An analysis of students’ Grammar mastery in writing recount text

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1. Introduction

In English, there are four language skills: listening ability, reading ability, speaking ability, and writing ability. The researchers' primary focus in this study is on writing ability. As one of the productive talents, writing becomes a complex skill because writing is a textual form intended to communicate. It is more difficult to get people to communicate in written form since they do not communicate immediately as they do when conversing. Writing requires an understanding of grammar, word choices, and general information to assist in the composition of a flawless piece of writing, no doubt if writing is a difficult and complex ability. However, writing is a necessary skill to learn in school. It is critical for students to effectively communicate their ideas, feelings, or thoughts in class and ask appropriate questions. Additionally, children are encouraged to produce and comprehend a variety of text types dependent on the curriculum. Additionally, students must adjust quickly to the current scenario. Students need to improve their focus and motivation, as most of their time is spent in front of a screen. According to Kumar and Somani (2020), Covid-19 causes some persons to experience fear of infection, stress, pessimism, and anxiety. These are negative emotions, including worry, which arise due to the student's circumstances.

Senior high school students learn numerous types of texts, including descriptive text, procedural text, recount text, and report text (Mulyasa & Aksara, 2021). According to Sudarwati and Grace (2007), recount text aims to retell a past event or experience, the narrative text aims to entertain the audience with actual or imagined events, and the procedure text aims to instruct the reader on making decisions or operating something. The narrative text is similar to myths or legends stories, the descriptive text aims to provide information or a description of a particular person or thing, and news item text aims to inform the reader about events deemed significant or newsworthy. The researchers examined the students' capacity to write a recount text in one of those texts. A recount text is a type of narrative text that attempts to enlighten or entertain by retelling events from the past.
According to Hartono (2005), recount text is a tale genre that aims to inform or entertain by retelling events. Students are anticipated to compose their letters, personal journals, speeches, and biographies after mastering the recount text (Anderson & Anderson, 1997; Görlich, 2008).

Students are able to recount their experiences but struggle to put them into writing due to a variety of issues, one of which will be examined in this research: grammar mastery. When telling events, those who read the narration will focus on the writing's grammar to ensure that the reader is aware of the proper position and time in the narration. Regrettably, grammar becomes an impediment to Indonesian students studying English. The majority of Indonesian students struggle with grammar, and changing verb forms can be extremely difficult (Ariyanti, 2016). Due to the fact that English grammar is so dissimilar to that of the Indonesian language, students may notice numerous variances in grammar function and usage. These distinctions might make it more difficult for students to compose a text and elevate the writing skill to a complicated level. The most common inaccuracy in students' recount texts is due to interlingual transfer, indicating that students encountered difficulties using grammar rules in their writings (Mesrawati & Narius, 2019). Thus, it is critical to grasp grammar when learning the English language, particularly when it comes to writing. Similarly, Ramli et al. (2013) stated that English grammar had become the most prevalent problem in recount text writing. The error rate in students' recount texts is 34.54 percent for content errors, 7.63 percent for vocabulary errors, 44.74 percent for grammar errors, and 13.9 percent for mechanics errors, indicating that grammar has become the most prevalent error in recount text writing. Although recount text has been studied since junior high school, some students continue to struggle with recount text composition.

The research was done by Nurohmah (2013), who took six recount texts that were taken from students in the eighth semester of the English Department. The result shows that the students were able to write their recount text based on the schematic structure, but the researchers found some errors or ungrammatical structure, like inappropriate regular past tense, which caused misunderstanding and misinformation in their writing. Considering this issue, the researchers are interested in analyzing the students’ grammar mastery in writing. The sample of previous research above is the eighth semester of English Department students who have learned recount text before, and Nurohmah (2013) measured the students’ grammar mastery based on the language feature of recount text (Gerot & Wignell, 1994). However, the researchers do not apply the same way in measuring grammar mastery as Nurohmah (2013), that is because the researchers decided to choose a writing test as an instrument and the tenth-grade students in one of the public senior high schools in Gowa regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, which need a scoring system in measuring the students’ grammar mastery.

There are differences between this research and the prior research. The researchers measured the students’ writing ability using a rubric adapted from Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) and analyzed their grammar mastery by using a modified rubric of grammar mastery. The researchers choose a tenth-grade student in one of the public senior high schools in Gowa regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, because the tenth-grade student was learning about recount text and based on the researchers’ experience, it is one of the reputable schools. This research is important to help teachers know the students’ ability to master grammar and write a text, especially recount text. Furthermore, recount text is one of the basic competencies that students have achieved to fulfill the curriculum's goals. The researchers decided to analyze students’ grammar mastery in writing recount text in the tenth grade with references above. Under the statement above, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. To what extent is the students’ ability to write recount text?
2. To what extent is the students’ mastery on grammar in writing recount text?
3. What grammar error are made by the students in writing recount text?

