Designing Comic Book as a Medium for Learning Tenses and Aspect in English

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Abstract—English proficiency is absolutely necessary for Indonesian students to succeed in international competition. Some English lessons relatively difficult to be comprehended by Indonesian students are related to tenses and aspects. There must be creativity in teaching, such as incorporating the lessons in the form of a comic book. A comic is a way of communication favored by many people, ranging from children to young adults, like college students. It communicates ideas through pictures and words. The study aims to design a comic as a learning medium of tenses and aspects in English. The educational comic is expected to support government program in improving English education, especially the students' understanding of Tenses and Aspects. It uses a qualitative method. Data concerning difficulties encountered by students in understanding tenses and aspects are collected through observation, literature reviews and interviews. Then the collected data are processed into a comic by applying management and design theories. The result of this study is a bilingual, full-color comic book containing a theory of English tenses and aspects included in daily activities and heroic stories that are inspiring for students.

Keywords: English, educational, comic book, tenses, aspects

I. INTRODUCTION

English proficiency is absolutely necessary for Indonesian students to succeed in international competition. However, Indonesia is ranked at Low Proficiency or ranked 61 out of 100 countries based on a 2019 study on the English proficiency index carried out by Education First (EF) [1]. This fact shows that most Indonesian students cannot speak or write English properly. Jufrizal said that some English lessons relatively difficult to be comprehended by Indonesian students are related to tenses and aspects [2].

From the observation carried out by researchers in English class, it can be concluded that common errors found in students' works are related to the correct usage of verbs or tenses, such as misuse of form 'be' in a sentence "He is born in Bandung." The difficulties faced by Indonesian students may be related to the difference of Indonesian and English grammar as mentioned in Unang and Rahayu [3].

Regarding language teaching, there is currently a change in the teacher's view of the importance of visuals in learning. Gunther Kress states that the media constellation of books and the use of writing have given way to the constellation of screen media and the use of images [4]. Considering this, there must be creativity in teaching, such as incorporating the lessons in the form of a comic book. In this case, comic functions as an educational tool. As mentioned by Muzumdar that the combination of visuals and text in comic books providing a description for the presented information "gives comics the potential to go beyond the traditional textbook for teaching and learning" [5]. Moreover, visuals that are managed properly in the classroom can make it easier for students to integrate the knowledge they had before and understand new concepts or knowledge.

In the comics, information is conveyed through an arranged visual language. Sudjana and Rivai define comics as a form of cartoon that represents characters and stories in a sequence that is closely connected with images and is designed to provide entertainment to readers [6].

Therefore, in this study, researchers want to use visuals, especially comics, as a means to convey English material. The design of this educational comic is expected to help students understand the concept of tenses in English and also to learn vocabulary in a fun way. The research, which was conducted at the Craft Department ISBI Bandung, focusing on designing comics with the main subjects of tenses and aspects. Through this comic, the English lesson is expected to be delivered more effective and efficient because students can connect their knowledge of tense and aspect to the context that is presented through structured images.

II. METHODS

This research uses a qualitative method with the consideration that the data in this study are problems related to tenses and aspects in English that are collected through observation, literature review and interviews. Qualitative research refers to the meaning of words, definitions, symbols, concepts and descriptions of something. Meleong and Lexy agreed with Kirk and Miller, that qualitative research is often understood to be naturalistic, ethnographic, and participatory in nature [7].

Based on the results of the needs analysis, the comics that are designed must be able to support English learning for

beginners (elementary level) in tertiary institutions and contain 1) content of explanatory material about tense and aspects with easy-to-understand language; 2) how to apply each tense and aspect in a simple sentence; 3) shows the use of different tenses and aspects in a narrative story.

Therefore, this comic is divided into three parts, namely: 1) tense and aspect theory presented in simple explanation that are partly delivered in Indonesian to facilitate the understanding of readers; 2) tense application in sentences with the theme of daily student life illustrated by four-panel comics; 3) appendix in the form of a heroic story that contains the application of tenses and aspects in a narrative story. The figure of Mrs. Kartini was chosen as a heroine who fought for educational equality for Indonesian women. This story is selected since it tells the importance of education and language mastery, both in mother tongue and foreign languages, to achieve our goals. In this case, Kartini was able to express her opinion in speaking and writing, either in Indonesian or Dutch, until she succeeded in making changes for the progress of Indonesian women.

