

AN ASSESSMENT ON COHERENCE AND GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURE OF STUDENTS' WRITING SKILLS

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Abstract: *This study is aiming at assessing students' competency in writing skill at First Semester Public Health Students of Diponegoro University. The target population were 25 Public Health students taking English class. A writing test was conducted to asses the students coherence, grammar, and sentence structure. This descriptive qualitative study is to discover (1) students' awareness of applying transition signals devices to connect ideas (conjunction words, substitution, reference and ellipsis to create coherence. (2) students' awareness in grammar and sentence structure. The result revealed that students found no problems using connective devices in their sentences. However, concerning grammar and sentence structure students faced difficulties in 1) Subject - Verb Agreement in which students often ignored plural forms, missed verbs, missed subjects in a sentence or they sometimes put two verbs in one sentence. 2) They were also still confused dealing with pronoun references. 3) Students also tend to write too long sentences without any punctuations.*

INTRODUCTION

Among the four main skills in English: reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Writing is generally considered as one of the most difficult skill for foreign language students. "Even native speakers feel difficulty in showing a good command of writing."¹ (Johnstone, Ashbaugh& Warfield, 2002). "The ESL teachers include writing skills in the syllabus because this is an essential element for students' academic success."² (Kellogg, 2008) because writing helps to i) reinforce the grammatical structure, ii) enhance the students' vocabulary, iii) and assist other language skills such as reading, listening and speaking.

In many ESP (English for Specific Purpose) courses, writing is also considered important to improve students ability. In this course writing practice is usually integrated with other skills mostly reading, and it is provided to develop student's writing skill beginning from simple sentences, to complex, compound, complex compound sentences, paragraphs and later essays. "The actual goal, however, is not really the acquisition of the writing skills itself, but the students' ability in recognizing the arrangement of sentences into paragraphs and essay together with their sentence linkers or sequence signals to show cohesive in expression".³ (A Team of Writers: 2002)

Knowledge of Grammar and sentence structure are the crucial problems faced by the students. It needs an extra attention to make them understand about the components involved in this element of writing.

In the process of writing, sentence is the basic part of forming a good paragraph of a text. Every single sentence plays its important roles to the whole message, especially for written text. This means a meaningful sentence will be based on its structure. Therefore, the knowledge of sentence structure, grammar structure, as well as cohesion and coherence is crucial for students in doing writing practice. However, the fact that sometimes the texts they write are mostly incorrect, just like a list of ideas with no connection one to the other, the words, phrases being jumbled, non-cohesive or incoherent.

The data to be analyzed for this research is taken from students' Mid Term writing test of Public Health Students of Diponegoro University taking English Course in Semester 1. The main purposes of this research are to analyze (1) to what extent students are aware of applying transition signals devices to connect ideas (conjunction words, substitution, reference and ellipsis in order to create coherence.? (2) If there are any mistakes in grammar and sentence structure? The data, then, were analyzed based on coherence and grammatical structure.

LITERARY REVIEW

The terms cohesion and coherence are interrelated meaning they cannot be separated. Cohesion could refer to the ways in which sentences are connected by cohesive devices in which readers can perceive the semantic relationship between the sentences. Meanwhile coherence is the unity of the text in which each sentence or each paragraph in the text clings together to form a discourse that the readers can perceive its meaning. The unity of the text can be built through the use of cohesive devices that connect ideas from one sentence to the other or from one paragraph to the other. "The cohesive devices which are often used to connect ideas in writing are among others: references, substitutions and ellipsis, conjunctions and lexical cohesion"⁴ (Nunan, 1993). Thus, with cohesive devices, a writer is able to show how parts of a text, sentences or paragraphs, relate to one another.

According Alice Oshima and Ann Hogue (1999), "there are four ways to achieve

⁴ Nunan, D. Introducing discourse analysis. London: Penguin Books Ltd.1993

coherence in a paragraph (1) repeating key nouns, (2) using pronouns, (3) the use of transition signals, and (4) logical order”.⁵ However, in this research the author only focused on the use of transition signals in the students’ writing.

Table 1 Types of Transition Signals

Meanings/ Function	Sentence Connectors		Clause Connectors		Others
	Transition Phrases	Conjunctive Adverbs	Coordinate Conjunctions	Subordinate Conjunctions	
To Introduce an additional Idea	<i>In addition</i>	<i>Furthermore moreover besides also too</i>	<i>and</i>		<i>Another (+ noun) An additional (+ noun)</i>
To introduce an opposite idea	<i>On the other hand In contrast</i>	<i>However Nevertheless Instead Still nonetheless</i>	<i>But yet</i>	<i>Although Though Even though Whereas while</i>	<i>In spite of (+ noun) Despite (+ noun)</i>
To introduce a choice or alternative		<i>otherwise</i>	<i>or</i>	<i>If unless</i>	
To introduce a restatement/ explanation	<i>In fact indeed</i>	<i>That is</i>			
To introduce an example	<i>For example For instance</i>				<i>An example of (+ noun) Such as (+ noun)</i>
To introduce a conclusion/summary	<i>In conclusion In summary In brief In short</i>				

