

# TENSE AND ASPECT IN ENGLISH: How do EFL Learners Understand Them?

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## Abstract

It has been claimed that most undergraduate students (S1 degree) of English Department of FBS Universitas Negeri Padang were in difficulties and problems in understanding the grammatical features and uses of English tenses and aspects. The students were familiar with the grammatical term tense, but they were not in sufficient concern with the term aspect. In addition, most learners thought that they did not need to specifically differentiate between tense and aspect. It has been also reported that there were significant numbers of ungrammatical uses of passives found in theses written by EFL students. This paper discusses how the EFL learners at the English Department of Universitas Negeri Padang theoretically understand and practically use the tense and aspect of English in written and oral communication. The main data presented in this paper are those directly derived from previous research reports (Jufrizal et.al., 2009; Mukhaiyar and Jufrizal, 2012). The additional data were those collected by means of direct-participant interviews during the teaching learning processes of English Grammar at the English Department of FBS Universitas Negeri Padang. The analysis of data was based on relevant theories dealing with grammatical-semantic features of tense and aspect cross-linguistically. Based on the data analysis, it is reasonable to state that most English Department students have not linguistically understood the nature and concepts of tense and aspect in English. A number of students even admitted that the tense and aspect are the same with time, particularly adverb of time.

**Keywords:** tense, aspect, English, grammatical-semantic, pedagogical grammar

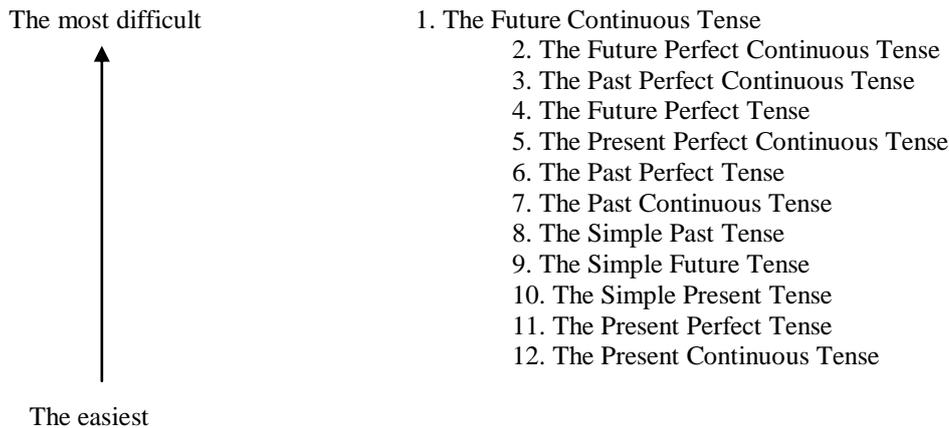
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## Introduction

It is obvious that linguistics and language teaching are in mutual interactions both in theoretical and practical matters. Linguistic studies have to do the descriptive and analytic descriptions of human languages. The results and conclusions of linguistic works lead linguists to draw grammatical conclusions and/or linguistic theories which may be accommodated into language teaching. The teaching-learning process of language cannot be extremely separated from linguistic theories and grammatical points. In relation to this idea, Valdman (1966) and Corder (1973) as quoted by Stern (1994: 174) state that linguists may seek validity in a coherent and consistent linguistic theory, while language teachers judge a theory for its usefulness in the design of materials, in curriculum development, or in instruction. In addition, different linguistics theories may offer different perspectives on language, and they can be treated as equivalent resources.

Although world languages have universal features as human languages, each language has specific characteristics in the levels of grammatical features and communicative uses. It is also necessary to know that different languages differently construct their grammatical constructions. English and *bahasa Indonesia*, for instance, have different types of grammatical constructions in which they perform different grammatical typology. Typologically, English belongs to *tenseless* languages, but *bahasa Indonesia* and most of local languages in Indonesia are the *tenseless* languages. In accordance with this, most learners in Indonesia need to know and to understand that English and *bahasa Indonesia* are typologically different (see Jufrizal, et.al. 2009).

