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## **PROBLEMS FACED BY THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT STUDENTS IN STUDYING GRAMMAR AT BUNG HATTA UNIVERSITY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This research aimed at finding out the problems faced by the English Department students of Bung Hatta University in studying grammar. Some of the problems in grammar are; the students repeated grammar subject for several times, most of the students did the remedial teaching because they did not fulfill the requirement of the score given by the university. This research is a descriptive quantitative study with the all the English department students as the population. The researcher took stratified proportional sampling in determining the sample. The students were given the questionnaire to find out what are their problems in studying grammar. And to find out more information about students problems, the researcher also did an interview with the grammar lecturer. In understanding grammar materials, students had problems in terms of copying some parts of compulsory grammar book, owning additional grammar book to support their compulsory grammar book, problem in mastering too much material, many time allocated was very limited. In relation to the problems in understanding teachers' presentation, teacher explains the materials too fast, problem in understanding the language used by the teacher, the media used by teacher. And problem in asking questions when they do not understand teachers' explanation. Related to the problems of reviewing grammar lesson, the students had problems in terms of reviewing lesson at home. They also had problem in applying grammar rules to communicate outside the class. And students became frustrated when they are failed in grammar subject.*

Keywords: *Problems, Studying Grammar*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Many learners come to language classes with fairly fixed expectations as to what they will do there (Thornbury, 1999:17). These expectations may derive from previous classroom experiences of language learning. Learners experiences may lead them to the point that they do not want to immerse in the target language. Many learners come to language classes in the expectation that at least some of the time they will be studying the grammar of the language. Furthermore he said learners already assume that studying grammar is boring and frustrating since the need for rules, order and discipline are highly valued.

Students learning experiences will direct them to have a strong opinion about grammar subject since they have their own record of success and failure. Harmer (1998:11) said that

those who underachieved at school may subconsciously assume that they are going to fail again. Their failure experiences of studying grammar in the previous time may direct them to behave against grammar subject. Grammar is extremely important in learning English.

There are compelling arguments to support the view that without the attention to rules, orders, and discipline, the learner is unlikely to progress beyond the most basic level of communication. Leibniz in Thornbury (1999:25) says “A language is acquired through practice, merely perfected to grammar”. Although grammar is related to complicated rules orders, and discipline, learning it is a must.

It happens as well at university level. University students think that studying grammar is studying many complicated rules, orders and discipline. No wonder the students often have to take the same subject for several times because they do not get the standard point set by the university. Problems of students’ grammar ability particularly occur in the case of written language, which generally needs to be more explicit than spoken language.

English Department of FKIP Bung Hatta University offers Grammar I, II, III, and IV for the students. In fact, the students’ ability in mastering grammar is not satisfactory yet. It is proved by the fact that English Department conducted remedial teaching that focused on grammar to the students. Moreover, most of the students took grammar subject in short semester. Remedial teaching and short semester are only offered to the students who do not fulfill the standard point set by the university. Those facts show that students still have problems with their grammar.

Based on the phenomenon above, the writer would like to identify the problems that the students faced in studying grammar. This study is conducted at the university level especially English Department students from four students’ levels. The researcher conducted this study in the assumption that all the students from the four levels had experiences learning grammar subject, whether in progress or they had pass grammar subject.

A number of experts have proposed their ideas to define what grammar is. Thornbury (1999:17) says grammar is a description of regularities in a language, and knowledge of these regularities provides the learners with the means to generate a potentially enormous number of original sentences. Furthermore, he says that grammar is a kind of “sentence making machine”. Without grammar, the sentence will be failed to have meaning.

Moreover, he says that grammar is a description of rules that govern how a language’s sentences are formed. Next, grammar is a description of the rules of the structure of a language; the way the words combine, the order they come in, the way they change according to their relationship to other words, how they build up into units like a sentence

The writer concludes that grammar is a kind of a “sentence making machine” and a set of rules that enables the user of the language to describe how the language should be used. Without grammar, the language will be meaningless. All language has grammar. Knowing the grammar of the language correctly can help users of the language to communicate easily.

Understanding grammar material will be very difficult for the learners, especially when teacher serves a new grammatical structure for them. Ellis (2003:1) says learners can acquire a new grammatical structure only very gradually and slowly. No matter how well designed the material is, the students are unlikely to achieve immediate success.

Students often have problems concerning the grammar materials they have during teaching and learning process. Understanding the materials is a big dilemma for them since the materials is served in large number but the time is very limited. It is important to decide the most appropriate materials for the students.

