THE USE OF RECOMBINATION ACTIVITIES TO DEVELOP STUDENTS' DISCOURSE SKILLS

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Abstract

Discourse analysis cannot be neglected nor separated from our lives. Several experts even claim its importance in language teaching. The need to teach a language in context is unavoidable. Therefore, a lesson plan to develop students' discourse is needed. This paper reports on a descriptive qualitative research conducted at a language institution in Yogyakarta. The research was started from lesson plan development to teaching practice in the classroom. The lesson plan followed top-down approach and text-based approach on the model. It focused on the use of recombination activity. At the end of the lesson, five questions were given as a reflection for the students. The results show that half of the students succeeded in arranging the sentences into correct order for the recombination task. It was found that half of them agreed that title provision might help them in doing recombination activity. In addition, all of them also agreed that the knowledge of language features of the text helped them in doing recombination activity. They even mentioned that it was the knowledge of conjunctions that helped them in doing the activities. These results prove that the use of recombination activity can develop students' discourse skills.

Keywords: discourse analysis, recombination activity, lesson plan

INTRODUCTION

Discourse analysis, which is defined as a search of how stretches of language become meaningful, coherent, and unified for their users (Brown & Yule, 1983; Cook, 1989), is something that cannot be neglected in our lives including in a language teaching to achieve successful communication (Celce-Murcia & Olsthain, 2000). . Several experts claim that discourse analysis has pivotal roles for both language teachers and language teaching. Discourse analysis can draw attention to the skills needed to put the knowledge of pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary into action, achieve successful communication, and analyze social situations or contexts that may affect the meaning of the language (Cook, 1989; Paltridge, 2012; Sepulveda, 2017). In addition, McCarthy (1991) and Hoey (1991) as cited in Yao (2013), also claim that discourse analysis can be helpful in language teaching and learning as it focuses on the sentence level. As the teachers may expect their students to be able to use and

understand the context in which the language is used rather than remembering rules in isolation.

Therefore, a certain set of discourse-based lesson plan to teach students in a language classroom is needed. This paper attempts to report the teaching and learning process in a writing program class using a discourse-based lesson plan. The lesson plan contains a series of learning tasks and activities aiming the students to be able to: (1) identify generic structure of explanation text, (2) identify cohesive devices used in the texts, and (3) arrange jumbled sentences into coherent paragraphs. The lesson plan was developed by following the top-down approach to develop discourse skills from Cook (1989). Then, as it aimed to teach a certain type of text, the text-based approach model from communicative language teaching theory from Richards (2006) was applied in the lesson plan.

Cook (1989) differentiates two approaches to develop discourse analysis, namely bottom-up approach and top-down approach. Bottom-up approach is defined as how the most detailed features of discourse are analyzed first, then the most general features afterward. Top-down approach works in the opposite way. It starts from analyzing the most general features of discourse towards the most detailed ones. Top-down approach, according to Cook (1989), starts from analyzing social relationships, shared knowledge, discourse type, discourse structure, discourse function, conversation mechanisms, cohesion, grammar and lexis, and sounds or letters. The researcher chose top-down approach as a basis for developing the lesson plan since it is the only approach which has similar characteristics to the steps in text-based approach.

Text-based approach was the teaching approach chosen by the researcher in developing the lesson plan for the research as it intended to teach a certain text type. Feez and Joyce (1998) describe five stages in which text-based approach can be applied. Those five stages include (1) building the context or building knowledge of the field (BKOF), (2) modelling and deconstructing the text (MDOT), (3) joint construction of the text (JCOT), (4) independent construction of the text (ICOT), and (5) linking to related texts. Due to the limited time and meeting, the researcher only included two phases of the text-based approach in the lesson plan, i.e. BKOF and MDOT.