2. Literature Review

This chapter deals with the review of literature related to the present study, and it contains some pertinent ideas and a theoretical framework.

2.1. Grammar

Thornbury (1999) defined grammar as examining the structure of meaningful sentences. Similarly, according to Larsen-Freeman (2009), grammar is a collection of meaningful patterns and structures that are constrained by certain pragmatic constraints. Additionally, some experts described grammar in terms of how it is used; Nelson and Greenbaum (2018) defined grammar as the study of language rules that are said to instruct students on how to speak the language of the socially educated class. Additionally, Smith (2003) claimed that grammar transforms into the mechanism by which language functions when used to communicate with other people. Individuals require grammar in order for others to grasp their language.

Thus, the researchers conclude that grammar refers to the norms of language that individuals must follow. According to the definition of grammar, which is the laws of a language and the fundamental unit in learning a language, grammar is crucial to learn since it plays a significant part in language learning. As Shen (2012) mentioned, grammar is critical when learning a language, not just for writing ability but also for other abilities. Even if mastering grammar is not easy, students may notice numerous discrepancies in grammatical function and usage because English grammar is so dissimilar to Indonesian. Thus, grammatical knowledge must be taught in schools, particularly to EFL students, in order to assist students in resolving the difficulties they encounter when attempting to use the English language.

2.2. Writing

The research chose Harmer (2007) definition of writing as the basis for this study, which said that writing is a method of communication that aims to convey an emotion or thought through written form. As Harmer remarked on writing,
Nunan (2003) revealed that writing is committing thoughts or words, and it is different from the primary goal of speaking, which is communication. This can be accomplished through written communication on paper, or an e-mail message typed into a computer or smartphone. In other words, writing is defined as communicating ideas, considering how to communicate them, and organizing those ideas in written form. As a result, researchers conclude that writing is a productive talent that requires physical action to do. Writing skill requires another skill to support it, such as knowledge of grammar, word choices, and general knowledge. As Richards et al. (2002) state, writing skill is a particularly challenging activity for foreign learners, as it is a complex skill that involves knowledge, writing's rules, and concepts.

2.3. Recount Text

2.3.1. Types of recount text

From the explanation before, there are several types of recount text based on Derewianka and Primary English Teaching Association (Australia) (1990):

- Personal recount, retelling experiences that the writer was involved in personally, such as diary, personal letter, postcard, entries, etc. Personal recount often aims to entertain and inform, it is usually written that use the first person like I and We.
- Factual recount, recalling events accurately. It could be every day, such as news recording, police reports, accidents, and science. In a factual recount, the writers use factual, detailed, and precise language, so that it helps the audience get a complete overview of an experience, event, or achievement.
- Literary or imaginative recount entertains the audience by recreating the imaginary events or imaginary world as though it happened, just like fiction.
- A procedural recount tells the steps of completing procedures or tasks. For example, it includes several steps for making fried rice, and it also could be the steps to answer mathematical questions.
- A biographical recount tells a person's life using a third-person point of view (She, He and They), and an autobiography uses a first-person point of view (I and We).

2.3.2. Recount text structure

Anderson and Anderson (1997) stated that there are three parts of a recount text: orientation, events, and re-orientation. Orientation provides details of who, what, when, and where. Events provide the order of event; it tells what has happened. Re-orientation concludes the retelling of the events and usually deals with the writer's personal comment.

2.3.3. Language feature

Alderson and Anderson (2003) argued that usually, in recount text, there are several language features, as follows:

- Proper nouns, it identifies participants who involve in the text.
- Descriptive words give some details about what, who, where, when, and how.
- The use of past tense in retelling the events, and
- Connector words that show the events' sequence (first, next, then, etc).

3. Research Method

3.1. Research Design

This research applied mixed methods design. Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that mixed methods research is an approach to an inquiry involving collecting both quantitative and qualitative data, integrating the two forms of data, and using distinct designs that may involve philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks. The key premise of this type of research is that combining qualitative and quantitative data offers additional knowledge beyond what either quantitative or qualitative data alone can provide. In this research, mixed methods were chosen because of its strength of drawing on both qualitative and quantitative research and minimizing the limitations of both approaches. This method is divided into two categories, qualitative and quantitative design. The quantitative design was used to answer the research questions number 1 and 2 in which the researchers found out and calculated to what extent the students' ability in writing recount text as well as their grammar mastery by conducting test to get their score and tabulate the data into the table of data bank. The qualitative design was used to answer the research question number 3. The researchers discovered and analyzed the students' grammar errors in their recount text by listing and categorizing the errors, having them cross-checked with the provided references and elaborate on the problems causing the errors.

