

Students' writing ability in descriptive texts and their problems of using appropriate adjective in SMP

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the students' ability in writing descriptive texts in class VIII and the adjectives' problems that they encountered in writing the texts. This study was a descriptive study and used cluster random sampling. The subject was thirty students in VIII. The test was used in collecting the data and was processed by using an assessment rubric of Heiton which evaluated five components of students' writing ability. The findings show that nine students had good ability, three students had fair ability, fifteen students had poor ability and three students had very poor ability. Half of students had problems in using adjectives. The results showed that students still had difficulty in developing the content, organization, grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, and had the problems in adjective. Therefore, teachers are suggested to give exercises for students to write descriptive text.

Keywords: writing ability, descriptive text, adjective



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Introduction

In learning English, there are four skills required to be mastered well by the learners such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. As one of the language skills, writing has an important role in the learners' actual life such as for writing letters, emails, and documents for both informal and formal purposes. In the context of schooling, the writing skill will help the learners to accomplish many kinds of tasks in written form more easily such as for writing narrative texts, descriptive texts, procedure texts, and more importantly for writing a thesis as one of the most important requirements to graduate. In conclusion, the ability to write will unavoidably give many advantages in students' life both inside and outside of the school contexts.

Based on KTSP (Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan) 2006 of junior high school, there are some texts that are required to be taught to the students such as narrative, descriptive, recount, report, and procedure texts. Each kind of the texts has its own characteristics and language features.

The students should understand and master all of these characteristics and language features. One of the texts learned by junior high school students is descriptive text. Wyrick (2000:227) states that in writing a descriptive text, it is important that the writer is able to give details of the object being described so that the readers can create a mental picture of the person, place, or object. To enable this, the writer must use a selection of choice of words to make the object being described appear vivid in the reader's eyes. It is important then that the writer makes use of words that elevate sensory details such as sight, sound, smell, taste, feeling, and texture to create vivid images in the reader's mind. In addition, the writer must also be aware of spatial order in order to create a clear visual image of a person, place, object, or scene: 'the location or arrangement in space from top to bottom, bottom to top, right to left, left to right, near to far, far to near, inside to outside, or outside to inside' (Haines, 2007:121).

For example, a student wants to write about a place. The student should then include several information about the place, such as where the place is, how big it is, how cold or warm the place is, what it looks like and how the place makes us feel and so on. When a student wants to describe about his/her house, he/she should have the background knowledge about parts of his house, such as how many rooms the house has, what the color of the wall is, how wide or how high the house is, and so on. In conclusion, the adjectives are needed to enable the reader to create a mental picture of the object described.

Considering the fact above, the researcher is very interested in conducting a research on the eighth graders' achievement of writing descriptive text and the problems that they encountered in writing descriptive texts at SMP N 21 Padang. The researcher believes that it is appropriate to conduct this research on writing descriptive text because it is included in the curriculum of English subject in SMP.

Method

The researcher conducted a descriptive research. The purpose of this research is to gain information about phenomena in order to describe existed condition in the field. Sudaryanto (1995) says that descriptive research describes the way things are which is based on facts. Here, this research was intended to explain the students' ability and their problems in writing descriptive text.

The population of the research was 30 students of 222 students registered in eighth graders that consisted of 8 parallel classes (VIII.1-VIII.8) who studied English subject taught by different English teachers at SMP N 21 Padang. The participants were chosen by using cluster random sampling because there was more than one parallel class of the eighth graders. The researcher invited all of the total number of VIII.1 students as the participants of the research. It means that the participants who were involved are 30 students. VIII.1 class is divided into 30 students in the academic year of 2016/2017.

Results and Discussion

The data gotten in this part dealt with students' ability in writing descriptive text. In writing the texts, students needed to pay attention to the component of writing and adjective. The component of writing in descriptive text divided into five parts, they were content, generic structure, language feature, vocabulary, and mechanics.

The Students' Writing Ability

The students' ability in writing descriptive texts depicts that there is no students who had very good ability and 9 students (30%) who had good ability in developing generic structure. Besides, for

fair ability were 9 students (10%). Then, more than half of students had poor ability. The data showed the highest percentage is poor ability.

Content (expressing ideas)

The students' ability in expressing ideas depicts that there was no student who had 'excellent' and 'very good' ability in expressing their ideas in writing descriptive text. The students with good ability amounts to 5 (16.67%), fair ability 5 (16.67%), poor ability was 18 (60%) and very poor ability was 2 (6.66%). Those data showed the highest percentage was on 'poor' ability.

Poor

The ideas were not clear and not developed well. The second paragraph was not clear and the arguments were difficult to understand. The paragraphs were not united and coherent. It depicts that students did not understand how to write the description and how to develop it into body of paragraphs and concluding paragraph as restatement of the first statement in first paragraph. One of corrections is "*my cat is very healthy because I feed it every day.*". Then, in following paragraph, the writer might have wanted to write "*my cat is very healthy because I feed my cat every day.*".

Organization (generic structure)

The generic structure of descriptive text consists of two components. They are identification and description. The highest frequency is poor. Eighteen students were on poor quality by percentage 60%. Besides, the lowest frequency is for very poor quality. There were 3 students (10 %) for the lowest frequency. On the other hands, more than half of students had poor ability.