A research concerning with problems and difficulties in the teaching-learning processes of English *tenses* and *aspects* (Jufrizal et.al., 2009) tells that most students of English Department of FBSS Universitas Negeri Padang (now FBS Universitas Negeri Padang) faced difficulties and problems in understanding and using English tenses appropriately. The difficulties were observed based on the written expression test given to the sample of the research. The hierarchy of students' difficulties on understanding and using tenses and aspects of English can be shown in following diagram:



**Diagram 1. The hierarchy of students' difficulties on understanding and using tenses and aspects**  
(see Jufrizal et.al., 2009; Jufrizal, 2010).

The hierarchy of students' difficulties above tells that English Department students of FBSS UNP faced various difficulties in understanding and using English tenses and aspects. It may be academically claimed also that they are in serious difficulties to understand and to use complex tenses, the English tenses that are actually the combination of using tense(s) and aspect(s) in sentential constructions (see Jufrizal, 2010). Linguistically, *tense* and *aspect* are not really the same; the terms past, present, and future are the *tenses*, while continuous (progressive) and perfect are the aspects. For academic and practical purposes, however, they are all frequently called *tenses*. The use of tenses for all grammatical features is not theoretically correct for advanced learners, in nature.

The grammatical problems in the understanding and uses tenses and aspects in English were also found in graduate students' theses. Mukhaiyar and Jufrizal (2012) reported that there are a lot of grammatical mistakes made by the master degree students in constructing passive voice. It is supposed that the mistakes made by the students indicate the lack of grammatical awareness and/or lack of grammatical understanding dealing with tenses and aspects in the foreign language. It is believed as well that the students had already learned and academically informed the concepts of English tenses, but they were lack of grammatical information about aspect. This condition is not fair enough for advanced students of EFL.

The theoretical-linguistic descriptions (in descriptive grammar) of tense and aspect in English may cause psychological and academic problems and difficulties in teaching-learning EFL in Indonesia. Consequently, learners of English in Indonesia have a negative image toward English grammar. Then, prescriptive grammar of English in terms of tense and aspect even give further difficulties and problems because it comes to have right and wrong decisions. It is a psychological burden for learners as they are always afraid of being wrong; the learners will be too careful in using English. The academic atmosphere of EFL with the condition of "*too careful*" frequently leads learners to have unexpected grammatical problems.

The phenomena of tense and aspect in English brought into the practical teaching into the practical classrooms of grammar may be complicating and confusing because they are brought to the learners with tenseless languages. In accordance with the fact, it is necessary to know and explore how the EFL learners at the English Department of FBS theoretically understand the tense and aspect in English. The scientific information dealing with the condition of EFL learners' understanding on English tense and aspect is academically meaningful to know whether they have had sufficient theoretical-grammatical understanding on English tense and aspect as one of language awareness indicators. The discussion delivered in this paper is particularly based on two key questions: (i) what are the nature of tense and aspect in English?; and (ii) how do English Department students (EFL learners) understand the English tense and aspect?

The main aim of the discussion presented in this paper is to have descriptive-argumentative explanations of English grammar in term of tense and aspect, and to explore how the English Department students (EFL learners) academically understand the English tense and aspect. The description and explanation based on these two questions may give empirical data and information the EFL students' understanding on English tense and aspect that can be applicably used to construct and to develop better program of learning English grammar and language awareness on the foreign language at university level and for advanced learners. The idea of this paper is derived from and developed based on results of researches conducted by Jufrizal et.al. (2009) and Mukhaiyar and Jufrizal (2012).

## Brief Review of Related Theories

### 1. Short Review of Tense and Aspect in Linguistic Studies

Human languages do not have the same forms of grammatical constructions embodying language meanings in the level of clausal and syntactical levels. In relation to grammatical-semantic meaning in clausal-sentential construction, Saeed (2016:112) mentions that one aspect of meanings that belong to the level of sentence marking of time is known as tense. According to him, how the tense is marked varies from language to language; it might be marked on a verb in some languages like English (see (1) a, b, c) or by special time words as in Chinese (see (2) a,b, c).

- (1) a. *She is taking a business course.*  
       b. *She took a business course.*  
       c. *She will take a business course.*
- (2) a. *Ta xianzai you ke*  
       he now have classes  
       ‘He now has classes’  
       b. *Ta zuotian you ke*  
       he yesterday have classes  
       ‘He had classes yesterday’  
       c. *Ta mingtian you ke*  
       he tomorrow have classes  
       ‘He will have classes tomorrow’

In this sense, Cruse (2000: 274) tells that the grammatical features of tense serves essentially to locate the event referred to in the sentential constructions with reference to the time at which the utterance was produced. Only languages which encode timing distinctions by means of grammatical elements can be properly said to manifest the grammatical feature of tense. Many languages encode the timing of a designated event lexically, by means of expression equivalent to yesterday, last year, tomorrow, next week, etc. Typologically, languages which belong to the first group are simply called as tenseless languages, whereas those belonging to the second group are the tenseless languages.