⁵ Oshima, A. and Hogue, A. Writing Academic English. New York: Longman.1999. 40-45

	<i>indeed</i>				
To introduce a result	<i>Accordingly</i> <i>As a result</i> <i>As a</i> <i>consequenc</i> <i>e</i>	<i>Therefore</i> <i>Consequentl</i> <i>y</i> <i>Hence</i> <i>thus</i>	<i>so</i>		

Grammar function in a sentence is giving sense and meaning to language, therefore to master the four skills of language; listening, speaking, reading, writing, the knowledge of grammar is required. It can be said that applying the correct grammar and structure is crucial in mastering English, moreover grammatical structure between Indonesian and English is completely different. "The components of sentence and grammar structure are formulated by many writers; one of them is created by Alice Oshima and Ann Hogue (2006)"⁶.

Herewith are the components to analyze students' writings:

1. The paragraph must follow correct verb tenses. English, like some other languages, has the particular forms of tense. It shows the time and the action done, whether it is in past or present or future. Correct verb tense becomes one of the requirements of good writing so that the readers understand the time line of the actions.
2. There is a subject-verb agreement in the sentences. Subject-verb agreement is crucial to avoid misunderstanding and help the readers to identify the meaning in which the writer expects to tell.
3. The correct use of articles (a, the) in the paragraphs, because it shows whether the matters are already mentioned or know or not. The different usage between article and determiner is also important to be learnt. Article (a) should be used for unknown or unmentioned thing, and determiner (the) should be used for known or mentioned thing.
4. The paragraph has the correct use of pronoun agreement / reference. Pronoun agreement/reference sometimes becomes a problem for English as Foreign Language Learners. Avoiding repetition is one of the advantages of using pronoun in a sentence, as well as the knowledge of which pronoun replaces which noun (reference).
5. A good paragraph has no choppy sentences. Choppy sentences are extra information given in sentences to provide clear information to the readers. He/she considers that the short sentences need to be separated by period or full stop. However, in writing matters, it is called as choppy sentence. Choppy sentences are often written in the beginning of a text. Because the writer wants to introduce the things he/she wants to write. Too many choppy sentences in a text will show that the text is not sophisticated
6. The paragraph has no stringy sentences. A stringy sentence often happens when a writer forgets or does not realize that he/she has to add some discourse marker. The

⁶ Oshima, A. and Hogue, A. Writing Academic English. New York: Longman.2006

discourse marker plays its role as a connector between clauses or ideas. If the connector is missing, then the sentence will be stringy.

7. The paragraph has no sentence fragment. Unlike a stringy sentence, a sentence fragment happens when the writer uses a connector but there is no clause follows the previous clause. So, the connector is redundant. It is commonly called as an unfinished sentence. The solution provided is deleting the connector and give a period; or continuing the unfinished sentence by adding another clause.
8. The paragraph has no run-on sentences/comma splices. Run-on sentence or comma splices often happen whenever there are no punctuation between two clauses, like comma, period, semicolon, or colon. A run-on sentence can confuse the readers when they find two clauses with two different ideas within one sentence and without any markers or connectors.

This research is a replication of previous two studies 1) "Coherence and Cohesion: An Analysis of the Final Project Abstract of the Undergraduate Students of PGRI Semarang."⁷ (by Suwandi, 2016) This article analyzed the coherence and cohesion of students' abstracts concerning the cohesive devices which are often used to connect ideas in writing are among others: references, substitutions and ellipsis, conjunctions and lexical cohesion. The result shows that the abstracts analyzed have not satisfactorily achieved coherence though some cohesive devices like reference, conjunctions, ellipsis which are used to link one sentence to the other. Some grammatical mistakes are also found such as the plural forms, active-passive voice.

The other research was conducted by 2) Aisyah Ririn Perwikasih Utar (2019)⁸ she analyzed Students' grammar and sentence structure in writing"⁸ The writer used texts written by the students as the data source randomly chosen from the whole final projects. The result revealed that 63% of the total texts are grammatically incorrect which consist of 10% stringy sentences, 5% comma splice, 10% run-on sentence, and 12% sentence fragment. The percentages found in the analysis show that most of the students make some errors in their grammar (tenses) and mis used of conjunctions.

RESEARCH METHOD

This is a descriptive qualitative research since the data are in the form of words, phrases or sentences. "Bogdan and Biklen (1992:30) state that one of the characteristics of qualitative research is descriptive meaning the data collected are mostly in the form of texts or pictures rather than numbers. "⁹ The procedure of research can produce the descriptive data which is more informative and explicitly representative.

