The Expression of English Linguistic Time through Simple Past Tense by Indonesian Learners

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Abstract—**Based on the concept of language time, all languages in the world are divided into two categories; tense and tenseless language. As a tense language, English is grammatical since verbs change to other forms. However, Indonesian (as a tenseless one) has an ungrammatical linguistic tool, such as using noun, adverbial time, certain lexical forms, affixes, and the inherent meaning of verbs [1]. Comrie says "tense is grammaticalised expression of location in time". Thus, tense is a linguistic tool which helps people to situate various series of events in time. Indeed, the different tools raise various difficulties for Indonesian learners who learn English since they tend to assume tense as various formulas that must be memorized not as grammaticalized expression of location in time. This research aims to analyze the forms of the written expression of learners past tense through the presence of verbs in their complex sentences and describe the causes of ill formed sentences linguistically as well. The approach of this research is qualitative and structuralism by which the empirical data are presented explanatorily by utilizing morph syntactic theories. Based on the gained data, learners have not been able yet to express past tense correctly; there is no a clear concept of past tense can be viewed through their writing. Hence, teachers need to create a basic breakthrough in teaching it.**

Keywords—complex sentence; grammatical verb; linguistic time; tense

I. INTRODUCTION

As social beings, humans require other people to meet their needs. The efforts are carried out through various cooperation and communication activities among them. In the communication process, humans need language as a tool to send and receive information that basically contains a series of events in their life which occupy the points of time. Therefore, it is necessary for people to understand well how to express various events in linguistic time correctly so that they can be understood well.

Benveniste in Hoed divides time into three senses, 1) *temp's physique* (physical time), in this sense time will continue to run continuously without being stopped, 2) *temps chronique* (chronic time), a time that is re-conceptualized by humans based on a number of events that are used as conventional reference points in physical time, and 3) *linguistique temps* (linguistic time), it is a linguistic tools

contained in every language system that functions to express various events in time [2].

Fundamentally, the time which is spent by humans is natural and linear so it cannot be delayed even for a second. However, it can be re-conceptualized based on a number of events which are used as conventional reference points in natural time as presented on many calendars now a day. Therefore, humans are able to explore the time span freely, both in the past and in the future.

To express the various events in the conceptualized time, which are related to the natural time, each language has its own characteristics and provisions. In other words, each language has its own linguistic time. All languages in the world can be divided into two categories; tense and tenseless language [2]. Tense language has a linguistic tool in the form of a grammatical system which generally occurs in the verb of sentences / utterances through the process of morphology (inflectional) as in English. Conversely, tenseless language has lexicalization tools that according to Comrie "...lexicalization refers merely to integration into the lexicon of the language, without any necessary repercussions on its grammatical structure". Indonesian is a language that has a system of lexicalization [3].

Tense is grammaticalised expression of location in time. It relates the time of the situation referred to some other time, usually to the moment of speaking. The commonest tenses found in languages are present, past, and future [4-6]. Generally, linguists assume that time is represented in a straight line with events that occurred in the past occupy the left side of the line and events that occur in the future occupy the position to the right of the line. Meanwhile, the current time is in the middle of the line represented by a point 0 (as a deictic point).
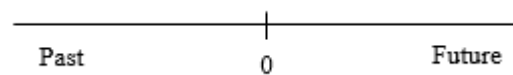

Fig. 1. Time diagram.

Based on Reichenbach's theory, those 3 absolute tenses above are represented as E ___ S; E, S; and S ___ E [7]. In the former representation, event (E) is to the left of the reference point S (at the utterance) which illustrates the past situation.

Next, event (E) coincides with the time of utterance (S), which indicates the current moment (punctual). Finally, the future time marker with event (E) is to the right of the speech time (S). S is deictive and has two roles: generally as a reference point at the utterances and specifically it links E to the time of speech. As expressed by Hornstein "..... an S point must be anchored within the discourse [7]. The moment of speech is always available as a default value for this purpose. However, S can be anchored in other ways as well...". The application of linguistic time will be more complicated without understanding the concept clearly when some activities should be put in the time line, as shown in the following figure.
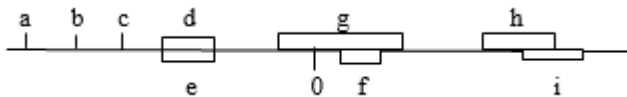

Fig. 2. Representation of situation.

In Indonesian, for example, people can express a series of events in the following sentence "*Aku memperoleh souvenir itu ketika berkunjung ke Jogja*". The sentence informs that an event *Aku memperoleh souvenir itu* (obtaining a souvenir) occured in the past (before the time of speech), and it is known from the clause *ketika berkunjung ke Jogja* (when I visited Jogja). There is no change in the sentence verb (*memperoleh* and *berkunjung*). Different from Indonesian, the example above will be expressed in English as follows "I got the souvenir when I visited Jogja". There is a change in sentence verb form from get to got and visit to visited through inflectional process. In English, the change of verb forms through that process can inform the linguistic time of an event in a sentence without adding any lexemes. In the sentence 'I was a sailor', the auxiliary verb was directly indicating that the information conveyed took place in the past.