In addition to *tense*, *aspect* is another semantic-grammatical category which is essential in clausal constructions. *Aspect* is also grammatically marked in various ways from language to language. English is a language which belongs to *tenseless languages*. In this language, the grammatical features called *tense* and *aspect* are grammaticalized in clause constructions as the core predication. In other side, *bahasa Indonesia* and most local languages in Indonesia are *tenseless languages*. In a tenseless language, the category of *tense* and *aspect* are not grammatically constructed in clause constructions. They are just expressed in lexical items which have similar meaning with *tense* and *aspect*, as in Chinese (see data (1) above). Linguistically, there are three basic primary *tenses*: (i) past (event occurs before time of speaking), (ii) present (event occurs concurrently with speaking time or includes it), and (iii) future (event is projected to occur after the time of speaking (see Lyons, 1990; Matthews, 1997; Saeed, 1997).

*Tense* and *aspect* are the main grammatical categories which must be involved in clause or sentential constructions in English as a tenseless language. For practical and pedagogical purposes, many grammar books of English just use the term *tense* to refer to *aspect* and/or the combination of *tense* and *aspect* (see Jufrizal et.al., 2009; Jufrizal, 2010). Although they are similar in many cases, *tense* and *aspect* are linguistically different. According to Lyons (1987: 304 & 313), the category of *tense* has something to do with time-relation, in so far as these are expressed by systematic grammatical contrast. Traditionally, the term *tense* refers to past, present, and future. *Aspect*, on the other hand, was firstly used to refer to the distinction of perfective and imperfective in the inflective languages.

In grammatical-semantic studies, grammarians distinguish *aspect* from *tense*. Saeed (1997) and Cruse (2000: 275) give theoretical description about *tense* and *aspect*. *Tense* serves to locate an event in time, but *aspect* says nothing about when an event occurred (except by implication). However, either encodes a particular way of conceptualizing an event or conveys information about the way the event unrolls through time. It is also important to make a distinction between *aspect* as a semantic phenomenon and *aspect* markers in a particular language which may have a variety of semantic functions. Then, Saeed (2016) states also that *tense* and *aspect* systems both allow speakers to relate situations to time, but they offer different slants on time. *Tense* allows a speaker to locate a situation relative to some reference point in time, most likely the time of speaking. *Aspect* systems allows speakers to review an event in various ways: as complete, or incomplete, as so short as to involve almost no time, as something stretched over a perceptible period, or something repeated over a period.

In other explanation, Lyons (1990: 678-679) states that *tense* semantically is a category of the sentence. In a tenseness language, such as in English, the participant in the language-event must be able to control and inter-relate at least two different frames of temporal reference; the deictic and the non-deictic. *Tense*, in this language, is a part of the deictic frame of temporal reference; it grammaticalizes the relationship which holds between the time of the situation that is being described and the temporal zero-point of the deictic context. Not all languages have *tense* as it is involved in grammatical constructions; when it is said that Chinese and Malay do not have *tense* what is meant is that these languages do not obligatorily relate the time of the situation being described to the time of utterance by any systematic variation in the structure of the sentence. The same linguistic cases occur for category of *aspect* (see also Flawley, 1992: 339-340).

### **Grammar as a Part of Language Awareness for Adults Learners**

Linguists argue that (human) language consists of four main layers: form, meaning, function, and value. They interact in systematic ways used by human beings as a main instrument of verbal communication. Human beings acquire and learn the four layers for their first, second, or foreign language(s). In theoretical statement, it may be claimed that languages are learnable and teachable due to the fact that they are systematic and regulated. The regulations and rules governing the language forms are simply referred to as grammar. It is at a right point to say that grammar in any type should be taught and learnt in order to have linguistic competence as one primary foundation for communicative skill.