3.2. Respondent

The respondent of this research was the tenth-year students in one of the public senior high schools in Gowa regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The school consists of three departments: Math and Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, and Languages and Culture. The total class of tenth grade is ten classes, and the total number of the tenth-grade students at the school was three hundred and forty students. Thirty students were randomly chosen based on convenience sampling.

3.3. Procedure

The researchers employed a writing test. A test is a formal, methodical, paper-and-pencil procedure for gathering information about people's cognitive and affective traits (Mills & Gay, 2018). A cognitive characteristic is a mental characteristic related to intellect, such as achievement and an affective characteristic is a mental characteristic related to emotion, like attitude. Test is considered appropriate for this research because the researchers wanted to gain data from the students' achievements. The researchers applied a writing test to measure the students' writing and grammar mastery. In collecting data for this research, the researchers asked the students to write a recount text. The students wrote their unforgettable experiences, it could be their first day in school, their most special birthday, et cetera. The test must follow the schematic structure and language features of recount text.
Data obtained from the test is analyzed in some steps as follows:

- Identify the students’ ability in writing recount text.
- To identify the students’ writing recount text the researchers used a rubric which adapted from Brown and Abeywickrama (2010).
- Identify the students’ grammar mastery.
- The next step is to identify the students’ grammar mastery by using a rubric that the researchers modify.
- Identify the students’ error in writing recount text.
- The researchers then identify the error found in the students’ recount text, then classify the error into interlingual or intralingual errors.

4. Results and Discussion

Based on the results of all the research findings, it can be seen that students were able to construct recount text based on the recount’s structure, but unfortunately, some students still found difficulties in using grammatical structure in their writing. They knew that recount text should use the past form, but the students sometimes used it. The students were unable to distinguish between regular and irregular past forms, resulting in grammatical frameworks (Richards, 2015). Some errors detected in the students’ writing are caused by students’ intralingual and interlingual errors, as studied in Şanal (2008) that ungrammatical error is influenced by two major factors: intralingual and interlanguage factors. Richards (2015) further explains that interlingual structure deviation occurs when foreign language students are influenced by their mother tongue, and intralingual structure deviation occurs when students lack sufficient mastery of their second language. As a result, it can be stated that intralingual was the primary cause of ungrammatical structure created by students. The results of this research are almost the same with previous research by Nurohmah (2013). The data analysis result reveals that most of the students or the sample were able to construct recount text well. This research found that all the samples achieved the minimum completeness criteria determined by one of the public senior high schools in Gowa regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Based on the students’ writing analysis results, the researchers found that all the sample applied grammar in recount text, including simple past tense, past continuous tense, past perfect tense, past future tense, to be, verb conjugation, and auxiliary verb. Unfortunately, there was the ungrammatical structure (errors) found in the students’ recount text. The intralingual error mostly caused the error that appeared in students’ recount text. Intralingual error refers to items produced by the learner, and it demonstrates generalization based on partial exposure to the target language rather than the structure of the first language. It occurs because students may lack practice and mastery of English grammar, which differs from that of their original language.

5. Conclusion

The researchers discovered that students were adept at constructing narrative text after examining the data. The research revealed that the entire sample met the minimum completeness criteria established by one of Gowa regency’s public senior high schools in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. All the sample grammar used in that text is included, including simple past tense, past continuous tense, past perfect tenses, past future tenses, to be, verb conjugation, and auxiliary verb. Regrettably, the students’ recount text discovered ungrammatical structure (errors). The inaccuracy that arose in the recount text of students was primarily due to an intralingual error. This occurs because students may lack practice and mastery of English grammar, which is distinct from the grammar of their native language. As a result, it is recommended that students enhance their knowledge and practice in writing, particularly in writing recount.

After conducting the study, the researchers desired to provide recommendations based on the findings. Hopefully, it can be implemented effectively during the learning and teaching processes, hence reducing error. Teachers are expected to emphasize the grammatical components that must be taught to students during the learning and teaching process in order for students to improve their ability to write, particularly for recount texts; additionally, recount texts are one of the basic competencies that students must achieve in order to meet the curriculum’s objectives. Students are expected to be more motivated in their grammar studies and to pay greater attention to the learning and teaching processes so that they will have no difficulty applying grammar to organize text. Additionally, students must be conscious of their unique learning modes to feel more at ease when studying. This research is expected to serve as a reference for future researchers, enabling them to debate and analyze students’ grammatical expertise in producing recount text in greater depth using a bigger sample.

References


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