Twenty-five essay tests were taken randomly out of 150 students of Public Health Students of Diponegoro University who took English 1 Course. These essay tests were then analyzed in terms of their coherence as well as grammar and sentence structure. To analyze

⁷ Suwandi, Coherence and Cohesion : An Analysis of The Final Project Abstracts of the Undergraduate Students of PGRI Semarang, *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, Vol. 5 No. 2, January 2016, pp. 253-261

⁸ Utari, Aisyah Ririn Perwikasih. Students' Grammar and Sentence Structure of the Texts written in Paragraph Writing Class. *PROMINENT Journal*, Volume 2, Number 1, January 2019, pp. 117-123

⁹ Bogdan, C and Biklen, K. *Qualitative Research for Education*. Boston: Advision of Sinn and Schuster, Inc.1992.30.

their coherence, the writer concerned on how the ideas presented and delivered to the readers in the texts. Therefore, the writer focused on the investigation of the coherence of the students' writing.

There were some steps taken by the writer to analyze the students' texts. At first, she took notes on the students' texts based on coherence (the use of connective devices in the sentences), Vocabulary, and grammar and sentence structure (including tenses). Then she checked on any mistakes in the texts (both coherence and grammar). The analysis was based on the transition signals and students' writing components by Alice Oshima and Ann Hogue mentioned above.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The 25 written essays by the students as the data source were randomly selected out of 150 essays. Based on the analysis of the data, it was discovered that from coherence point of view 1) only 3 students (12%) did not use transition signals in their writing assignments, 2) only 2 students (8%) used double connectors in a sentence, 3) only 2 students (8%) put coordinate connectors in the wrong position.

While from grammar and sentence structure, the result is as follows

- 1) In terms of tenses, many students did not find any difficulties, only one student wrote passive sentence which should be active: "So, the amount **will be increased** → it should be So, the amount **will increase**.
- 2) Students made many mistakes in term of subject verb agreement
 - They forgot to put plural form "s" for example in a sentence "*There are some alternative manner* → it should be *There are some alternative manners*
 - Many students also missed putting subjects in their sentences, for example "..... *but actually is endangering* → it should be ... but actually **it** is endangering.
 - Some students missed putting verbs in their sentences or they put double verbs in one sentence.
- 3) Some students did not understand the pronoun reference, therefor they put a pronoun without any noun it refers to. For example in the sentence. "Plastic waste that accumulates without realizing **it** is also dangerous." **It** in this sentence doesn't refer to any previous mentioned noun, so this sentence is confusing.
- 4) Many students wrote too long sentences with many topics without any punctuations so the sentences just like a list of things.
For example: "*Plastic is a material consisting of any wide range of synthetic or semi-synthetic organic compound, there are malleable and therefore can be molded into solid objects.*" → This sentence should be broken down into two sentences since there are two topics discussed.
- 5) In many cases, students tended to use short forms like isn't, wrote many imperative forms, and used wrong vocabulary.

Below are the table of analysis

Tabel 2 Analysis on Coherence, Grammar and Sentence Structure

Analysis on Coherence, Grammar and Sentence Structures

No	Name	Previous High School	Coherence		Vocabulary	Grammar (<u>structure</u> and tenses)
1	Hillary Ruth	Jayapura	Connectors used - Not only, but also - If - By	The flow one paragraph to another is not so good	Paragraph 2 - Ways to reduce → should be replaced with → actions	Paragraph 1 - Informal isn't → is not - If not manage → If it is not managed/ If not managed Paragraph 2 - Too many words in one <u>sentences</u> Paragraph 3 - No ending signal like "In conclusion, etc - The <u>us</u> of imperative → Learn to love the environment ...
2	Jihan Alqisti	Cibitung Bekasi	- Although - Only - Still - Wrong connector <u>But</u> in paragraph 2 → <u>However</u> - <u>Although</u>	ok	Paragraph 3 - Pronoun " <u>This</u> " in first line has no reference (what object/person this replaces?)	No ending signal
3	Lucyana Devina	Jakarta	-From -First -Second -As	The intro is ok The body / <u>action</u> is not good Conclusion → ok		- Many imperatives such as <u>as</u> : get ..., refill ... - No ending signal (<u>In</u> conclusion ...

CONCLUSION

There are two main purposes of this research, they are to discover: (1) students' awareness of applying transition signals devices to connect ideas (conjunction words, substitution, reference and ellipsis to create coherence. (2) students' awareness in grammar and sentence structure.

Based on the result of the analysis, it was discovered that concerning sentence coherence – students did not find any problems using connective devices in their sentences despite the fact that they sometimes put the wrong connectors or misplaced connectors. Whereas, concerning grammar and sentence structure the three biggest problems for students in writing essays are 1) Subject - Verb Agreement in which they sometimes forgot to put plural forms, verbs, subjects in a sentence or they sometimes put two verbs in one sentence. 2) They also still confused dealing with pronoun references. 3) Students also tend to write too long sentences without any punctuation which often confuse the readers.

Based on the above conclusions some actions can be done to improve students writing by asking them to practice writing simple sentences before complex sentences. Moreover grammar practice on pronoun references and subject verb relation is also important for the students to improve their mastery in writing skill

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