The following are the steps for designing a comic:

- Make a story line
- Designing characters
- Make pencil sketches / pencilling
- Give text / lettering
- Giving ink / inking
- Give colour / colouring
- Editing

The art management approach and design theory are used to study the structure and stages of work in relation to the Comic Making System, which are first, making scripts for the three parts of the comic; second, making comic sketches using pencils; third, blackening or thickening sketches that have been made using black ink; fourth, coloring with digital methods (using Adobe Photoshop Software); fifth, affixing narrative text, dialogue, and sound effects; sixth, laying out and finishing all comic pages for printing needs; and seventh, printing out a dummy and binding it with an exclusive hard cover.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Problem analysis and needs analysis were done to determine the material that would be delivered through comics. Data are obtained through observation, document analysis and interviews. The observation made was participatory observation, which means the researcher was involved in student activities during the teaching and learning process.

The researcher observed the level of student understanding related to English tenses material, for example the extent to which students are able to use present simple, present perfect, past simple, past continuous and past perfect tenses in descriptive text or when describing their experiences. Then, documents in the form of students' assignments are analyzed to identify errors commonly made by students.

Based on class observations and analysis of student assignments, several common errors were found. AlSobhi then classify these errors according to Dulay's categories namely omission, addition, misformation and misordering [8]. Types of errors found in student writing can be seen in table 1.

TABLE I.   ERRORS FOUND IN STUDENT WRITING ACCORDING TO DULAY'S TYPES OF ERRORS (1982)

| Errors found in atudents' writing according to Dulay's types of errors ||
Type	*Example*
1. Omission	I watch Frozen movie yesterday.
2. Addition:	
a. Double markings	My sister didn't went to Bali.
b. Regularizations	Mrs. Yupi teached English.
c. Simple additions	It is a new cars.
3. Misformation	
a. Regularization errors	There are five fishes in the aquarium.
b. Archi-forms	This cats are nice.
c. Alternating forms	I done my homework last night.
4. Misordering	I am a person diligent.

From this table it can be seen that the errors students commonly made are related to verbs, for example in the sentence "I watch Frozen movie yesterday". Eventhough the sentence is understandable in terms of its meaning, it omits grammatical morpheme 'ed' for past tense. The sentence should be like this 'I watched Frozen movie yesterday". This error may be caused by the differences in grammar system between English and Indonesian. The role of verb in English is very vital. The verb must always exist in a sentence.

After knowing the problems faced by students in learning English, the researchers conducted needs analysis by interviewing several students. The first, second and third-year students from Craft Department of ISBI Bandung were randomly selected and interviewed. On the average they were having difficulty understanding tenses and aspects in English. They were hoping that there would be a medium that makes tenses and aspect easier to understand. When being offered comics as English learning media, most students seemed to be enthusiastic. Thus, the researchers concluded that students need a medium that can explain the concepts of tense and aspects in a way that is easily understood by them, such as comics. The comics contain material about theory of tense and aspects with language that is easily understood and also the usage of each tense.

Next, the researchers conducted a literature study on books and journals that discussed tenses and aspects in English and their comparison with Indonesian. The data obtained were used as a reference for compiling tense and aspect material that would be conveyed through comics. In addition, the researchers also collected data from various comic literature, local and foreign publications, with various genres and styles. The data obtained were used as a reference to get a picture related to speech style and visual style effectively used in English learning media for students. From the interpretation of the data, the researcher concluded that the English style of speech in comics for children and adolescents should have simple sentence structure and is relatively more easily understood by English learners of elementary level.

Based on the results of the needs analysis, the comics that are designed must be able to support English learning for beginners (elementary level) in tertiary institutions and should contain 1) explanation about tense and aspects with easy-to-understand language; 2) the example of applying each tense and aspect in a simple sentence; 3) the usage of different tenses and aspects in a narrative story.

Therefore, this comic is divided into three parts, namely: 1) tense theory and aspects that are inserted in theories or formulas that are simpler and partly delivered in Indonesian to facilitate the understanding of readers; 2) tense application in sentences with the theme of daily student life illustrated by four comic panels; 3) appendix in the form of a heroic story that contains the application of tenses and aspects in a narrative story. The figure of Mrs. Kartini was chosen as a hero who fought for educational equality for Indonesian women. This story is expected to be an inspiration for readers of the importance of education and language skills, both mother tongue and foreign languages, to achieve the goals that are aspired. In this case, Kartini was able to express her opinion verbally and in writing, to her people and foreign parties, until she succeeded in making changes for the progress of her people.

Fig. 1. Observation and interview.

A. *Arranging Materials of Tenses and Aspects to be Covered in the Comic*

English is one of the languages that makes time difference as a part of the grammar which is expressed through tense. Although linguists have different opinions regarding tense definitions and categories, in general tense can be interpreted as a grammatical means to indicate an event, a situation, a state or a process at a time [9]. Tense can be expressed through the inflection or change in verb form. As exemplified by Andrew and McCarthy in a sentence: "Mary told us that this pianist performed in the local hall every week." For that sentence, Andrew and McCarthy explained:

"The aspect of the grammatical context that is relevant to the suffix –*ed* on *performed* is the fact that the verb *told* is in the past tense (that is, it refers to a past event, namely an earlier conversation with Mary). Mary's actual words in this earlier conversation were probably 'This pianist performs ...', not 'This pianist performed ...'