The different tools of linguistic time above raise various difficulties for Indonesian learners who learn English. It is hard for them to express ideas, both spoken and written, through English utterances/sentences by using appropriate linguistic tools of time, especially in complex sentences which contain several events. The learners tend to be fixated on a series of formulas that have been memorized, such as simple past, simple present, simple future, simple continuous, etc. without fully understanding what the meanings of these formulas are as a comprehensive linguistic time concept.

This research aims to analyze the forms of the written expression of learners past tense through the presence of verbs in their complex sentences and describe the causes of illformed sentences linguistically. As an evaluation study, this research is expected to contribute to the educational field generally and teaching English in Junior High School specially to define the achievements, deficiencies, and their causal factors as well.

II. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with explanatory methods. According to Creswell qualitative approach is a scientific research approach that is based on constructive perspectives - the interpretation of the data comes from individual experiences, social and historical values with the aim of building a particular knowledge theory or pattern-- or participatory which is oriented to political, collaborative or change issues, or it can be a combination of both [8]. Thus, this approach requires a deep interaction between the researcher and the object under study.

The source of the research data was the essays of Junior High School students of class IX that were included in 3 classes. The selection of data sources is based on the assumption that students are heterogeneous in terms of gender, ability level, and socio-economic. Linguistic data in this study are a number of verbs contained in students' complex sentences that are collected from their portfolio. The essays then were built and processed as corpus data using The Ant Conc_64bit toolkit for concordance and text analysis.

Data processing is carried out based on the following steps, 1) building corpus data, 2) data selection, 3) classification of data, 4) data tabulation 5) data analysis, and 6) data interpretation.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In many languages, time-indications are expressed in verbal forms, the so-called tenses. In other words, tense is associated with verbs as the central of sentence/utterance that connects a situation (action or event) to a particular time [5,9,10]. Thus, tense is not only comprehended as various formulas of verb form but also as a concept of thinking in arranging some events or actions in a linguistic time.

Based on the production of learners' complex sentences, it is known that most of them put several past events incorrectly in the linguistic time (time line). Events that occurred in the past should occupy the left side of the line (E __ S), however learners tend to locate them in the middle of the line which indicates the current time (E, S). Or some events were put on the left and others were put in the middle. There is an inconsistent behaviour of learners in arranging events or actions in the linguistic time line.

TABLE I.   THE EXAMPLES OF LEARNERS' COMPLEX SENTENCES

DATA	RECONSTRUCTION	NOTE
Unfortunetly the Keraton is still close because we ø very early to visit it.	Unfortunetly the Keraton is was still close because we ø were very early to visit it.	Is – was; ø were #23:7 E1x, E2-
I think he's liked you	I think (that) he's liked you	+ is #1:27 E1pr, E2x
It was feel like we never been a friend	It was feel felt like we ø had never been a friend.	+ was; feel – felt, ø had #19:14 E1x, E2-
It was feel like we never know each other.	It was feel felt like we ø had never know known each other.	+ was; feel – felt, ø had, know – known #19:13 E1x, E2-
When the monkey ø ready to do his feed, the crocodile talk "Now, come in to the my back. I'll bring you to the my home"	When the monkey ø was ready to do his feed, the crocodile talk talked,"Now, come in to the my back(get on my back). I'll bring you to the my home".	Ø was; talk – talked, #25:12 E1-, E2x, E3pr, E4ft

Table 1. Cont.

After <u>saw</u> the movie we <u>go</u> back home for rest.	After (we) saw the movie, we ~~go~~ back went home for rest.	Go – went (kala, bentuk) #6:11 E1pt, E2x
Although we ø so close, but it feels like we ø so far.	Although we ø were so close, (but) it feels like we ø are so far.	ø were; ø are #19:15 E1-, E2axfb-
When he <u>get</u> bad score he <u>keep</u> trying and <u>work</u> hard to fix his grade.	When he ~~get~~ got bad score he ~~keep~~ kept trying and ~~work~~ worked hard to fix his grade.	Get – got, keep – kept, work – worked #16:13 E1x, E2axbx
In the afternoon we saw the animals ø being fed.	In the afternoon we saw the animals (which) ø were being fed.	ø were #9:7 E1pt, E2-
After buying some the food, we <u>playing</u> some wahana games.	After buying some the food, we ~~playing~~ played some wahana games.	Playing – played #11:3 E1pt, E2x

As Hornstein says that S is depictive and has two roles: generally as a reference point at the utterances and specifically it links E to the time of speech, learners need to understand and realize it well so they can situate some events correctly whether in the left, in the right, or might be coincide with S in the time line [7]. The imaginary time line will help learners to organize where they put those events in the right side. English linguistic time is viewed as a concept of thinking not only as a series of rules/patterns which are memorized without context, even more it is quite different from Indonesian linguistic time that is ungrammatical.