In BKOF, the students are introduced to the social context, social purpose, and general cultural context of a certain model of the text that will be studied (Richards, 2006). This first phase, if it is analyzed carefully, has similar characteristics with the first feature analyzed in top-down approach to discourse, i.e. social relationships and shared knowledge which focus on the contexts and social purposes of a certain discourse type.

In modelling stage, the students both investigate the structural pattern and language features of the model text and compare the model with other examples of the same text type (Richards, 2006). Again, this step has similar patterns with the next steps for top-down approach from Cook (1989), i.e. discourse type, discourse structure, discourse function. These steps aim to analyze the type, structure, and function of discourse. As the main goal of the lesson plan is intended the students to be able to arrange jumbled sentences into correct paragraphs, recombination activity is the one that suits the goal.

Recombination activity is defined as "an activity in which students are given sentences in the wrong order and asked to put them in the right one" (Cook, 1989: 158). Recombination activity is simply defined as a learning activity asking the students to arrange scrambled sentences into a correct order. This activity is also one of the activities proposed by Hyland (2003) for writing skill. Paltridge (2019) names this activity as "reassembly activity" which also has a similar concept to recombination activity,that is, jumbling discourse structures or sentences for the students to reassembly. This activity, according to Paltridge (2019), might bring students' attention to discourse structure. This type of rearranging sentences, according to Cook (1989), aims to alert students to paragraph structure, the position of topic sentences, cohesion, and the information structure within the text. In line with Cook, McCarthy (1991) also proposes the possibility to conduct classroom activities such as word order, cohesion, and tense sequences in discourse activities. In the same vein, Hyland (2003) also states that one aim of this activity is to help the students develop effective paragraphs through knowing the topic sentences, supporting sentences, and transitions.

This paper, therefore, attempts to report the teaching practice by using recombination activities. The practice starts from developing a lesson plan and implementing it in a writing class. This paper also attempts to answer five questions as reflections for the practice of teaching using a discourse-based lesson plan. Those questions include:

1. what factors that might influence the teacher in developing recombination activity?

2. are there several ways of recombining the sentences or only one? If there are several ways, what factors does the choice depend on?

3. how would the provision of a title affect the ordering?

4. should students do this exercise individually, in pairs, in groups, or as a class?

5. in what way does recombination activity help the students in developing their discourse skills?

RESEARCH METHOD

This descriptive qualitative research was supposed to involve eight students as participants, yet, those who came to the class on the day of the research were only half of them. The current research belongs to qualitative since it seeks to gather information on a certain concept about recombination activity (Creswell, 2011). The present study depicts qualitative research as the data in this research were collected in narratives or words (Lodico, 2010). These four students were students of Writing I program in a certain private language institution in Yogyakarta. This class belonged to the researcher's colleague.

Before teaching, the researcher asked the teacher about the characteristics of the students. According to the teacher, these students were categorized as lower intermediate students. They were able to use basic grammar, yet had difficulties in identifying text types and writing correct sentences in English. Class attendance from the beginning of the program was also poor, according to the teacher. Therefore, these four students were the consistent attendees among the others. The age of the participants was ranging from 23 to 27 years

old. All of them were students of master program from non-English department. Though they admitted that they had learned English since elementary schools, they still had problem with English especially in writing.

The researcher conducted this research by herself. Before teaching the class, the researcher prepared a set of lesson plan. The materials in the lesson plan were chosen by the researcher based on the topic that the students had learned previously. The lesson plan was developed for one meeting which lasted for 90 minutes. The activities in the lesson plan were divided into three, namely pre-teaching, whilst-teaching, and post-teaching. As it aimed to teach explanation texts in English, the researcher decided to adapt text-based teaching as the approach from Richards (2006).

There were only two stages of text-based approach applied in the research since recombination activities can only be conducted there. Those two stages included BKOF (Building Knowledge of the Field) and MDOT (Modelling and Deconstructing of the Text). In BKOF, the researcher brainstormed several types of text in English that the students knew by showing some pictures and asking the students to match them with correct text types. The researcher then gave some questions to the students such as: (1) are you familiar with the texts? (2) where do you usually find them? (3) in your opinion, who are the writers and the readers? (4) why do the writers write those text? and so on. The researcher then focused the discussion on explanation text.

