AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' ABILITY AND DIFFICULTIES IN WRITING DESCRIPTIVE TEXTS

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Abstract: This paper repotrs on an investigation towards the tenth graders' ability and difficulties in writing descriptive text in one class of one senior high school in Bandung. The research used a qualitative case study as the method and texts analysis as the data collection techniques. Nine texts written by Low, Mid, and High achievers were analyzed in terms of schematic structure and linguistic features using Systemic Functional Linguistics. The findings revealed that the students representing the middle and high achievers had a good control about the schematic structure of descriptive text. They also were able to use appropriate linguistic features. On the other hand, it was also revealed that the low achievers were still confused in identifying the schematic structure of descriptive text. Moreover, the low achievers still needed a lot of improvement as they still made a lot of mistakes in the text they wrote.

Keywords: *Descriptive Text, Systemic Functional Linguistics*

Introduction

Writing plays an important role for students who are in the process of learning a language. In Indonesian school, students are required to learn to write different text types. There are some types of text that should be learned by tenth graders, they are: Recount, Narrative, Procedural, News Item and Descriptive.

One way that can be used to find out students' knowledge about English is by analyzing the students' text/writing. Analyzing students' text is very important to do because it can help English teacher to find out the students' ability and difficulties in writing (Lock, 1996). Further, Emilia (2005) stated that research about analyzing students' text is very important to do because by knowing the students' difficulties, it can lead the teacher to help solve the students' problems.

Research about students' ability and difficulties is important to do to help both teachers and students. However, in Indonesia, research about students' ability and difficulties in writing each of type text is not many. So, in this research

the researcher has a desire to find out the students' ability and difficulties in writing, especially in Descriptive text.

From the elaboration above, this research is intended to find out tenth graders' ability and difficulties in writing descriptive text by analyzing the students' text in terms of schematic structure and linguistic features using Systemic Functional Linguistics. The results of the study are expected to give contribution for language learning in theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this study is expected to give a real portrait about Indonesian students' ability and difficulties in writing Descriptive text. Practically, this research is expected to give much information about students' difficulties, so in the future the students will be more careful in writing and English teachers can help the students to solve the difficulties they face.

Literature Review

- Descriptive Text

Descriptive text is a text which is intended to describe a particular person, place or thing. The schematic structure of Descriptive text is divided into two: Identification and Description. Besides schematic structure, descriptive text also has its own linguistic features. Linguistic features of descriptive text are: use specific participant, written in present tense, use linking verbs, use adjectives, use relational and material processes (Derewianka, 1990; Gerot & Wignell, 1994; Nafisah & Kurniawan, 2007; Butt, et al, 2000; and also Emilia, 2010).

- Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL)

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is a new approach to learn grammar which has been introduced by Halliday in 1960s. SFL is an approach which sees language not only as a rule, but also as a resource for making meaning (Lock, 1996; Bloor and Bloor, 2004).

- Transitivity

Transitivity is a system of grammatical resource for construing which expresses what is going on (Gerot & Wignell, 1994). According to Halliday

(1994:p.107), there are three types components in transitivity, they are: the process itself, the participants and the circumstances.

In transitivity system, there are six process types (Eggins, 1994 and 2004). The first is material process. It can be defined as process of doing something (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004). It usually uses action verbs. The example:

Enrique	eats	a mouse
Actor	Process: material	Goal

Second, Mental processes, are ones of sensing (Halliday, 1994). There are three types of sensing in mental processes, they are: affective (feeling), cognitive (thinking), and perceptive (perceiving through the five senses) (Gerot & Wignell, 1994:58). The example:

I	like	Siberian Husky
Senser	Process: mental: Affective	Phenomenon

Third, Verbal processes, are processes of saying or symbolically signalling (Gerot & Wignell, 1994:62). According to Halliday (1994), there are four participants in verbal processes, they are: Sayer, Receiver, Verbiage, and Target.

I	told	my secret	to my lovely cat
Sayer	Process: verbal	Verbiage	Receiver

My dog	observe	the cat
Sayer	Process: verbal	Target

Fourth, Relational processes, are processes which relate a participant to its identity or description (Butt, et al, 2000:58). There are two types of relational process: *Relational Attributive* and *Relational Identifying. Relational Attributive* relates a participant to its general characteristics or description; and *Relational Identifying* relates a participant to its identity, role or meaning. The examples:

Relational Attributive:

He	is	a Spanish snake
Carrier	Relational attributive : Intensive	Attribute

Relational Identifying:

His name	is	Enrique
Token	Relational identifying : Intensive	Value

Fifth, Behavioural processes, are processes of psychological behavior. The main participant is called *behaver,* and it must be a conscious being (Eggins, 1994).