Lyons (1987: 133) explains that the term grammar originally goes back to a Greek word which may be translated as “the art of writing”. But quite early in the history of Greek scholarship, this word went to a much wider sense and come to embrace the whole study of a language. Linguistic theories and grammatical concepts and descriptions have been giving essential contributions to the theories and practices of language teaching. Therefore, the teaching of language directly implies learning with a further implication that language teaching should be treated as the activities which are consciously intended to bring about language learning (see further Stern, 1994).

Grammatical theories and the description of language rules (regulations) should be accommodated in such a way to have successful language teaching and learning. In accordance with this, Stern (1994: 166) states that the idea that language teaching theory implies the theory of language and that of linguistics had a direct contribution to language pedagogy become more and more accepted. Quoting Spolski, Stern (1994) adds that the relations between linguistics and language teaching as dual: ‘applications and implications’. The descriptions of language made by linguists can be ‘applied’ in the sense that they provide the data needed for writing about teaching grammars, course books, and dictionaries. The need for grammar teaching in any form and level of language teaching and learning is not only for the first language (L1) and the second language (L2) but also for foreign language (FL). According to Brown (2001: 65), one thing that must be concerned with is that the language itself and how learners deal with complex linguistic systems.

The teaching-learning of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Indonesia at university level belongs to the teaching-learning of EFL for adult. Learners of English at university are those have been learning the foreign language for at least six years. Adult learners of one language normally need language awareness, including the grammatical awareness. The language awareness, moreover, is highly essential for EFL learners as the basis for both language and communicative competences. According to Carter (in Bourke, 2008:13), language awareness is the development in learners of an enhanced consciousness of and sensitivity to the forms and functions of language. In addition, James (see Bourke, 2008:13) states that language awareness is a learned ability to analyze one’s internalized language, be it the first language or that part the L2 that one has acquired so far. In other words, it is about making implicit knowledge explicit. The language awareness is basically derived from the features of grammatical competence which are involved as the basis for language forms. Thus, grammar and the grammatical awareness is a part of language awareness. For adults, these are necessary in learning a new language.

The need for language awareness possessed by adults EFL learning can be logically related to Brown’s ideas concerning with adults in learning a language. According to Brown (2001: 90-91), adults have superior cognitive abilities that can render them more successfully in certain classroom endeavors. Their needs for sensory inputs can rely a little more on their imaginations. Their level of shyness can be equal to or greater than that of children, but they usually have acquired a self-confidence not found in children. The followings are some points related to the teaching-learning of an L2 and/or an FL for adults.

- (i) Adults are more able to handle abstract rules and concepts;
- (ii) Adults have longer attention spans for material that may not be intrinsically interesting to them;
- (iii) Sensory input needs not always be quite varied with adults, but one of the secrets of lively adults classes is their appeal to multiple senses;

- (iv) Adults often bring a modicum of general self-confidence (global self-esteem) into a classroom; and
- (v) Adults, with their more developed abstract thinking ability, are better able to understand context-reduced segment of language.

Based on the description above, adult or advanced learners, particularly at university level, may study grammar in details theoretically and academically. It is really needed to build a better foundation of linguistic competence and language awareness. Learners of English at advanced level have to know the nature of English grammar to support the communicative competence in a FL. In the sense, *tense* and *aspect* as a part of main grammatical features of English should be introduced and taught to university students descriptively and pedagogically. The theoretical and practical matters dealing with *tense* and *aspect* should be learnt by advanced learners in nature.

### **Language Learning and Types of Grammar**

Language learning can be seen as learning about language and learning how to use language (language use). Learning about language is more on linguistic views while learning how to use language is the language learning in practical uses. However, both need grammatical description and grammatical rules of language, as it is simply called grammar. In general view point, there are three types of grammar: descriptive, prescriptive, and pedagogical grammar. Descriptive linguistics studies and describes the language phenomena as what they are. In contrast, prescriptive linguistics explains and expresses the language phenomena as what they should be. Prescriptive linguistics discusses the “purity” or “correctness”; it is about “right” and “wrong” in language uses (see Lyons, 1987: 42-43). Following the ideas, the terms descriptive grammar and prescriptive grammar are well known among grammarians and linguists. Then, these two terms are also used in language teaching and language planning theories.

