

Students' Ability and Difficulties in Comprehending Simple Sentence in English at First Grade of SMA Adabiah Padang

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Abstract

The bad scores gotten in English subject still become a problem for senior high school students. The aim of this study was to find out students' ability and difficulties in comprehending English simple sentence. The total sample members were 20 students, and they were chosen by cluster random sampling technique. Twenty students of SMA Adabiah Padang were tested to describe their ability in comprehending simple sentence in simple present tense and simple past tense. Then, they were interviewed in order to know their difficulties in comprehending it. The result of this research showed that despite having gone many years in learning English at school, the learners are still having problems in comprehending simple sentence whether it is in simple present tense or in simple past tense. The result of the data analysis showed that the students' ability in comprehending simple sentence stated in 41 mean score, where their ability in comprehending simple sentence in simple present tense stated in 60.7 mean score and 18.6 in simple past tense. Moreover, the students' difficulties in comprehending simple sentence mostly caused by the language transfer that they did, the lack of support from the environment, and also the status of English as the foreign language in Indonesia. Based on the findings from this research, it can be concluded that senior high school students have problems in comprehending simple sentence because of some factors, so that makes them still difficult in getting good score in English subject at school.

Keywords: *ability, difficulties, simple sentence*

Introduction

Grammar is one of the English components which are taught to every language learner at the school. Based on the curriculum for the X grade students of senior high school, the students have to be able in English including the lexicogrammatical features such as the use of simple present tense and simple past tense. They have an important role in understanding the English language. Without proper knowledge of grammar the students will find many difficulties to build up the sentences and express their ideas for communication activities. Generally the students are demanded to understand and to memorize the formulas of structure or grammar, but they cannot apply them in writing or in speaking and it becomes one of the problems for them. Some students may have high score in grammar test but they cannot use it in writing or speaking properly.

Grammar should be comprehended by the learners at the school. Based on the syllabus of senior high school, simple present tense and simple past tense are taught at the first grade and it has been learned by the students when they were in junior high school. In this case, the teachers have to strive hard to drill and stimulate students' skill including the social function, the generic structure and also the lexicogrammatical features.

Grammar is defined as the rules that show how words are combined, arranged or changed to show certain kinds of meaning (Klammer: 2000; Harmer:2001; and Swan: 2005) . Grammar explains many things, for example, it guides us to use the language correctly. It also helps us to state how we should use it. Grammar becomes important aspect for English skills. It is a part of English components that cannot be separated from English skills in order to make students can produce correct sentences, an English student can be claimed to be able in English skill if he or she uses the grammar suitable. So that mastery toward grammar is very important to motivate the students in their skills English.

In order to help the students in comprehending simple sentence, their problems and the causes of the problem need to be analyzed. By analyzing their ability in comprehending simple sentence in simple present tense and simple past tense, it will help to find out the students' problems. Therefore, the researcher is interested in analyzing the first grade of SMA Adabiah students' ability and difficulties in comprehending simple sentence.

Method

This research carries out through a descriptive research. The aim of this research is to make a description about students' ability and difficulties in understanding English simple sentence at first grade of SMA Adabiah Padang. Gay and Airisian: 2000; Sukardi: 2003 state that a descriptive research is called survey research which focuses knowing about the problem and to get the justification about the situation, condition, phenomena and activity that directly. It determines and describes the things as they are.

In order to know the ability of the first grade students of SMA Adabiah Padang, the researcher analyze the grammar test to the 20 students of SMA Adabiah Padang in class X IPA 2. This class is chosen by cluster random sampling. After that, the researcher analyzes the data. The scores had gotten added and divided to get the average scores. From the average scores, the researcher decide whether the students get high, moderate or low in the test.

Later on, the researcher interviews the students of the first grade of SMA Adabiah Padang in order to know their difficulties in comprehending simple sentence in simple present tense and simple past tense. Moreover, in analyzing the data gotten from interview, the researcher follows the steps explained by Berg (2001: 35). The research is analyzed by using the following steps: data reduction, data display, conclusion and verification.

Results and Discussion

The data gotten to measure students' ability in this research was collected by using an instrument, namely a grammar test. The data gotten was used to answer the research question about the students' ability in comprehending English simple sentence at the first grade of SMA Adabiah Padang. Then, the data was analyzed based on the indicators of item test in comprehending English simple sentence in simple present tense and simple past tense.

The researcher did this research to the students in comprehending simple sentence. The researcher gave the test to the students of SMA Adabiah Padang at class X IPA 2 about simple sentence in simple present tense and simple past tense. Next, they asked to choose the best answer by changing the word in the bracket based on their comprehension of simple sentence in simple present tense and simple past tense.

