

ENHANCING STUDENTS GRAMMAR BY WRITING JOURNALS

(a case study: analyzing a student's journal in one semester)

Nita Henita Koesoemah

English Department - Politeknik Negeri Bandung, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

The title of the research report is *Enhancing Students Grammar by Writing Journals* (a case study: analyzing a student's journal in one semester). The aim of the research is to analyze how writing journals can enhance students grammar of English which is influenced by Indonesian. As there is a big difference of present-past form of the verbs in both Indonesian and English, this research focused on those forms. The errors found in the students' journals were analyzed. To get the answer of the aims, descriptive method is used. The data source is one student's journal which is written in one semester (semester 2) by one of the students of 2012 English department. The result obtained is that there is an improvement in students' grammar (in this research the use of present-past form the verbs) through writing journals.

Key words: *enhancing, journals , grammar*

INTRODUCTION

Among the four skills of English ability (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing), as Hamp&Heasley (2006) stated, writing ability is often considered as the skill that should be learnt after the three other skills (Listening, Speaking, and Reading) not only by the foreign/second language speakers but also by native speakers. This is also applied to students of D3 English program of Politeknik Negeri Bandung. They learn Writing 1 subject in the second semester after they learn Listening 1, Reading 1, and Speaking 1. The subject of writing is given to prepare them to write their final project

report which is written in English, so they have to be able to write formal written English.

Since English is a foreign language in Indonesia, it makes many Indonesians find it hard to write in English. In the year of 2000s there were many studies on the issue that writing English for EFL students is difficult especially at the beginning of their study (Benson, 2002; Cedar, 2004; Chen & Huang, 2003; Collins, 2002; Jarvis, 2000). When students write in English, they usually concern about English Grammar but the big difference of grammar in English and Indonesian makes many students consider writing in English is difficult. Good writing is written in a good grammar. This condition could lead to lack of motivation and self confidence in producing English writing works. It also applies to students of D3 program of English Department Politeknik Negeri Bandung.

Having not enough confidence in their grammar could make students feel reluctant to practice writing, if they are asked to write formal writing. This condition can discourage them to write in English. Writing ability actually can be developed by writing continually but many students do not take any interest in this subject as they feel uncomfortable when their writing which they feel has a lot of mistakes and errors will be corrected by their lecturer, as stated by Hedge (1991). This finding is supported by Hamp dan Heasley (2006) who state that some people write spontaneously and feel excited to know that their writings are read by other people, but not by their lecturers. When the people who are going to read their writing are their lecturers, they become reluctant to do so.

This problem should be solved since the subject of writing is an academic pre-requirement. To overcome the problem, a good method that can motivate students to write without any pressure is needed. Cited from Chandrasegaran (2002), writing outside classroom is a way to improve students' ability and Spaventa (2000) supports the idea by stating that one way to practice writing is by writing a journal which is a kind of notebook in which the writer puts forward his/her ideas, opinions, and the descriptions of his/her daily activities.

In this research, enhancing students' grammar by writing journals was carried out to find the influence of writing English journal to the improvement students' grammar. In this research, the researcher limits the grammar in *'the use of present-past form of the verbs'*. The problem

identification is: Is there any significant change in the English journals written from the early semester to the end of the semester to their grammar (*the use of present-past form of the verbs*)? Based on the problem identification, the purpose of the research is to identify the improvement of students' grammar in their present-past form of the verbs by writing journal in one semester.

The result of the research is aimed to contribute to the lecturers to motivate their students to write in English outside class in which one of them is journal writing. This research could also motivate students to write more, especially in English in a more-friendly way by writing in a way that students feel comfortable with. This could make them find writing as a challenge. Last, this research could give a contribution to the development of English syllabus, especially Writing.

THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

In this theoritical framework of this study, the grammar, especially the use of present-past form of the verbs is used.

Grammar

According to Hornby (2014) grammar is the rules in a language for changing the form of words and joining them into sentences. Swan (2008) pointed out that grammar takes more than just a sentence building. He comes to a point that there are limitations in communication systems. For example, if we combine three words 'fire', 'house', 'scary', it will be confusing whether the sentence is 'There is scary fire in the house' or 'There is fire in the scary house.' He also states that word by itself can be used to talk about the world but the relationship is not clear. For example, 'chicken, cat, ate', it's not clear whether 'the chicken ate the cat or the cat ate the chicken'. Another thing is the words combination cannot say the meaning behind it. For example, the words 'fire house' means 'there is a fire in the house.', or 'there is no fire in the house.' From the above explanation we can see how grammar is important.