Based on the theory above, the writer concludes that student’s understanding in learning grammar will be influence by the choice of material. Having almost the same material appearance will direct the students to behave against grammar subject.

Each student has their own ability of understanding teacher’s presentation. In presenting the lesson, teacher should consider several things in order to limit the number of vague information during the presentation. The fundamental classroom management concern has to do with the teacher and the messages the teacher sends through her voice and through her body language.

Different individual style will create different approach of presenting the lesson. There are some common problems related to teacher presentation (O’Connell, 2000:1), they are:

1. Teacher talks to the blackboard
2. Teacher draws confusing diagrams
3. Teacher talks with accent and is difficult to understand
4. Teacher talks too fast and difficult to understand
5. Teacher overcomplicates a concept.
6. Teacher assumes students know something that they don’t
7. Teacher rushes at the end to finish the course
8. Teacher gives problems in class and doesn’t give students time to think before questioning them.

Since English is a new language for students, it will be a hard time for them to understand teacher presentation using the grammar rules and other aspects of the language.

Grammar will not work well if there are no reviews. Reviewing lesson takes an important role on student's achievement in studying grammar. Brown (1994:191) states there are some criteria of good learners:

- a. Creative, developing a "feel" for the language by experimenting with its grammar and words.
- b. Make their own opportunities for practice in using the language inside and outside the classroom.
- c. Learn to live with uncertainty by not getting flustered and by continuing to talk or listen without understanding every word.
- d. Make errors work for them and not against them.

Most of the students do not review their lesson, as the consequences their grammar ability will stay the same. Grammar needs a lot of practice, students should be creative in developing a "feel" for the language by experimenting with its grammar and words.

## **METHOD**

This study was descriptive research. Gay (1987: 189) states that the descriptive research involves collecting data in order to answer questions concerning the current status of the subject of the study. Moreover Selinger (1989:116) states that this research is concerned with providing description of phenomena that occur naturally without intervention of an artificial treatment. In this research, the writer was describing the phenomena of students' problems in studying Grammar in English Department.

The population of the study was all students of English Department students of FKIP Bung Hatta University registered in the even semester. There were 80 students from the first year, 90 students from the second year, 50 students from the third year, and 80 students from the fourth year. The total number of the population was 300 students. The researcher chose this population to be investigated because the students in the first, second, and the third year were in the process of studying Grammar while almost all the students from the fourth year had finished Grammar subject. Based on that assumption the writer could determine the problems that they faced in studying Grammar.

The researcher used proportional stratified sampling to take the sample since it selects a sample in such a way that identified sub groups in the population are represented in the sample in the same proportion that they exist in the population (Gay, 2012:107). There was 20% of the population to study. It means there were 16 students from the first year, 18

students from the second year, 10 students from the third year, and 16 students from the fourth year. The total number of the sample was 60 students.

Another resource was four Grammar lecturers in English Department of FKIP Bung Hatta University. In this case, the researcher used simple random sampling technique. The writer took 50% of this population as a sample to study. She wrote the names of four Grammar lecturers in four different papers, she rolled them, and chose 2 pieces of the rolled paper randomly. The names chosen were the other samples.

There were two kinds of instruments used in this study, questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire was tried out to the students out of the sample. From the result of the try out, good items of the questionnaire could be selected. First, the questionnaire consisted of 20 items, 11 positive statements and 9 negative statements which were developed by some indicator of problems faced by the students in studying grammar; problems in understanding grammar materials, problems in understanding teacher's presentation, and problems in reviewing grammar lesson. From 11 positive statements and 9 negative statements, the writer spread them in several numbers. The items with positive statements are items number: 1, 3, 7, 8, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, and 20. While the items number 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 12, 17, and 19 are the items with negative statements.

The questionnaire was tried out to the students out of the sample after consulting it with her advisors. The reason why the writer used questionnaire was that she could get factual information from the respondents. Questionnaire surveys are a form of research which depends on the frankness of the subjects' responses as stated by Leung (2001:1).

In addition, the questionnaire was modified in a form of Likert Scale. Nasoetion (2002:4.21) states that Likert Scale is five-point scale in which the interval between each point on the scale is assumed to be equal. But, the writer modified it, each item was followed by five possible answers: 1) Always, 2) Often, 3) Sometimes, 4) Rarely, 5) Never.