In MDOT, the researcher provided a model of explanation text to the students as well as explained its general features. The researcher explained about the generic structure of explanation text and together with students analyzed the structure of the model text. Students were asked to analyze the structure of another text afterward. Next, the researcher focused the teaching on language features of the text. The students identified cohesive devices from other texts after the researcher highlighted the cohesive devices from the model text and explained referring expressions and conjunctions to the students. Finally, the students were asked to arrange jumbled sentences into paragraphs (recombination activity) and put those paragraphs into the correct text structure.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The following section will describe the findings from the students' responses during the teaching activity conducted by the researcher. In BKOF stage, in which the teacher asked the students to match the pictures with the correct text types, the students' skill of identifying the types of text was developed. Furthermore, when the students were asked about the writers and the readers of the texts, they were actually asked about the senders and the receivers of those texts as well. This activity might also be considered as an activity to activate students' schemata about text types.

Though the students were able to answer all questions correctly, it seemed that in the beginning they did not really get the idea about explanation text. However, after doing picture-text type matching, they could even give another example of the explanation text they knew earlier.

In MDOT stage, there were several activities done by the students. The first activity was identifying the generic structure of explanation text. From four

students, one student answered this question wrongly. He missed mentioning general statement or introduction as the first part of the text. The rest of the students were able to answer correctly by mentioning three parts of the text. The next activity was asking the students to identify the language features of the texts. All of the students mentioned the use of present tense as one of the features. Some others mentioned the use of passive voice in explanation text. However, there was only one student mentioning conjunctions as its language feature. Although the three of them did not mention conjunctions as the language feature of explanation text, they could answer the next tasks about referring expressions and conjunctions correctly.

Unfortunately, from two recombination activities provided by the researcher, only one activity that could be done by the students in the classroom. Most of the time in teaching was spent by the students to do tasks about language features of the text. The one and only recombination activity completed by the students was the last activity in which they worked individually. The individual task was chosen as the researcher intended to know the students' ability in ordering sentences. The result showed that from four students, only two of them successfully put the sentences into the correct order. Two students who failed to order the sentences were distracted by two sentences containing the same initial word. They were distracted by the word "oxygen" in the beginning of the two sentences, yet, they had no problem in arranging other sentences. They failed only in arranging the second part of explanation text (sequences of explanation) and succeeded in arranging introduction and conclusion parts. Amazingly, all four

students were able to identify which paragraphs belong to which parts.

The researcher added three more questions for the students as a reflection for the teaching and learning process. The first question asked about the difficulty that might be encountered by the students during the learning process. Two students stated that they had difficulty in arranging the sentences while the others stated that they had no problem with the tasks. The second question was whether title was important for them to understand the text and to arrange the sentences into paragraphs. Two students believed title provision helped them in arranging the sentences while the others said it did not help them at all. One student emphasized that it was the knowledge of text structure that might help him in doing recombination activity. The last question for reflection was asking the students whether by understanding the language features of the text would help them in arranging sentences into the correct order. It seems all students shared the same opinion for the last question. All of them stated that the knowledge of language features of the text helped them in doing recombination activity. They even mentioned that it was the knowledge of conjunctions that helped them in doing the activities.

Discourse analysis cannot be separated from our lives. It is even one major point in learning a language. Discourse analysis is needed as language cannot be understood in isolation. Context is needed to learn language. Therefore, as English teachers, to some extent, it is important for us to teach discourse to our students. This section will answer and elaborate the aforementioned questions in

the introduction section as well as connect the theories and the findings of the research.