The present-past form of the verbs

Cited from English Grammar verbs from British Council and English page.com (2016), the present form of the verbs is the base form of the verb: *play, go, take*.

For the third person (she/he/it) adds an **-s**: *he plays football*. The present form of the verbs is used to talk about something in the present (*they go to school by bus*), or something that happens again and again in the present (*He always takes the garbage out*). The present tense of the verb is also used to talk about something that is always true (*The sun goes around the earth*), and to talk about something that is fixed in the future, Schedule (*The flight departs at 8 this evening*). The past form of the verbs is used for completed action in the past (*We went to Bali last year*), a series of completed actions (*He went home, took a bath, and went to sleep*), duration in past (*she studied English in London for a year*), habits in the past (*I learned how to drive when I was seventeen*), and past facts for generalizations (*Tim smoked a lot when he was a teenager*).

The use of verbs between English and Indonesian is different. The use of verbs of different time is the basic difference between English and Indonesian. English verbs are used differently in different times or tenses. This is not the case Indonesian verbs. There are no special rules when the verbs are used, the form of the verbs is not influenced by the change of time.

For example:

In Indonesian:

- *Dia sedang **bermain** sepakbola sekarang.*
- *Dia akan **bermain** sepakbola besok.*
- *Dia telah **bermain** sepakbola.*

In English:

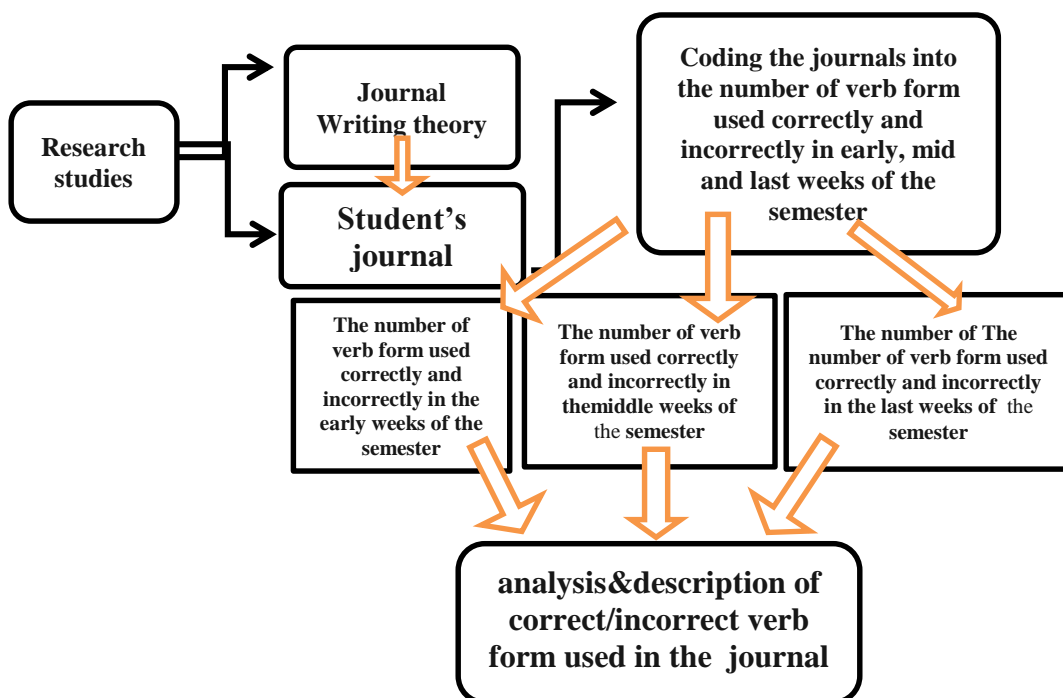
- He **is playing** football at the moment.
- He **will play** football tomorrow.
- He **has played** football at the moment.

From the above examples, it is very clear that in Indonesian structure there is no difference of the use of the verbs along with the time while in the English structure, the use of the verbs is really influenced by the time the verbs refer to.

METHOD

Descriptive method is used in this research. Research studies on journal writing and the student's one semester journal is analyzed. The next step is coding the journals based on the time she was written (the ones written in the first weeks, middle, and

last weeks of the semester). Then the journal is read and the data are collected, analyzed and described related to the use of present-past form of the verbs. Visually the research procedures could be seen below:



Picture 1: Research Procedures

The data of this research is English journal which was written in one semester by one student of D3 program of English Department 2012. In the process of writing journals, the students were given a freedom to write any topic and form they feel comfortable with and in the process, there was no involvement of the lecturer in the correction. This was done to avoid the feeling of reluctance in writing the journals and through this process. The researcher could get accurate and reliable data. The research subject was chosen randomly, to find out the accurate result that could be applied to any student. The data are then analyzed and described to answer the problem identification. The data are analyzed with the following systematics: 1) data reduction, 2) data display, and conclusion identification. To get the frequency of misused the present-past form of the verbs, the number of the frequency misused the present-past form of the verbs and percentage is used. Every number of error has the value of 1. The formula is:

$$P = \frac{f}{n} \times 100\%$$

Where:

P = The percentage

F = The frequency

n = The number of population

100% = Fixed number

Since this study is to find out whether there is improvement in the student's use of present-past form of the verbs, the percentage of correct/incorrect used of present-past form of the verbs in the student's journal is calculated. Applying the simple formula above, the interpretation of the formula in this study is:

P= The percentage (of correct/incorrect used of present-past form of the verbs)

F= The frequency of correct/incorrect used of present-past form of the verbs

n= The number of verbs used in the journal

100% = Fixed number

Data Interpretation

100% = no correct form in present-past form of the verbs

76,00% - 99,99 % = mostly incorrect

51,00% - 75,99% = more than a half

50% = a half

26,00% - 49,99% = less than a half

1,00 % - 25,99% = a small part

0,00% = no incorrect verb forms are used

The P value in every parts of the semester (the first weeks, the second weeks, and the last weeks of the semester) is then compared. The difference of the correct and the incorrect verb forms used is also compared. The result is whether there is student's grammar improvement in their journal writing or no improvement.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To make the analysis of the students' journals easier, the errors of the use of present-past form of the verbs are coded. For example, Diany's diary in the first weeks of the semester is coded D/01/01. This code means the first diary in the first weeks of the semester. The report coding of the data is shown below:

Table 1: Data Source Coding

No	Diary	code
1	The Diary written in the first weeks of the semester	D/01
2	The Diary in the second weeks of the semester	D/02
3	The Diary in the last weeks of the semester	D/03

1. The Analysis and Description of errors in the present-past form of the verbs

The analysis of errors in the present-past form of the verbs is divided into three groups. Group one is the diary written in the first weeks of the semester (01), Group two is the diary written in the second weeks of the semester (02), and Group three is the diary written in the third weeks of the semester (03).

The analysis and description of the errors in the present-past form of the verbs of Group 1

From the diary written in the first weeks of the semester there are 655 verbs used with 374 verbs which are correctly used while 281 words are incorrectly used. The percentage of the correct verb form used is 0.57%, while the incorrect verb form used is 0.43%. The percentage of the correct and incorrect used of verb form is almost the same; the difference is only 14%. The sample of errors in the first weeks of the semester is shown below:

Table 2: The incorrect used of the present-past form of the verbs of Group 1

The incorrect used of verbs used in the diary	The correct used of verbs	code
<i>Today I <u>go</u> to campus at 6.40 a.m.</i>	<i>Today I <u>went</u> to campus at 6.40 a.m.</i>	D/01
<i>I <u>get</u> there by motorbike as usual</i>	<i>I <u>got</u> there by motorbike as usual</i>	D/01
<i>I <u>think</u> Mrs. Nita will ...</i>	<i>I <u>thought</u> Mrs. Nita will ...</i>	D/01
<i>I <u>am</u> wrong.</i>	<i>I <u>was</u> wrong.</i>	D/01
<i>I <u>have</u> to write all the things happen to me.</i>	<i>I <u>had</u> to write all the things happen to me.</i>	D/01
<i>I opened my laptop and <u>watching</u> movie.....</i>	<i>I opened my laptop and <u>watched</u> movie.....</i>	D/01
<i>We <u>are</u> <u>watching</u> movie from Indonesia.</i>	<i>We <u>watched</u> movie from Indonesia.</i>	D/01
<i>Mrs. Hazma came to class, so I <u>turn</u> off my laptop and <u>pay</u> attention to</i>	<i>Mrs. Hazma came to the class, so I <u>turned</u> off my laptop and <u>pay</u> attention to</i>	D/01
<i>My mom <u>become</u> very sensitif when she <u>didn't have</u> some money.</i>	<i>My mom <u>becomes</u> very sensitive when she <u>doesn't have</u> money.</i>	D/01
<i>In the morning I just stayed at home and <u>listening</u> to the music.</i>	<i>In the morning I just stayed at home and <u>listen</u> to the music.</i>	D/01

The analysis and description of the errors in the present-past form of the verbs of Group 2

From the diary written in the second weeks of the semester, there are 522 verbs used with 357 verbs which are correctly used while 163 words are incorrectly used. The percentage of the correct verb form used is 0.68%, while the incorrect verb form used is 0.31%. The percentage of the correct and incorrect used of verb form is getting a bigger distance. The difference is now 37%. The sample of errors in the first weeks of the semester is shown below:

Table 3: The incorrect used of the present-past form of the verbs of Group 2

The use of verbs used in the diary	The correct used of verbs	code
<i>I saw my appearance on a mirror and my face <u>like not</u> fresh.</i>	<i>I saw my appearance on a mirror and my face <u>was not</u> fresh.</i>	D/02
<i>It because my hair <u>is</u> too long.</i>	<i>It because my hair <u>was</u> too long.</i>	D/02
<i>It <u>spend</u> 20.000 my money</i>	<i>I <u>spent</u> 20.000 of my money</i>	D/02
<i>My partner....asked me again because she <u>cannot</u> understand...</i>	<i>My partner....asked me again because she <u>couldn't</u> understand...</i>	D/02
<i>We talked much that day and I <u>think</u> ...</i>	<i>We talked much that day and I <u>thought</u> ...</i>	D/02
<i>...but I still have to enrich and <u>improving</u> my fluency when I <u>speaking</u>.</i>	<i>...but I still have to enrich and <u>improve</u> my fluency when I <u>speak</u>.</i>	D/02
<i>On sunny Saturday I invited my friends ...they <u>come</u> to my house at midday.</i>	<i>On sunny Saturday I invited my friends ...they <u>came</u> to my house at midday.</i>	D/02
<i>...it used to <u>named</u> BosschaSterrenwacht.</i>	<i>...it is used to <u>name</u> BosschaSterrenwacht.</i>	D/02
<i>Some place <u>providing</u> a pedicab for transportations.</i>	<i>Some places <u>provide</u> pedicabs for transportations.</i>	D/02
<i>She is my classmate and <u>sit</u> down next to my chair.</i>	<i>She is my classmate and <u>sits</u> down next to my chair.</i>	D/02

The analysis and description of the errors in the present-past form of the verbs of Group 3

From the diary written in the last weeks of the semester there are 295 verbs used with 231 verbs which are correctly used while 64 words are incorrectly used. The percentage of the correct verb form used is 0.78%, while the incorrect verb form used is 0.22%. The percentage of the correct and incorrect used of verb form is getting a bigger distance. The difference is now 56%. It means the students made less incorrect used of present-past form of the verbs compared to the first and second weeks of the semester. The sample of errors in the first weeks of the semester is shown below:

Table 4: The incorrect used of the present-past form of the verbs of Group 3

The use of verbs used in the diary	The correct used of verbs	code
<i>On Sunny Sunday morning....there are so many people who <u>bring</u> ...</i>	<i>On Sunny Sunday morning....there were so many people who <u>brought</u> ...</i>	D/03
<i>When I took a rest a big dog <u>come</u> to me ...</i>	<i>When I took a rest a big dog <u>came</u> to me ...</i>	D/03
<i>At 9 o'clock, I took a bath I <u>go</u> there by..</i>	<i>At 9 o'clock, I took a bath I <u>went</u> there by..</i>	D/03
<i>...farmer was working... . Suddenly, a big square truck <u>come</u> down the road.</i>	<i>...farmer was working... . Suddenly, a big square truck <u>came</u> down the road.</i>	D/03
<i>When the dog saw the cows, its <u>barking</u> out loud.</i>	<i>When the dog saw the cows, it <u>barked</u> out loud.</i>	D/03
<i>Once upon a time ...he really <u>like</u> a clear beach with trees around it.</i>	<i>Once upon a time ...he really <u>liked</u> a clear beach with trees around it.</i>	D/03
<i>Before I <u>forgot</u> ...</i>	<i>Before I <u>forget</u> ...</i>	D/03
<i>One day they <u>have</u> some planning to spend their holiday with hiking.</i>	<i>One day they <u>had</u> some plans to spend their holiday by hiking.</i>	D/03
<i>Moreover, I have home industry. My family job <u>are</u> trading but...</i>	<i>Moreover, I have a home industry. My family job <u>is</u> trading but...</i>	D/03
<i>I <u>loves</u> juice especially strawberry</i>	<i>I <u>love</u> juice especially strawberry</i>	D/03

From the analysis, the frequency of present-past forms of correct and incorrect verbs used in the student's writing in a number of verbs used is shown in the following table:

Table 5: The Frequency of Present-Past Forms Errors in a number of words

Weeks	Number of present-past verbs used	Number of correct present-past verb	Number of errors	Weeks	Number of present-past verbs used	Number of correct present-past verb	Number of errors
1	19	5	14	2	13	4	9
	18	6	12		8	3	5
	33	12	21		53	37	16
	30	19	11		11	7	4
	34	17	17		14	8	6
	14	11	3		11	6	5
	32	20	12		82	50	32
	29	14	15		80	66	14
	20	13	7		45	31	14
	37	19	18		71	52	19
	10	4	6		49	34	15
	27	15	12		68	51	17
	39	21	18		17	10	7
	45	33	12		Total: 522	357(0.68%)	163(0.31%)
	21	12	9	3	17	11	6
	67	41	26		12	7	5
	10	7	3		15	5	10
	32	23	9		42	40	2
	16	13	3		22	21	2
	8	8	0		18	13	5
	24	16	8		35	20	15
	28	9	19		20	18	2
	34	20	14		16	12	4
	28	16	12		6	5	1
	Total: 655	374(0.57%)	281(0.43%)		46	32	14
					7	7	0
					Total: 295	231(0.78%)	64(0.22%)

From Table 5, we can see that the correct forms of the verbs used from the first weeks of the semester to the second and the last weeks of the semester are increasing while the incorrect forms of the verbs used from the first weeks of the semester to the second and the last weeks of the semester are decreasing, but we can see that the number of verbs used is also decreasing. It is due to the number of words used in the journal. The problem of using the correct form of the verbs might due to the difference of the form of the verbs for present and past time in Indonesian and English. In English, the forms of the verb are changing as the time changes (Present tense or Past tense). This does not apply in Indonesian grammar.

Conclusion

Based on the finding and discussion, we can conclude that the students have problem in deciding whether to use the present or the past form of the verb in their writing. In one sentence, they often use different form of the verbs that refer to the same tense, for example: *I woke up late the I took a bath and brush my teeth*. This sentence is about the past, but the last verb is in the present form (It is not parallel with the two other verbs). Sometimes when they write about something in the past but the fact(s) that should be written in the present form, they tend to use the past form of the verbs, for example: *last night I met a handsome guy. His name was Tony*. The sentence '*His name was Tony*.' has two meanings, either the man has deceased or he has changed his name (not Tony anymore). The students have problem in choosing the correct form when they are aware that they are writing about past events, but do not realize that facts should stay in the present form.

This research has the implication to the teaching of grammar, especially the tenses. Although the students have learnt it since they were in junior high school, they still have problems. By assigning the students to write whatever they want in a diary everyday, there is a possibility for them to improve their awareness in choosing the right form of the verbs.

REFERENCES

- Cathy Benson- ELT Journal Volume 56/1 January 2002 © Oxford University Press. Retrieved from http://www3.oup.co.uk/eltj/hdb/Volume_56/Issue_01/freepdf/560068.pdf
- Cedar, P. S. (2004). Transferability and translatability of idioms by Thai-speaking learners of English. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 64(08), 2570. (UMI No. 3101068).

- Chandrasegaran, A. 2002. Intervening to Help in the Writing Process. RELC Portfolio Series 7.
- Chen, C. Y., & Huang, H. Y. (2003). L2 acquisition of subject-prominence by EFL students in Taiwan. *English Teaching & Learning*, 27(4), 99-122.
- Collins, L. (2002). The role of L1 influence and lexical aspect in the acquisition of temporal morphology. *Language Learning*, 52(1), 43-94.
- Hamp-Lyons, L. & Heasley, B. 2006. Study Writing (2nd Ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hedge, T. 1991. Writing. Hong Kong: Oxford University Press.
- Hopkins, G. 2010. Education World® Editor-in-Chief. (On Line)
- Hornby, A. S. 2014. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of "Current English". New York: Oxford University Press.
- Jarvis, S. (2000). Methodological rigor in the study of transfer: Identifying L1 influence in the interlanguage lexicon. *Language Learning*. 50(2), 245-309
- Lagan, J. 2000. College Writing Skills. London: Longman.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. 2006. The Grading of Practice Activities. A workshop presented at the National Conference for Teachers of English. San José, Costa Rica.
- Spaventa, S. 2000. Essay Writing. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Surakhmad. 1989. Pengantar Penelitian Ilmiah: Dasar, Metode, Teknik. Bandung :Tarsito.
- Swan, M. 2008. English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistic. (On Line)
- "The different use of the verbs between English and Indonesian". (2013) Retrieved from http://www.linguanaut.com/indonesian_verbs.htm.
- *What is grammar*. British council. Retrieved from <http://www.mikeswan.co.uk/elt-applied-linguistics/what-is-grammar.htm>
- *English grammar, Present tense*. (2016). Englishpage.com Retrieved from <https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/en/english-grammar/verbs/present-tense/present-simple>