The time given to the students to do the test was 60 minutes. It was controlled by the researcher and also the English teacher of SMA Adabiah Padang at class X IPA 2. In the data collected, researcher found that from 20 students of class X IPA 2, there were 3 students (15%) high ability, 12 students (60%) moderate ability, and 5 students (25%) had low ability in comprehending English simple sentence

After getting the data of the grammar test, the students were interviewed by the researcher. The interview was used to get more the information related to the factors which influence students' difficulties in comprehending English simple sentence in simple present tense and simple past tense.

In short, all of the data gotten were used to answer the research questions about the students' ability and difficulties in comprehending simple sentence in simple present tense and simple past tense.

1. The students' ability in comprehending simple sentence in simple present tense

In relation to theories mentioned previously, Oshima and Hogue (2006:164) stress that simple sentence is a sentence that has only independent clause. And in comprehending simple sentence in simple present tense, the meaning of simple present tense itself needs to be comprehended. Huddleston and Pullum (2005:31) say that simple present tense is used to indicate the present times. The sentence needs to be in its criterion.

In measuring the students' ability in comprehending simple sentence, the students' scores were counted. After checking and giving scores for each student's answer sheet, the researcher found that the highest score of the students' ability in comprehending simple sentence in simple present tense was 88. There was only one student who could answer the 14 questions of simple sentence in simple present tense correctly.

From the answers chosen by the students in their answer sheets, it can be calculated that the mean score was only 60.7 and the Standard Deviation (SD) was 12.6 (see appendix .). Then, it was found that the students had high ability by the score above 73.3 were 4 students (20%), moderate ability by score between 48.1 until 73.3 were 14 students (70%), and low ability by score under 48.1 were 2 students (10%). Overall, the students' ability in comprehending simple sentence in simple present tense can be described in the figure below:

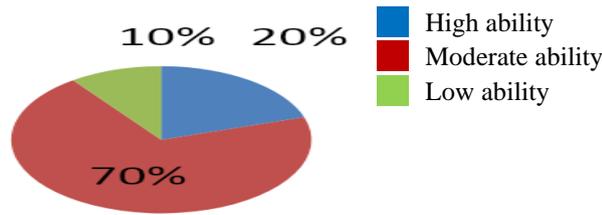


Figure 1. The students' ability in comprehending simple sentence in simple present tense

Based on the analysis above, it can be concluded that the students' ability in comprehending English simple sentence in simple present tense was moderate. It was based on the fact that the majority of the students (70%) had moderate ability.

2. The students' ability in comprehending simple sentence in simple past tense

From the data gotten, the highest score of students' ability in comprehending simple sentence in simple past tense was 43. There was only one student who could answer 6 questions correctly. Then, the researcher calculated the Mean score and also the Standard Deviation. The mean score was 18.6, meanwhile the Standard Deviation from students' score of simple past tense was 13.2 (see appendix).

Based on the Chapter III, the result analysis showed that the students who had high ability by score above 31.8 were 3 students (15%). Students who had moderate ability by score between 5.4 until 31.8 were only 13 (65%). Then, the students who had low ability by score under 5.4 were 4 students (20%). The students' ability in comprehending English simple sentence in simple past tense can be described in the following chart:

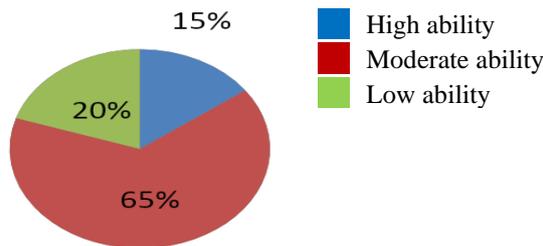


Figure 2. The students' ability in comprehending English simple sentence in simple past tense

From the analysis above, researcher can make a conclusion that the ability of the students' X IPA 2 in comprehending English simple sentence in simple past tense was moderate. It was based on the fact that the majority of the students (65%) had moderate ability.

3. The students' difficulties in comprehending simple sentence in simple present tense and simple past tense

Based on the data description before, the students had difficulties in comprehending simple sentence that is problem in using verb/ predicate correctly. The agreement between subject and verb was needed in a sentence. The agreement of verb was influenced by the subject form whether it was singular or plural. It was not only for verbal sentence, but also for nominal sentence. Therefore, a correct sentence structurally, the verb must agree with the subject.

From all of 16 questions related to simple sentence in simple present tense, there were no students who were able to put the whole verbs correctly. There was only one student who got 88. She could put 14 correct verbs in the simple sentence in simple present tense.

In comprehending simple sentence in simple past tense, students of class X IPA 2 also had difficulties in using verb/ predicate. They were really difficult to put the verb or to be in the sentence correctly. It can be proofed from their test. There were four students who could not answer all the questions in the test.