From the learner's complex sentence, "Unfortunately the Keraton <u>is</u> still close because we ø very early to visit it", there are 2 events that occurred in the past since in this writing the learner told her last holiday in Jogja (title: Wonderful Day in Jogja). Those events are The Keraton <u>was</u> still close (E1) and We <u>were</u> very early (E2). She located 2 events incorrectly by using auxiliary verb "is" in E1 (indicate current time, E, S) and without using a verb in E2 so the tense cannot be detected, however, from the context we know that both events occurred in the past (E __ S).
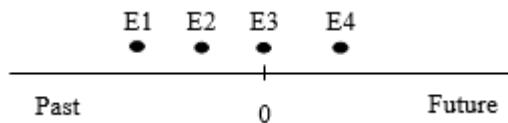

Fig. 3. Location of 2 events.

The next example is "When the monkey ø ready to do his feed, the crocodile <u>talk</u> "Now, come in to my back. I'll bring you to my home". The sentence is from narrative text in which S point is anchored based on the text itself. There are 4 events; E1 the monkey <u>was</u> ready, E2 the crocodile <u>talked</u>, E3 come in to my back (<u>get</u> on my back) (direct speech), and E4 I'<u>ll bring</u> you to my home (direct speech). When those 4 events locate in the time line, they are represented as E1 __ S; E2 __ S; E3, S; S __ E4, meanwhile learner located them as E1ø; E2, S; E3, S; S __ E4. The learner located the first two events incorrectly, E1 is without auxiliary verb so the tense cannot be detected and E2 was put in the middle of time line that indicates present

situation. In the reconstruction, attention is more given to verb form not to the choice of words and other errors of learners.
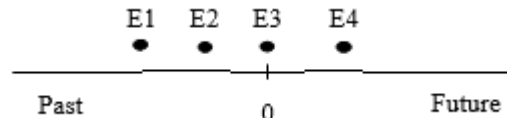

Fig. 4. Location of 4 events.

There are other same cases that are found in sentences produced by learners. Table 1 shows that learners are still inconsistent locating events in the linguistic time line (past tense).

Besides tense problems above, syntactically, it was found several ill formed sentences, such as no verb in the sentence (Although we ø so close...), two verbs in a sentence (I think he'<u>s</u> <u>liked</u> you), wrong irregular verb (When he ~~gets~~ got bad score...), wrong regular verb (...we ~~playing~~ played some *wahana* games), wrong auxiliary verb (Unfortunately the Keraton ~~is~~ was still close...), wrong –ing form (Before we ~~going~~ went home...), wrong past modal (...because we ~~must~~ had to ~~going back~~ go home). When tense is perceived as a time line and it focuses on arranging events in that imaginary line, learners will pay more attention to the verb of sentence, as well as the change of its forms since it is grammatical.

Actually, there are many Indonesian researchers who have already conducted researches about tenses but their attention is still aimed to describe learners' grammatical errors. As an example, Handayani, Isyam, & Fitrawati conduct a research that aims to identify students' ability in comprehending past and future tense [11]. They used grammar test as the research instrument. Based on research finding, students' ability was still very low by which the mean score from 78 students, as samples, was 37,31. No one of students could achieve the standard competency result (75). The highest score was 73,33 and the lowest one was 13,33. There are a lot of factors that influence the result, however we do need to investigate what is the basic factor that causes the phenomenon.

Through this research, the problem is probed from the basic aspect that is the learners' concept of tense itself. In General, linguists assume that linguistic time is represented in a straight line as shown in figure 1 [3,6,9,12,13]. This imaginary line then helps learners to put or locate various situations correctly in linguistics time indicated by the grammatical change of verbs form in English. In teaching grammar, this time line has been proposed by Azar as illustration for each tense. It is a worthwhile tool in building tense as a concept of thinking of learners [14]. Nevertheless, based on the gained data, tense has not been perceived as a concept of time line yet by learners since they are still inconsistent locating events in the linguistic time line (past tense).

In view of the fact that Indonesian and English have different tools of linguistic time that potentially raise various difficulties for Indonesian learners who learn English, teachers need to set up the right principles in teaching tense. They need to evaluate how tenses are taught all the time. Although the linguistic time line is not a new thing in linguistics, it can be considered as a tool of building a basic concept of tense in

learners' mind so it can help learners arrange various events correctly and easily.

IV. Conclusion

Based on the gained data, learners have not been able yet to express past tense correctly. There is no a clear concept of past tense can be viewed through their writing. As a straight line concept of time, they still made a lot of errors in arranging several events (complex sentence) in the time line and are inconsistent to locate those events precisely. Moreover, teachers need to create a basic breakthrough in teaching tense for Indonesia learners who have perceived it as only a set of formulas that must be memorized. Thus, tense still become a hard thing to be learned and practiced. Indeed, Indonesian learners whose language is tenseless need a right principle in learning English that is a tense language.

Acknowledgment

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