Factors Influencing the Teacher in Developing Recombination Activity

Based on the teaching practice, there were several factors that influenced the researchers in developing recombination activities, such as: (1) text type, (2) learners' characteristics, (3) time allocation, (4) teaching approach, (5) level of difficulty of the tasks, and (6) activities preceding recombination activities. Before developing the lesson plan for teaching recombination activity, the researcher asked the teacher about the text type that have been learned by the students. After deciding the text type that would be used, the researcher then also asked the teacher about the students' characteristics, such as level of proficiency, age, and academic background of her students. The researcher adjusted the texts to be used in the lesson plan so that they suited the students' characteristics. This decision was taken based on the suggestion from McDonough et al. (2013) stating that in the initial stage of planning the lesson, the teachers should consider the learners' characteristics such as age, level of proficiency in English, and also academic and educational level of the students. The researcher decided to include explanation texts related to science and academic since all of the students were master students. The researcher set the time allocation for one meeting for Writing I class afterward, which was 90 minutes for one meeting. Since the researcher would like to teach explanation text for the writing class, text-based approach was chosen as the teaching approach. Text-based approach is product-based communicative language teaching approaches proposed by Richards (2006). Since the lesson plan focused on teaching

recombination activity, the steps included there were only from BKOF to MDOT. Task complexity or level of difficulty of the task was another factor that influenced the researcher in developing the lesson plan. The researcher arranged the tasks in the lesson plan based on the steps in text-based approach and based on the principle of "from easy to difficult". Task complexity or level difficulty of the material is an important factor for researchers, teachers, and other curriculum planners (Nunan, 2004; McDonough et al., 2013).

The last factor influenced the researcher in developing the lesson plan was deciding activities preceding the recombination activity. The goal of the teaching was that the students were able to arrange sentences into correct paragraphs. Therefore, this rearranging-sentences activity was placed in the last step of teaching. The researcher put several activities before the recombination activity to assist the students in arranging sentences into good paragraphs. The researcher followed top-down approach to developing students' discourse skills from Cook (1989) in deciding the preceding activities before the main activities. Cook (1989) proposed seven sequences in top-down approach starting from social relationship, shared knowledge, discourse type, discourse structure, discourse function, conversational mechanism, and cohesion. Conversational mechanism was excluded from the lesson plan as it was not designed for teaching speaking skills. The social relationship and shared knowledge steps were reflected in Task 1 in which the researcher put some pictures and text type and asked the students to match them and answered some questions. The questions included who the possible writers (senders)

and the readers (receivers) of the texts (pieces of discourse) were, and why the writers wrote the text (social purposes of the text). Furthermore, discourse type, structure, and function steps were reflected from Task 2 to Task 4 in which the students were provided with a model of explanation text, its generic structure, and its purposes, respectively. In addition, Task 5 to Task 7 reflected the cohesion step in which the researcher presented both explanation and tasks about referring expressions and conjunctions found in explanation text. Lastly, the researcher provided recombination activities in which for the last activity, the researcher also asked the students to identify the structure of the text they have arranged.

Ways to Recombination Activities

There is possibly more than one way to recombine sentences. The recombination activity proposed in the lesson plan is one of those ways. There were two tasks for recombination in the lesson plan, i.e. Task 8 and Task 9. In developing these two tasks, two different explanation texts were used. In Task 8, the researcher jumbled the sentences in the second part of the text while introduction and conclusion parts were already in the correct order. The students were asked to rearrange the second part only. Meanwhile, in Task 9, the researcher jumbled all the sentences in the text and then asked the students to arrange those sentences. The jumbled sentences in both Task 8 and Task 9 were either in the form of simple, compound, or complex sentences. Another way of recombining sentences is by scrambling text into several simple sentences. From those simple sentences, the students were asked to combine the sentences, perhaps, using the right conjunctions. This activity is called

approximation. The ways of recombining the sentences depend much on the students' level of proficiency, and also learning objectives from the teacher. Cook (1989) even claims that the ways of recombining sentences depend on the higher levels of discourse, such as the sender's perception of the reader's knowledge and interest, the function of the discourse, its topic, and the context in which it is used.