Moreover, from 14 questions related to simple sentence in simple past tense, there was only one student who could put six verbs or to be correctly in the sentence. She got the highest score in the class which was only 43.

As a conclusion, the students in class X IPA 2 at SMA Adabiah Padang had difficulties in using verb/ predicate. They had problems in verb agreement in the sentence. They had problems in verb agreement not only in simple sentence in simple present tense, but also in simple sentence in simple past tense.

4. The factors which influence students' difficulties in comprehending English simple sentence

Due to the difficulties that were found from the students' comprehending of simple sentence in simple present tense and simple past tense, there must be some factors which caused the difficulties occurred. Those factors were collected by using interview in which there were some indicators used to see the causes. The interview was done to six students. In the interview, there were three indicators which were used to find out the factors which cause the students' difficulties in comprehending simple sentence in simple present tense and simple past tense. Those indicators were the language transfer, the environment, and the status of language.

a. Language Transfer

Based on the interview, it was found that all of the students transferred English into Indonesia language when they read the sentence. They assumed that by transferring the language, they could understand the sentence, and use the verb or to be in the test easily. In other words, they thought that thinking Indonesia words before answering the English questions was very helpful for them.

Moreover, it was also found from the interview that the students were difficult to use English structure. They were aware that those languages had different words and rules which they had to master. In fact, in Indonesia language, to be was not needed. There were no to be in Indonesia. On the contrary, in English, students needed to pay attention to the use of to be in nominal sentence. Then, in English there were three forms of verbs; V1, V2 and V3 that needed to be mastered by the students. Meanwhile, there were no forms of verbs in Indonesia.

From all of the differentiation of the form between English and Indonesia, learners got difficulties in comprehending English simple sentence. The language transfer that they did while reading a sentence became one factor which causes their difficulties in comprehending simple sentence.

b. Environment

The second factor that influenced students' difficulties in comprehending simple sentence was environment. Based on the interview done to the students, it was found that there no students who practiced English with their friends. They had already known that practicing English with friends is needed. However, they did not do that. They were afraid of starting to speak English with their friends. They thought that their friends would laughed at them when they speak English all the times at the class.

In addition, from the interview, it showed that only some of the students practiced their English with foreigners. They practiced their English with native speaker that they found on the street. It really helped them to improve their English.

In conclusion, environment was the cause of the students' difficulties in comprehending simple sentence. Students who were lazy to practice their English with their friends and native speakers got difficulties to comprehend English. Therefore, they found difficulties in comprehending English simple sentence in simple present tense and simple past tense.

c. The Status of Language

The status of language influenced students' difficulties in comprehending English simple sentence. Based on the interview done to the students, it was found that they knew the status of English in Indonesia. They were aware that English was as a foreign language in Indonesia. They said that as the foreign language, English had so many things to comprehend. They felt strange with English, even in comprehending the simple sentence in simple present tense and simple past tense. They only studied English because of the requirement in the curriculum.

Conclusions

Based on the research findings and discussion, it can be concluded that:

1. The students' ability in comprehending English simple sentence in simple present tense is considered moderate.
2. The students' ability in comprehending English simple sentence in simple past tense is considered moderate.
3. The students difficulty in comprehending simple sentence in simple present tense and simple past tense is in using verb/ predicate correctly
4. Factors which influence students' difficulties in comprehending simple sentence are language transfer, environment, and status of language.

Based on the conclusions and implications above, there are number of suggestions that might be useful for the students, lecturers, and the next researchers. Those suggestions are explained as follows:

1. It is suggested to the students especially for those who have lack of ability in comprehending simple sentence to learn more about how to comprehend simple sentence in simple present tense and simple past tense..
2. It is suggested to the English teachers to facilitate their students to enhance the students' competence in comprehending English simple sentence in simple present tense and simple past tense.
3. For other researchers who will conduct a further research about the students' ability in comprehending simple sentence, it is suggested to them to dig more about the other aspects simple sentence.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express thanks to Allah SWT who has given the blessings to researcher to finish this thesis entitled "students' ability and difficulties in comprehending English simple sentence at first grade of SMA Adabiah Padang". This thesis would be difficult to finish without any support, guidance, and valuable advices from many people. Therefore, I would like to express my deepest gratitude and appreciation to those people:

1. Dr. Muhd. Al Hafizh, S.S, M.A., as my advisor who has given his advices, guidances, and encouragements in accomplishing this thesis.
2. Prof. Jufriзал, M.Hum. and Dr. Havid Ardi, S.Pd, M.Hum. for encouragements, useful critiques and supportive feedback for the improvement of this research work.
3. I would like to extend my thanks to the Chairman of SMA Adabiah Padang, office staff, and English teachers for their help in completing the data for this thesis.

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