...the word performs is replaced by *performed* in the report of her words because English grammar incorporates a rule about what is called 'sequence of tenses' : if a verb of saying or thinking is in the past tense (as *told* is here), then a verb in any sentence reported as having been said or thought is likely to be shifted backwards in tense" [10].

According to this explanation, there are two categories of tenses, namely 'past' and 'non-past'. For example, (1) past: *She walk - ed*; and (2) non-past: *She walk - s*. While as cited in Muhammad Safiur Rahman and Md Maksud Ali [11]: "Problems in Mastering English Tense and Aspect and the Role of the Practitioners, argues that 'tense expresses the time when an event occurs with regard to the moment of utterance' and 'tense has three dimensions, namely: present, past, and future'. Based on this category, there are three categories of tense, namely present, past and future. In English learning textbooks in Indonesia, the later definition is more commonly used. On the other hand, aspects do not refer to the concept of time of events, but rather to how speaker views the event. Aspects related to the state of an event or activity, whether it is happening, has been happening, or will happen. In this comic, aspects are divided into simple, continuous/progressive and perfect".

From the explanation above, we can conclude that tense tells us when an event occurred, while the aspect tells us how the event occurred, or how the event is viewed by the speaker, related to its frequency, duration, and whether the event has or has not yet been completed. However, to be able to understand tense and aspects deeper, learners must realize that the role of verb is very important in the sentence. Every sentence must have a verb. In comics, to make it easier for readers to apply the formulation of tenses, verbs are divided into five categories, namely action verbs (verbs that show actions, such as beat, chase, eat, run, write); modals (such as can, could, may, might, might, would, should, shall, must); auxiliary to be (like is, am, are, was, were, be, been, being), auxiliary to have (like has, have, had); auxiliary to do (like do, does, did).

By considering the combination of tenses and aspects frequently used, the researchers put English tenses and aspects in the following table:

TABLE II.   NINE CATEGORIES OF TENSES AND ASPECTS IN ENGLISH

Tenses / Aspect	PAST	PRESENT	FUTURE
SIMPLE	I painted my house.	I paint my house	I will paint my house
CONTINUOUS	I was painting my house.	I am painting my house.	I will be painting my house.
PERFECT	I had painted my house.	I have painted my house	I will have painted my house.

The name of tense and aspect are combined into the following 9 categories: past Simple, present simple, future

simple, past continuous, present continuous, future continuous, past perfect, present perfect, future perfect.

B. Determining Verbal and Visual Styles of the Comic

Various genres and styles of comic were collected to study their verbal and visual styles and determine which visual style suitable for English-learning comic intended to college students.

At this stage, the researcher sorted, selected, and analyzed dozens of comic titles both in Indonesian and English that had been collected. For verbal style, researchers sorted comics according to genre and target reader. Most comics for the age of 18 years or above (young adults), has complex sentence structure and full of idioms. If the comic is in English, then the comprehension of its sentences and dialogues requires a high level of English language proficiency. Comics like this are often called graphic novel.

While English comics for children and adolescents (elementary and junior high school age) have simpler sentence structures and are relatively easier to be understood by non-native readers. Its verbal style of comics for children and adolescents is quite suitable for students to learn English tenses and aspects.

C. Determining the Content and Structure of the Comic

The biggest challenge of this research was to make a comic book that can be used as an English-learning medium for beginners in a college.

Another challenge was deciding whether the comic would bewritten in English, Indonesian or bilingual. The researchers worried if the explanation of English tenses and aspects are written in English only, the students may not fully understand it. Considering this, the researchers decided to take a middle course, that is, the explanation of tenses and aspects is delivered in simpler formula or theory, and some sentences are written in Indonesian to facilitate readers' comprehension.

Furthermore, to apply the theory of tenses and aspects in sentences, a theme of students' daily lives around campus or events often encountered in daily lives will be used. To stimulate the reader's imagination in relation to past, present and future tense as well as improving an understanding of the aspect (which depends on how the speaker views the situation), the researchers add an appendix in the form of a hero-story comic.

The heroine of the story is the figure of 'Ibu Kartini' (Mrs. Kartini). She is an inspiring Indonesian woman who struggle for women equal rights in education, which is expected to raise readers' awareness of the importance of education and communication competence to achieve one's goal. The story of 'Ibu Kartini' was made in the form of an English-language comic. Different tenses and aspects in the comic are marked by different colors in the sentence.