The Effect of a Title Provision to the Ordering

From four students involved in the research, two of them believed that title provision could help them in arranging the sentences, while two others disagreed with this. They said that title was not really important since they could guess the title of the text from the jumbled sentences. Those who believed that title provision was important claimed that it might help them in understanding and knowing the topic or the context of the text thus it made them easier in arranging the sentences. It was not surprising that these two students who claimed that title provision was important were those who succeeded ordering the sentences into a good text. Therefore, of course, title provision would affect the ordering activity as it would activate the students' schemata and give them a topic of the text, thus make them easier in arranging the sentences.

Procedures of Recombination Activities

Several procedures of doing learning activities, such as in pairs, in groups, or as a class, are possible to be created for recombination activity. There are some factors that might be considered by the teacher in deciding whether a certain recombination activity is done in what settings such as (1) students' characteristics,

(2) learning objectives, (3) classroom space, and (4) time allocation. Every student has different characteristics. Some students prefer to work alone while the others love to work with their friends (McDonough et al., 2013). Learning objective is also another factor that might influence the teacher's decision. For example, as the researcher would like to see each student's ability in arranging jumbled sentences into correct order, the task that required them to work individually was chosen instead of the one requiring them to work in pairs. Classroom space consisting of big tables and chairs became other restriction for the researcher to conduct in-pairs or in-group activities as it was impossible to move that furniture. This notion is supported by McDonough et al. (2013) stating that either room space or classroom furniture may affect the classroom management settings. Time allocation is presumably the last factor influencing the teacher to choose in what ways recombination activities are done. If it is possible to conduct both group and individual activities then that must be great. However, if the teacher has limited time and should choose one type of activity only, it is better for him or her to refer back to the learning objective.

In the lesson plan, the researcher arranged two recombination activities to be done both in pairs and individually. However, due to limited time, the researcher could only conduct one of those two activities. At last, it was recombination activity to be done individually that was chosen by the researcher as the learning objective of the lesson plan was to make each student be able to arrange jumbled sentences into coherent paragraphs.

The Use of Recombination Activities Help Students Develop Their Discourse Skills

The recombination activity in this case is defined as a series of learning activities from the BKOF stage to the MDOT stage. Each stage, as previously mentioned in paragraphs answering the first question, was developed following the steps for top-down approach to develop students' discourse skills. Therefore, throughout the learning activities from the beginning to the end of the lesson, the students' discourse skills such as awareness of and knowledge about senders and receivers of some discourse types, discourse structure, discourse function, and cohesion have been developed. It was reflected from the students' reflection mentioning that the presence of tasks asking about language features of the text helped them in doing recombination activity. Cook (1989) also claims that recombination activity may draw students' awareness of the paragraph structure, the position of topic sentence, and the cohesion and the information structure.

CONCLUSION

Discourse analysis is needed as language cannot be understood in isolation. Therefore, as English teachers, we might teach discourse to our students. The researcher, in this research, designed a one-meeting lesson plan with a series of discourse-based activities such as recombination activities to develop students' discourse skills. It is found that in the beginning when the students were asked about text types in English, they did not answer confidently. However, after given a task requiring them to match pictures and text types, they could do the tasks correctly.

When the researcher explained about explanation text and its features, those students fully gave their attention to the researcher. Though one of them could not answer the question about text structure correctly, all of them got correct answers for the tasks about referring expressions and conjunctions. Unfortunately, only two students succeeded in arranging the sentences into correct order for the recombination task. The rest of the students answered wrongly only for second part of explanation text named sequence of explanation. From the result of reflection question, it was found that all of them agreed that the knowledge of language features of the text helped them in doing recombination activity. They even mentioned that it was the knowledge of conjunctions that helped them in doing the activities. These results, therefore, prove that the use of recombination activity may develop students' discourse skills.

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