Then, Lyons (1987: 43-44) further states that the linguists’ first task is to describe the way people actually speak and write their language, not to prescribe how they ought to speak and write. Linguistics is descriptive, not prescriptive (or normative). However, it does not mean that linguists have to say ‘no place’ for prescriptive studies on language. In particular, there are of course obvious administrative and educational advantages in having a natively unified literary standard. The descriptive grammar as one form of descriptive linguistic works contributes to theories and frameworks in linguistics, while the prescriptive grammar may be useful in literary uses of language such as language in school, standardization, administrative language, or language planning.

In addition to these two types of grammar, there other types of grammar proposed by grammarians. For academic purposes, there are, at least, three types of grammar necessarily introduced. They are (i) academic grammar for university students; (ii) teachers’ grammar, and (iii) grammar for learners. The academic grammar for university students should be theoretical and descriptive. The grammar for learners is intended to be practical, selective, sequenced, and task-oriented. Then, the teachers’ grammar may be in the matter of academic and learners’ grammar (Leech in Bygate et.al (eds.), 1994:17). Leech argues that the types and levels of grammar for academic purposes at schools should be selected.

Chalker in Bygate et.al (eds.), 1994), for instance, introduces one more type of grammar called pedagogical grammar. The idea of pedagogical grammar introduced by Chalker can be said as the accommodation of the ideas of academic and learners’ grammar by making pedagogical modifications in order to achieve specific and practical goals in learning a language. The main aim of learning grammar in pedagogical sense is to enable learners to be skillful in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The term grammar in this case does not refer to theoretical and complex phenomena as linguistics tells; it simply refers to rules.

Pedagogical grammar, according to Chalker (in Bygate et.al (eds.), 1994: 32-33), is grammar for pedagogues. Quoting Greenbaum, she describes that pedagogical grammars (that is, grammar books) teach the language and not about the language. They are inherently prescriptive, since their purpose is to tell students what to say or write. A pedagogical grammar is a course book, books intended for self-help and offering comprehensive coverage. Such kind of books has five desirable characteristics:

- (i) it must be constrained by the length of class lessons;
- (ii) it should be determined on psycholinguistic grounds (i.e. in accordance with the best methods for learning a foreign language);
- (iii) grammar topics and material should be graded;
- (iv) learners should be helped by having their attention drawn to general rules; and
- (v) it should be provided for practical applications (possibly with exercises in a separate book).

It can also be said that pedagogical grammar is not merely as grammar for learners, but as a specific type of course book. Pedagogical grammars are the books specifically designed for teaching a foreign language, or for developing an awareness of the mother tongue. EFL learning mostly needs the concepts of pedagogical grammar, but it is important to state that the foreign language learning at university level and for adults theoretically and practically involves the descriptive and prescriptive grammar, as well.

## **Data Analysis and Discussion**

### **1. Learners' Practical Problems of Tense and Aspect of English**

Jufrizal et.al. (2009) reported that most students were in difficulties and problems both in the theories and in practical uses of tenses and aspects. The phenomena of English tense and aspect also bring about the problems and difficulties in teaching; it was difficult for the lecturers to explain and to discuss the nature of tense and aspect particularly. The hierarchy of difficulties, as shown in the Introduction part, reveals that most English Department students of FBS UNP had problems and difficulties in understanding complex tenses. In contrast, they were able to understand and use some of simple tenses of the foreign language (Jufrizal, 2009; Jufrizal, 2010). These unfortunate facts require theoretical and practical handlings in order that the teaching-learning process of EFL in Indonesia comes to better condition.

Based on relevant studies and theories, Jufrizal (2010) states that the ways how one tense merges with other tense(s) or aspect(s) are grammatically complex and full of semantic properties. In this sense, the descriptive grammar and prescriptive grammar on English tense and aspect use the term simple tense to refer to one single tense in clause constructions, and complex tense to refer to any permitted merger of one tense with other tense(s) or aspect(s).