A crocodile	lives	in the river
Behaver	Behavioural	Circumstances : Place

Sixth, Existential processes, are "processes of existence". There is only one participant in existential processes, it is *existent* (Halliday, 1994).

There are	so many cats
Process: existential	Existence

Research Methodology

This study used case study as the research designed. This study was conducted in a class of tenth grader students of one senior high school in Bandung, but only nine students were chosen as the participants. The nine students were selected based on the level of their English proficiency in writing Descriptive text they produced. The nine students were categorized into: low, middle and high achievers. The three categories were identified by the researcher and English Teacher.

Data Presentation and Discussion

In low achievers category, it is revealed that the students were incapacity in differentiating the schematic structure of descriptive text. The low achievers put some information which is related to description in the identification.

- Text (Low Achiever)

Siberian Husky is a dog. Siberian Husky looks like a wolf usually. *It has black and white fur and it has long tail. It has the most beautiful eyes in the dog's world*. It was so cute.

Siberian Husky is a friendly dog. Its not aggressive. Siberian Husky has a very sharp eyes, sometimes the eyes looks like angry .....

In terms of linguistic features, low achievers show their capacity in using linguistic features of descriptive text, such as: using specific participants *Siberian Husky*), writing in present tense (Siberian Husky *looks* like a wolf), using linking verbs (S.H *is* a dog), using adjectives (*Long, Beautiful*), and using relational and material process (Siberian Husky *are* still used....., Siberian Husky *gained* popularity ....).

On the other side, low achievers also show their struggle to write a successful descriptive text as they still made a lot of grammatical mistakes in the text: It was (is) so cute, has *a* very sharp eyes, The eyes looks (look) , two hamster (hamsters).

Different from low achievers, in middle achievers category, it is revealed that the ability of middle achievers in writing is quite better.

Middle achievers show their good control about the schematic structure of descriptive text. They also show their capacity in applying the linguistic features of descriptive text in the text they wrote.

- Text (Mid achiever)

Panda is wild animal. It usually found in central western and south western china. Panda also live in bamboo forest.....

Panda has black and white fur, that's why panda easily recognized by peoples. Panda has a large body, distinctive black patches around the eye, over the ears, and across its round body.....

In terms of processes, middle achievers show some improvements from the low achievers. Different from the low achievers in which the texts were dominated by relational process, in these middle achievers' texts, the total use of relational processes and material processes are almost similar. This proves that middle achievers have better capacity in using processes in writing descriptive texts.

On the other hand, middle achievers show their immaturity in English Grammar as they still made some mistakes. Examples: Some panda live in a few mountain *range*, that's why panda easily *recognize* ***(recognized)*** *by, more cute (****cuter****), peoples (****people****).*

Different from low and middle achievers, high achievers show greater ability in writing.

- Text (High achiever)

Goat is one of the farm animal beside chicken, cow, and horse. It lives in a large steppe, but some goat lives at mountain..... . Goat has four legs, two eyes, two ears, one mouth, one nose, and two horns. The horns is sharp and strong. It has short and small tail. Goat has round eyes and horizontal pupil.....

In schematic structure, high achievers show their good control about the schematic structure of descriptive text. They also show their capacity in applying the linguistic features of descriptive text, such as: specific participant (*Goat),* written in present tense (It *is* herbivore), linking verbs (Farm goat *is* docile), adjectives (*wild, strong*).

In terms of processes, high achievers are better than low and middle achievers. High achievers use more amounts of processes in the text than the low and middle achievers.

However, in terms of English grammar, high achievers still made some mistakes. For example: Goat is one of the farm *animal* ***(animals)***, The *horns is* ***(are)*** sharp, It often *eat* ***(eats)*** grass, he usually *trick* ***(tricks).***

Conclusions

From the text analysis, it is revealed that the students from middle and high achievers have good control about the schematic structure of descriptive text. In terms of linguistic features, almost all the students have ability in implementing the linguistic features in the text they wrote. In terms of transitivity process, all the students showed their good ability in applying it, but middle and high achievers showed better ability in using processes.

On the other hand, it is also revealed that low achievers were still confused in identifying the schematic structure of descriptive text. Moreover, the low achievers seemed to have less sense about English Grammar. They made a lot of mistakes in the text they wrote.

Regarding the conclusions above, it is recommended that further study could be done (if using the same research method) involving large number of the participants, and used other metafunctions, such as textual metafunction and interpersonal metafunction. This is suggested to see clearer and comprehensibly on the students' ability and difficulties in writing a text.

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