In order to prove that the data represented the current status of the sample the writer did interview session. For interview session there were two English department lecturers who teach Grammar I, II, III, and IV as the interviewees. From the interview result the writer got some information related to the student's problems in studying grammar.

The interview consisted of 20 questions. The interview took about 30 minutes. The interview was developed by some indicators of problems faced by the students in studying grammar such as; problems in understanding grammar materials, problems in understanding teachers presentation, and problems in reviewing grammar lesson.

The questionnaire of the study was administered to a group of 60 students. From the result of the questionnaire, the researcher got the raw scores from each sample. The percentage of item quality for each item was determined by dividing the raw score of an item and the maximum score for the item. The maximum score for the item was gotten from multiplying the number of total sample for each level of students and the maximum score of an item.

Table 1 Result of the questionnaire was analyzed and classified based on this classification.

Category	Percentage	Classification
Having no problem at all	> 89.73	Having no problem
Having no problem	77.58 – < 89.73	
Having small problem	65.42 – < 77.58	Having problem
Having problem	53.27 – < 65.42	
Having big problem	< 53.27	

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Result of Problems Faced by the English Department Students in Understanding Grammar Materials

From the result of calculating the mean and standard deviation, the researcher found the category for each item in questionnaire, they are as follows:

- a. Item number 1 was scored 89.64. It means that the students of English department do not have problem at all owning compulsory grammar book.
- b. Item number 6 was scored 66.88. It means that the students of English department have small problems with the limited time allocated for grammar class.
- c. Item number 2 was scored 65.32. It means that the students of English department have problem in copying some parts of compulsory grammar book.
- d. Item number 3 was scored 59.38. It means that the students of English department have problems in owning additional grammar book.
- e. Item number 5 was scored 58.92. It means that the students of English department have problem in understanding many rules in learning grammar
- f. Item number 4 was scored 51.88. It means that the students of English department have big problem with too much material in grammar class.

Based on the table of classification, the writer classified the problems of understanding grammar materials as follows: students of English department do not have problems in owning compulsory grammar book. But, they have problems in copying some parts of

compulsory grammar book, owning additional grammar book, understanding too much material, understanding many rules, and limited time allocated for grammar class.

From the interview with two grammar lecturers, the writer concluded that students do not have problems in owning compulsory grammar book. According to the two grammar lecturers, students have some problems concerning copying some parts of compulsory grammar book, owning additional grammar book, understanding too much material, understanding many rules, and limited time allocated for grammar class.

#### Result of Problems Faced by the English Department Students in Understanding Teachers' Presentation

Based on the result of data analysis, the writer got the following result:

- a. Item number 8 was scored 86.18. It means that the students of English department do not have problem with teacher articulation and systematic way of teaching
- b. Item number 7 was scored 78.30. It means that the students of English department do not have problems in understanding teacher explanation in grammar class.
- c. Item number 10 was scored 74.26. It means that the students of English department have small problem in understanding the language used by the teacher in teaching grammar
- d. Item number 12 was scored 67.68. It means that the students of English department have small problem in asking question to the teacher in grammar class.
- e. Item number 11 was scored 62.08. It means that the students of English department have problem with the media used by the teacher in grammar class
- f. Item number 9 was scored 49.92. It means that the students of English department have big problem when teacher explain grammar materials too fast.

Based on the table of classification the writer classified the problems of understanding teachers' presentation as follows: students of English department do not have problems in understanding teachers' explanation in grammar class, clear articulation and systematic way of teaching grammar. But, they have problems when teacher explains the lesson too fast, understanding the language used by the teacher in grammar class, the media used, and the problems of asking question to the teacher in grammar class.

From the interview with two grammar lecturers, the writer concluded that students do not have problems with clear and systematic way of teaching. According to the two grammar lecturers, some students have problems in understanding the explanation given by the teacher during grammar class. Sometimes the teacher speaks too fast, as a result students often have problems in understanding the language used by the teacher.

Teacher did not use media to support their presentation, the only media used for presenting grammar lesson is grammar book, although there is direct projector, it was only for displaying exercises. Student's participation to ask question during teaching and learning process was not satisfactory, they just kept silent when there was a time given for them to ask question. The participation also depends on the class, active class tends to participate more than the passive one.