Good

The text showed that generic structure of the text had a quite good main point and clear conclusion. Moreover, the identification and description were clear. The paragraphs were developed well too.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary of descriptive text relates to choice of words. The student with good ability is 7 (23.33%). Then, fair ability is 10 students (33.33%) and poor ability was 10 (33.33%). Those data showed fair ability was equal with poor ability.

Good

The writer could choose appropriate words in writing descriptive text, just one word that was not appropriate in the sentence. The sentence was "*My dad's tall is about 180 cm and his weigh is about 70 kg.*". One of the corrections was "*My dad's height is about 180 cm and his weight is about 70 kg.*" Because he/ she stated about his/ her dad's weight.

Language feature (grammar)

Grammar of descriptive text relates to use some tenses and sentence structure. The students' ability in applying grammar was fair. More than half of students got fair 9 (30%) and poor ability was 18 (60%). These data showed the highest percentage was poor ability.

Fair

Here were some grammatical problem; "*Moreover color this nice*". The use of **to be** is important in that sentence. We should use **to be** to combine subject (noun) and adjective. The correction was "*this is nice*". Another error was "*child the secound named who likes to sleep and the third child is the famale brave named.*". One of the correction was "*the second kitten likes to sleep and the third kitten is the brave female kitten*". The sentence, "*Cat was every funny especially genitte voice*" must be written in present tense because this is descriptive text that uses present tense. It must be, "*the cat is funny especially from her flirty voice*".

Mechanics

Mechanics consists of spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. There was no student can get mechanics correctly in their writing. They still made errors in spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. There were 5 students who had fair ability and 17 students for poor ability. Then, half of the students had poor ability (56.67%).

Good

There were only three incorrect words. The first one was about capitalization. At the beginning of paragraph "*he is a handsome man with 178 cm in height*", the writer did not capitalize the word; he (He). In every first letter of sentence should be capitalization. Another error was "*compared with me, he is still more diligent.*". The correction was "*Comparing to me, he is still more diligent*". The other is "*Dad never takes a bath too late, he always, keeps his body clean with a shower early in the morning.*". It should be "*Dad never takes a bath too late. He always keeps his body clean with a shower early morning.*".

Students' adjective problems in writing descriptive text

There were ten students who had errors of adjective in their writing. They often used the adjective in improper context. They also did not know the difference between noun and adjective. They also did it because of their mother tongue. They did not know the things in English. In addition, they did misspelling in English words. It could be proven by the following samples:

a. *Sample 1*

Referring to Richard and Schmidt (2010:12) mention that an adjective is a word that describes the thing, quality, state, or action which a noun refers to. The student meant "funny" and "runny-nosed." In that paragraph, the student stated mucus. Basically, mucus is a noun. It is not adjective. On the other hands, the student wrote first. Whereas the correct one was first.

b. *Sample 2*

The student tried to say *genit* in English. Because she did not know the English of *genit*, so she wrote the wrong one. She stated *genitte* as the representative of *genit* in Indonesian.

c. *Sample 4*

The student stated 'soft chocolate' in that paragraph. Actually, the correct one was 'soft brown'. Identically, the chocolate is representative of brown color for this student.

d. *Sample 5*

There was no something wrong with the word "better" in that statement. The problem was the student wrote article "a" before adjective. It means that the noun must be put after the adjective.

e. *Sample 6*

In that context, the student stated "aliving". As the adjective, "aliving" must be changed to be "alive". It was more appropriate than aliving.

f. *Sample 7*

The same case with the previous case, there was an article before the adjective. It means that the noun must be put after the adjective. The student should write 'clean' for the correct adjective.

g. *Sample 8*

After the word 'so', it must be the adjective. But the student wrote the verb after the word 'so'. Furthermore, the student stated the past form of the verb. It was totally wrong. Then, she wrote 'best dad'. For the superlative degree, it must be 'the best dad'. Best is the superlative form of good. Both of them are adjectives.

h. *Sample 9*

White is one of the colors. It was not appropriate for the student who still wrote 'colors' before 'white'. The people had known that white is a kind of colors. In conclusion, the student kept stating white, without saying color before it.

i. *Sample 10*

Both of the words 'sift' and 'beatiful' were false. He referred to say soft and beautiful. As the adjectives, the student must be careful to write them. Consequently, the reader would not confused to catch the idea of his writing.

j. *Sample 11*

The student wanted to say white. The student did not know 'putih' in English. The word *witte* replaced by *white*.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the students' ability in writing descriptive texts of the eighth grade of SMP N 21 Padang was poor. It was based on the analysis of all of indicators in this research, concerning with the aspect of writing ability (content, generic structure, language features, vocabulary, mechanics) and adjective. The generic structure was divided into two parts. They were identification and description.

Then, the students' poor ability in writing descriptive text happened because of some problems by the students. The problems were dealing with the components of writing. It was proven by the data of students' writing descriptive texts. It was found that students did many errors in each component. All students had problems in applying correct adjective.

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