The followings are the classification of tenses and aspects in English:

a. The Simple Tenses:

- 1) The Simple Present Tense
- 2) The Simple Past Tense
- 3) The Simple Future Tense

b. The Complex Tenses:

- 1) The Present Continuous Tense
- 2) The Present Perfect Tense
- 3) The Present Perfect Continuous Tense
- 4) The Past Continuous Tense
- 5) The Past Perfect Tense
- 6) The Past Perfect Continuous Tense
- 7) The Future Continuous Tense
- 8) The Future Perfect Tense
- 9) The Future Perfect Continuous Tense
- 10) The Past Future Tense
- 11) The Past Future Continuous Tense
- 12) The Past Future Perfect Tense
- 13) The Past Future Perfect Continuous Tense

(see also Leech and Startvik, 1975; Pransinkas, 1975; Werner, 1985)

Based on the concept of simple and complex tenses, there are some possible combinations between one tense with other tense(s) or aspect(s). If all grammatical and semantic properties concerning with tenses and aspects are brought into practical and academic purposes as what they should be in the classroom activities at schools, those may be too complicated and confusing. The descriptive grammar on tenses and aspects can be difficult for EFL learners in Indonesia. It will be so hard to teach and to learn the simple and complex tenses in the senses of descriptive grammar without any practical and pedagogical modifications. The descriptive grammar is more on linguistic description rather than that of practical one; the descriptive grammar concerning with tense and aspect of EFL seems to be rather "difficult" for many learners.

More specifically, it was also found in other research (see Mukhaiyar and Jufrizal, 2012) that there are seven groups of ungrammatical constructions of English passive voice written by master degree (S2) students in their theses. The following table shows the percentage of the seven groups of ungrammatical constructions of the passive voice found in 40 theses written by postgraduate students of English Department of PPs UNP.

**Table 1. The Types of the Grammatical Problems**

Types of the Grammatical Problems	Amount of Data	Percentage
I. Problem on Tense and Voice (Active for passive)	98	34.4%
II. Problem on Agreement of Subject, Copula, with V3	51	17.9%
III. No subject, copula, and verb agreement	81	28.4%
IV. Problem on using Prepositional Phrase and Adverb	11	3.86%
V. Misuse of passive voice	32	11.23%
VI. Problem of using double <i>to be</i>	3	1.05%
VII. Problem on using subject and sentential logics	8	2.8%

As the examples, the followings are the ungrammatical passive constructions found in students' master degree theses.

- (3) ... *the research will done the research...*
- (4) *This research has been conducted at ABA BHAS Bukittinggi...*
- (5) *Those data would be analyzed...*
- (6) *The data was analyzed by using simple regression technique...*
- (7) *It was help the researcher to get...*
- (8) *The students collected in their own classes, and gave them ...*
- (9) *Instruments are used in this research, as the followings: ...*
- (10) *For vocabulary test was also given by using multiple choice.*
- (11) *After the researches was evaluated the task of the students...*
- (12) *Secondly, it is implied that ...*
- (13) *Each cycle was consisted of plan, action, observation, and reflection...*
- (14) *It was be held by a collaborator...*
- (15) *The observation was be done by the researcher ...*
- (16) *This research was analyzed based on the theory conducted by...*

The seven types of ungrammatical passive constructions above indicate that the students were still in "basic-grammatical problems" on English *tense, aspects, and passives*. The results of the two researches also imply that the learners' practical problems in understanding and using English tense and aspect should become particular notes for the programs of EFL grammar instruction. At least, there three reasons why the learners of EFL at university (at English Department of FBS UNP) should not have such grammatical problems in using tense, aspect, and constructing passives. First, they can be categorized as advanced (or at least pre-advanced) learners of EFL. Second, they had followed academic processes and supervisors both in classroom activities and in independent learning. Third, especially for postgraduate students, they had learned how to write scientific papers and theses since they were at undergraduate degree.

How did the elementary grammatical problems come up? Further-critical analysis on relevant data and result of short-limited interview with EFL learners at English Department of UNP, it may be argued that the factors causing the grammatical problems are: (i) the interference of learners' L1 (first language); (ii) the difference of grammatical typology of English and learners' L1; (iii) less pedagogical attention, grammatical explanation, and communicative exercises on the features of English tense and aspects; and (iv) there is learners' tendency to focus on transferring the content of messages rather than the attention on grammatical features of sentences used.

It seems that the learners' theoretical understanding and practical using of tense and aspect in English had not come to the level of grammatical and language awareness yet. They only know English tense and aspect in the level of surface understanding and practices. In this sense, many English Department students have not had sufficient grammatical and language awareness on English tense and aspect. Consequently, they are not ready to be involved into the nature of English grammar which may lead them to have low linguistic competence and communicative competence, as well.