#### Result of Problems Faced by the English Department Students in Reviewing Grammar Lesson

After analyzing the data, the writer got the following result:

- a. Item number 20 was scored 89.77. It means that the students of English department have no problem at all when they make errors in grammar class; they make error work for them, not against them.
- b. Item number 13 was scored 88.18. It means that the students of English department have no problem in taking notes in learning grammar.
- c. Item number 15 was scored 82.94. It means that the students of English department have no problem in doing grammar task individually.
- d. Item number 16 was scored 79.60. It means that the students of English department have no problem in having the feedback from the task given by the teacher.
- e. Item number 17 was scored 79.35. It means that the students of English department do not have problem doing grammar task, they are not lazy to do it.
- f. Item number 19 was scored 71.60. It means that the students of English department have small problem when they are failed in grammar class, they are frustrated when they failed in grammar subject.
- g. Item number 14 was scored 68.84. It means that the students of English department have small problem in reviewing grammar lesson at home.
- h. Item number 18 was scored 59.35. It means that the students of English department have problem in applying grammar rules to communicate outside the class.

Based on the table of classification, the writer classified the problems of reviewing grammar lesson are as follows: students of English department do not have problems in taking notes, doing grammar task individually, having feedback from the teacher, they are not lazy to do grammar task, and they make errors work for them, not against them. But, they have

problems in reviewing grammar lesson at home, applying grammar rules to communicate outside the class, and they are frustrated when they failed in grammar class.

From the interview with two grammar lecturers, the writer concluded that students do not have problems in taking notes in learning grammar. There was a lecturer that requires their students to take note in each grammar session. Students also do not have problem concerning the feedback from the lecturer, the lecturer always give the feedback from quizzes and mid semester test. But, from teacher point of view, students have problem in reviewing the lesson at home, they tend to cheat when they were given grammar tasks. Most of them were lazy to do grammar task, teachers often find that there were some students who did homework in campus.

Students have very big problem in applying grammar rules outside the class, especially in written form. When students write thesis or paper, teachers often find many grammar mistakes. In fact, most of the students who wrote paper or thesis are the one who already pass grammar subject. Talking about frustrated students that failed in grammar class, teachers think that students frustrated when they are failed in grammar class but they do not have motivation to for not doing the same fault with the previous one.

## **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

There are some conclusions that can be obtained through this research. The students had problems in studying grammar in terms of understanding grammar materials and understanding teacher presentation. But, most of the students selected as the sample had no problem in reviewing grammar lesson.

1. In understanding grammar materials, students had problems in terms of copying some parts of compulsory grammar book. Moreover, students had problem in owning additional grammar book to support their compulsory grammar book. Students also had problem in mastering too much material in grammar subject. Another problem was there were many rules in learning grammar as a result they could not master the materials easily. Finally, the time allocated was very limited but the materials were too much for them.
2. In relation to the problems in understanding teachers' presentation, the writer concludes that students had problem in understanding grammar when teacher explains the materials too fast. Students also had problem in understanding the language used by the teacher while teaching grammar. Besides, students had problem concerning the

media used by teacher during teaching learning process. And students had problem in asking questions when they do not understand teachers' explanation.

3. Related to the problems of reviewing grammar lesson, the students had problems in terms of reviewing lesson at home. They also had problem in applying grammar rules to communicate outside the class. And students became frustrated when they are failed in grammar subject.

Based on the conclusion above, the writer draws several suggestions:

1. Since the students had problems in understanding grammar materials, it is suggested that:
  - a. Lecturers should consider the materials given to the students because learners can acquire a new grammatical structure only very gradually and slowly.
  - b. For the decision makers, such as the English Department and the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, who are responsible for the administration for grammar subjects should be able to improve its standard by revising the curriculum, adding credit hours, and supplying the media for teaching.
2. For the problems in understanding teachers' presentation, it is suggested that:
  - a. English Department conducts remedial teaching to help weaker students in order to have progress in grammar.
  - b. Student's oriented teaching strategy can be applied by the lecturer in order to give much more time for the students to learn and practice their grammar whether in oral or written.
  - c. The way of teaching in English department should be integrated. Grammar does not stand alone, it can be taught also in writing, speaking, reading, and other English subjects in English department. So the students have a lot of time to practice their grammar in another subject they are in.
3. And for the problem of reviewing grammar lesson, it is suggested that:
  - a. It is necessary for the students to practice grammar lesson outside the class. Do not practice only when there is grammar task given by the lecturer.
  - b. Students should have willingness to have progress in this subject and try not to involve in the same failure for the future.

All of the problems elaborated above cannot be solved without the cooperation among lecturers, students, and English Department. The willingness from the students, the help and support from the lecturers and English Department will help to solve student's problems in studying grammar.

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