunction and chronological order. For example: once upon a time, a long time ago, then, finally, last
d. Using action verbs. For example, run, hit, built, kicked, etc
e. Using direct speech. For example, the monkey said," because I don't bring my heart". "I left it under a tree, near some coconuts in the river bank".

The Simple Past

The simple past is used to talk about activities or situations that began and ended in the past (Wishon1980:195). Peterson (1992:64) says that the most basic use of past tense is to describe one complete action in the past. The common adverbs are yesterday, last …, and …ago. The words formation of the past tense can be seen as follows (Indriastuti 2009: 137):

(+) Subject + Verb-2 + Object + Adverb
(-) Subject + did + not + Verb-1 + Object + Adverb
(?) Did + Subject + Verb-1 + Object + Adverb?
Examples:
(+) I **cooked** noodles last week.
(-) I **did not cook** noodles last week.
(?) **Did** I cook noodles last week?

The Uses of the Simple Past

- The simple past tense is used to report a state or activity which can be ascribed to a definite time. A past adverbial is either expressed or else understood from the context in which the past tense is used. For examples: She finished her university studies at the age of twenty, or I received some visitors and cleaned my desk
- The past tense is also used for activities that occur over a while in the past but are now finished or that occurred at intervals in the past but don't occur now (Wishon 1980:195). For example: Before the war, I worked for an insurance company, Last week, I worked until midnight every night.
- The verb phrase *used to* + the simple form of the verb may also be used to indicate a state or condition that existed over a period of time in the past (Hayden 1956:82). For example, They *used to* have a lot of money, but they don't anymore, He *used to* work in a bank years ago.

The Past Perfect Tense

Wishon (1980:208) argues that the past perfect tense is a construction made of had + the past participle of the verb, the past perfect is used in connected discourse in conjunction with the past tense and shows that activity was complete at or before some definite time in the past. According to Peterson(1992:105) when past perfect tense is used in the same sentence with the past tense, the order of event is clear from the tense themselves. The past perfect action happened first. It can be said that in the past perfect tense there is an activity that had happened before another activity happened in the past. The words order of past perfect tense can be seen as follows (Indriastuti 2009:144):

(+) Subject + had + Verb-III + Object + when + Subject + Verb-2
(-) Subject + had + Not + Verb-III + Object + when + Subject + did + not + Verb-1
(?) Had + Subject + Verb-III + Object + when + Subject + Verb-2?
Examples:
(+) I **had graduated** from high school when Laura got married.
(-) I **had not graduated** from high school when Laura did not get married.
(?) **Had I graduated** when Laura got married?

The Uses of the Past Perfect Tense

Wishon (1980:208) says that the past perfect tense is also used in these specific ways:

- To replace the present perfect or simple past tense when a direct quotation is changed into reported speech. For example, the lecturer said, "I have studied the problem for years" (Direct). The lecturer said that he had studied the problem for years (Indirect).
- In certain sentences to express an unrealized wish that something in the past had been different. The expression if only, wish, would rather are commonly used in such sentences. The use of the past perfect will be studied in greater detail in the section on the conditional. For example, I wish you had come with us.
- In certain contrary-to-fact conditional sentences. For example, If Cleon had known the facts, he would have told you.

METHOD

This research is to know the students' ability to use past tenses in writing a narrative paragraph. Its observation is focused on past tenses that are past tense and past perfect tense. Based on the explanation above, the method of this research is a descriptive quantitative method for it focuses on the result of making the test. In gathering the data the writer gives three titles of narrative text, a sequence of pictures, and twenty words for each title. The students are free to choose the title and write based on what they know about the story. Then the writer analyses the usage of past tenses especially past tense and past perfect tense in their sentences.

In analyzing the data the writer tabulates the result of using past tenses in writing a narrative text, then finds out mean, standard deviation, and also validity and reliability of the test. To find out the validity the writer uses the formula of Pearson called the product-moment formula by Arikunto (2010:317). The reliability of the test can be done by giving the same test twice to the students. In this paper, the writer used a split-half method to estimate the reliability of the test and used the formula of Sparman Brown (Arikunto 2010:223). The standard ability will be made up based on the instructional system of the development procedure and Kurrikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan 2006 (KTSP). The students can use past tenses in writing narrative if the students get score ≥ 60. The students are not able to use past tenses in writing narrative if the students get score ≤ 60.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After making research the writer found that:

1. The 10th-grade students are able to use past tenses in writing narrative text.
2. The 10th- grade students' ability is at the medium level.
3. There is one student at the highest level or 2.86%.
4. The students who are able at the medium level ability are thirty students or 85.72%.
5. The students who are able at the lower level ability are four students or 11.42%.
6. The Mean $\{\bar{X}\}$ is 67.57 and Standard Deviation (S) = 14.46
7. The average right score is 0.67 or 67.42%.
8. The average wrong score is 0.32 or 32.58%.
9. The test is valid where the validity is 0.79 by using product moment.
10. The test is also reliable where the reliability is 0.88 by using the Sparman Brown.

The 10th-grade students in SMA KARTIKA JAYA I-4 Pematangsiantar are able to use past tenses in writing narrative text and their ability is at a medium level. According to (Wishon1980:195) the simple past is used to talk about activities or situations that began and ended in the past. The past perfect tense is connected discourse in conjunction with the past tense and shows that activity was complete before some definite time in the past (Wishon 1980:288). When the past perfect tense is used in the same with the past tense, the past perfect action happened first (Peterson 1992:105). Past perfect tense usually is used to replace the present perfect or simple past when a direct quotation is changed into reported speech, to express unrealized wish that something in the past had been different, and it is used for conditional sentence type-III.

To know the students' ability to use past tenses in writing narrative text, the writer gives a sequence of pictures and verbs that help the students tell or write the text easily. The data analysis showed the students' ability is good. So, a sequence of a picture is good to be applied in assessing the students. Using a sequence of pictures can help the students to plan, draft their writing, and provide further practice in learning how to compose stories. Fleming (2004:173) states that a sequence of pictures is good because pupils perform creatively with media-based equipment. The result of the test showed that the 10th-grade students in SMA KARTIKA JAYA I-4 Pematangsiantar are able to use past tenses in writing narrative text and their ability is in the medium level.

CONCLUSION

The writer concludes that the 10th-grade students in SMA KARTIKA JAYA I-4 Pematangsiantar are able to use past tenses in writing narrative text in which their abilities are in the medium level. Most of the students achieve the minimum score based on the instructional system of the development procedure and Kurrikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan 2006 (KTSP). Moreover, using a sequence of pictures is good to be applied in assessing the students about past tenses in writing the narrative because it helps the students to tell the story easily.

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