## 2. Tense and Aspect in English: How do EFL Learners Understand Them?

Ideally, the theoretical-linguistic explanation and description about tenses and aspects in English have to be reduced into simpler and more practical explanation. For university students or advanced learners, the practical descriptions should be more details than those for beginners of intermediate learners. The description also contains the conceptual and theoretical bases in practical explanation and followed by various communicative examples, both in spoken and written exercises. Furthermore, pedagogical and psychological judgments are highly needed during the time of learning execution. Then, for adults and

advanced learners, comprehensive and interesting materials should be based on the ideal principles of adults in learning a foreign language.

At the English Department of UNP, the principles of learning English grammar stated above have already been following. However, the teaching-learning processes of English grammar have not been achieving the level of having and developing the grammatical and language awareness yet. As Bourke (2008:15) argues, the grammar instructions, at least: (i) have to build and develop learners' conscious and subconscious knowledge of language learnt by having linguistic data around them; (ii) help learners effectively explore, internalize, and gain greater understanding of the target language; and (iii) develop learners' sensitivity on linguistic features and practical uses of language learnt. These ideal items have not been successfully achieved instead.

The analysis on questionnaire distributed and data obtained through practical-limited interview with five students of English Department tells that the learners:

- (i) know the term tense but do not really know the term aspect;
- (ii) do not know the linguistic differences between tense and aspect;
- (iii) have not been introduced the phenomena of tense and aspect in English;
- (iv) do not pay serious attention to the difference between tense and aspect;
- (v) do not know the terms simple tenses and complex tenses;
- (vi) understand that the tense and aspect are only tense.

If it is so, how do the EFL learners understand the English tense and aspect? In accordance with results of previous researches and related information above, it may be reasonably assumed that many EFL learners, in this case the English Department students, theoretically understand and practically use the tense and aspect of English in three-specific ways. Firstly, they know that English has tense (fourteen or sixteen tenses), but they do not really know grammatical-linguistic bases of tense (and aspect) in a tenseness language. This condition is still the surface grammatical competence for elementary-intermediate learners. The fourteen or sixteen tenses they have already known are the grammatical combination of tense and aspects, in fact. For university students, let's say post-intermediate to advanced learners, such elementary competence on grammatical features of EFL is not academically sufficient because it may lead learners to have low level of grammatical and language awareness.

Secondly, they practically understand that tense in English is closely related to time; in simple statement, tense is time or adverb of time. Consequently, many students frequently think and use lexical items rather than grammatical features to express tense and aspect in clausal or sentential constructions. This type of understanding and practical uses of tense and aspect in English may lead EFL learners to use their own grammatical features in speaking and writing in the foreign language. As a matter of fact, tense and/or aspect are different from adverb of time, although they are in high relationship. In linguistic-grammatical viewpoint, tense and aspect are grammatical features and categories expressed in the predicate of clause or sentence, meanwhile adverb of time is part of speech or word/phrase category.

Thirdly, they frequently think and understand that the essential and meaningful uses of tense (and aspect) are only in written expression (written language); the spoken language may has "no" tense (and aspect). This is, again, one more unexpected conclusion about English grammar. For beginners, such thought is probably all right as a way to motivate learners. For advanced and university learners, however, it should be revised. Both spoken and written clausal/sentential constructions in English need tense and aspect, whether they are in simple or complex tenses.

## **Conclusion**

Many Indonesia learners of EFL at any level think that learning and understanding English grammar, especially tense and aspect, are problematic and confusing. In other side, understanding grammatical features of a learnt language for university students is highly necessary in order to have better language awareness and communicative skills. Due to the facts that many students of EFL do not understand the nature of English tense and aspect in right "path" they have a lot of problems in constructing clauses and sentences concerning with the grammatical features. If the explanation and description about tense and aspect based on descriptive grammar are frequently too theoretical and complicated, the EFL teaching-learning at all levels, particularly at university level, need pedagogical description and explanation about tenses and aspects of the foreign language. This conclusion is derived from the ideas of pedagogical grammar which combine between descriptive grammar and prescriptive one. It is also relevant to state on this occasion that the EFL learners' perception and understanding toward tense and aspect as the problematic grammatical features should be reduced and removed. Better understanding on English tense and aspect is one component of having and

building language awareness and communicative competence in the foreign language. Above all, however, the ideas argued on this paper need further discussion and analysis in order to come to more practical ones.

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