D. The Comic Script Making

This stage is a crucial stage in making comics. Especially if the script is made for learning English. When writing a script, there are at least three things that researchers must consider in making this type of comic script.

- *First*, a comic consists of narration, dialogue and/or monologue with special drawing techniques. So the script writer must consider which sentences are in the form of direct dialogue, and which sentences only exist in the mind.

- *Second*, a comic created to explain a theory of science or a theory of language, has differences with a comic that directly describes an event or fiction. Researchers must be able to make a script that is both scientific and interesting. 'Scientific' in this case means the script is in accordance with the theories that exist in the academic literature of English lessons, while 'interesting' in this case is more qualitative, namely how images and words can work together and be understood by readers, even though the content is scientific.

- *Third*, the script made must be understood by the comic illustrator and thus he can transfer the script into narrative visual layout, with a visual style that must be chosen and adjusted to the target readers' characters.

The researcher divided the English learning comic script into three parts. The first part explains the theory related to aspects and tenses in English; the second part explains the usage of tenses and aspects in daily activities and habits; the third part is the application of tenses and aspects in a narrative story. This third part is an appendix in the form of the story of the heroism of '*Ibu* Kartini' (Mrs. Kartini).

E. Comic Sketch Making Stage

After the script was completed, the next step was making comic sketches using pencil. This stage lasted for one month. The challenge of this stage was how to turn written scripts into visual sketches, lay out (layout) for narration, dialogue balloons or monologue thoughts, and visualization of characters in comics, both main characters and supporting characters. The setting of the place, atmosphere, or house presented in the script must be visualized and realized with other components.

F. Comic Sketch Blackening

This blackening stage was done manually by using a special black drawing pen or pen for drawing. Pen sizes are varied, ranging from 0.05 mm, 0.3 mm and 0.5 mm. This stage lasted for 2 weeks. The following are examples of pages that have been successfully drawn with black ink, without text or dialog.
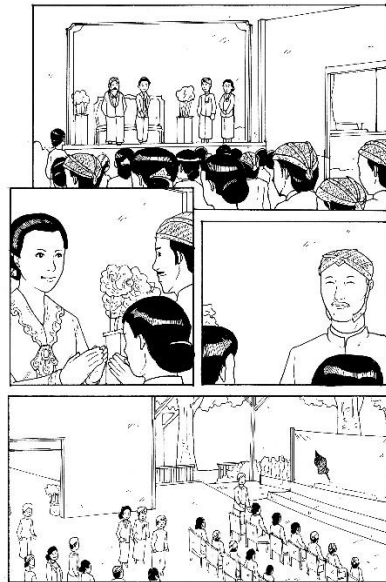
Fig. 2. Example of Ibu Kartini comics with black ink.

G. *Comic Coloring and Placing the Text*

The next stage that took longer time is coloring. This coloring should be done carefully. The concept of color outlined in this comic book is the concept of classic colors, namely analog colors that tend to stay away from primary colors, by reducing the color saturation so as not to be too strong or contrast.

Classic colors are produced by mixing secondary colors to other secondary colors, such as brownish green, beige, grayish red. This color conception is used so that the reader's attention does not focus on the colors in the comic, but rather focuses on the storyline and the information conveyed.

Fig. 3. Example of Ibu Kartini comics with classic color.

The coloring technique was done by using computer graphics (Adobe Photoshop Software) after scanning the black and white comic drawing in the previous stage.

After coloring, the next step was to place the text in the form of dialogue, monologue, and narration termed *dialogue balloon*. This dialogue balloon is a characteristic of comics that distinguishes it from ordinary novels or picture books.

Fig. 4. First page comics part 1, explanation of the theory of tenses and aspects.

IV. CONCLUSION

This research focused on designing a comic book as a medium for learning tenses and aspects in English for craft department students of ISBI Bandung art in particular, and college students in general. The finished comic were shown to some craft department students of ISBI Bandung. They read it and said that they started to realize their errors in the usage of tenses and aspect. They also mentioned that the comic was beneficial to improve their comprehension due to the table of tense and aspect categories and the comic illustration. The theory of tenses and aspects and their application in sentences can be learned in a fun way through the full-colour comic with semi-realistic visual style.

This research particular related to Claude Andre Drolet at Sungkyul University opinion [12]:

"A strong method to encourage reading is the use of popular texts such as comic strips. The use of comics has been shown to compliment the acquisition of effective comprehension strategies."

This research also suitably to a survey conducted by teachers using comics in Art language classrooms at Minnesota Council of Teachers of English, as Annett mentioned, proved that students, who are familiar with the form and style of comics, are more involved with the material and are better able to discuss text than with traditional textbooks [13].

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