

AN ANALYSIS ON EFL
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS'
DIFFICULTIES
IN UNDERSTANDING SIMPLE
PAST TENSE AND PRESENT
PERFECT TENSE

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AN ANALYSIS ON EFL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN UNDERSTANDING SIMPLE PAST TENSE AND PRESENT PERFECT TENSE

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Abstract

The objective of this research is to describe the analysis of EFL undergraduate students' difficulties in understanding Simple Past Tense and Present Perfect Tense. The research is conducted at the first semester of English Education study program STKIP PGRI Pacitan in the academic year of 2019/2020. EFL undergraduate students consider that tenses still uneasy materials to understand. They have difficulties in understanding tenses since there are many similarities both in patterns and functions. In this research, the researcher only focused on Simple Past tense and Present Perfect Tense. This study employed qualitative approach and used descriptive design. Moreover, to achieve the aim of this research, the researcher administers interviews and documentation. After collecting the data, the result of the research showed that EFL undergraduate students have difficulties in applying adverb of time, the irregular verbs, and the agreement into simple past tense and present perfect tense.

Keywords: *EFL undergraduate students, difficulties, tenses*

INTRODUCTION

English in Indonesia is more likely to be taught and learnt only as a foreign language/FL. This means that learning and teaching English occurs mostly in classrooms, rather than during daily communication. English learners in Indonesia do not have ready access to using English as a tool of communication during their daily lives outside the classroom. As stated by Oxford and Shearin (1994), a foreign language in this context is a language learnt only during formal education. As such, English language teaching and learning in Indonesia presents particular challenges that are not encountered in countries such as Hong Kong, where English is more commonly used on a daily basis. In nutshell, teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesia has been less than satisfactory. The learning and teaching English occur mostly in classrooms, rather than during daily communication

Students who involved in the classroom of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesia are students in primary level up to the university students. So the university students also called as EFL undergraduate students, which mean the students who learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in the highest educational institution.

Many people would agree that in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), some of the most troublesome yet fascinating problems are concentrated in the area of grammar, especially tense. These problems also faced by EFL undergraduate students' in English Education study program STKIP PGRI Pacitan. First, it is because tenses have sixteen patterns to comprehend by students. Second, English has infinitive, past tense, past participle verbs. Moreover, verbs in English are divided into regular and

irregular verbs, which make students need more effort to understand the material. Third, there are many almost similarities in the pattern or in the function in tenses.

Based on the problems above, the researcher analyzed EFL undergraduate students' difficulties in understanding simple past tense and present perfect tense. The simple past is the tense, which is used to tell actions completed at a definite time in the past. Azar (1992:18) says "The simple past is used to talk about activities or situations that began and ended in the past". It is usually followed by adverb of time like a few minutes ago, five hours ago, yesterday, last night, last week, last month, and and so on. Whereas, the present perfect tense allows you to refer to a past action that has been completed at the present time. The primary difference in meaning between the two tenses is that the present perfect describes a situation that continues to exist up to the present time, while the past tense describes a situation that no longer exist or an event that took place in the particular time

From the explanation above, it can be assumed that it is important to examine the EFL undergraduate students' understanding in receiving tenses materials and analyze their difficulties, especially in Simple Past Tense and Present Perfect Tense. In this research, the researcher conducted the study in Basic English Grammar class of English Education study program STKIP PGRI Pacitan in the academic year of 2019/2020.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teschner and Evans (2007: 5) said that any language's words can be classified to the part of speech or grammatical category. He further elaborates that as for English, its words can be categorized as nouns, adjectives, pronouns, verbs, adverbs, determiners, prepositions, conjunctions, and so forth. Shertzer (1996: v) lists down the same points of grammar of words. For sentences, the parts are subject and predicate, phrases, and clauses (Shertzer, 1996: 6-7).

According to Harmer (2007: 12), the grammar of a language is the description of the ways in which words can change their forms and can be combined into sentences in that language. Similarly, Greenbaum and Nelson (2002: 1) states that grammar refers to the set of rules that allow us to combine words in our language into larger units. Based on the previous definitions, it can be concluded that grammar is a set of rules in which words are combined or put together to make correct sentences which are meaningful in order to speak and write properly and effectively.

One of important components in language is grammar. Grammar is important because it makes the speaker constructs sentence in grammatical order and conveys the meaning clearly. As Harmer (2010:32) states, "Grammar can thus be partly as knowledge of word can go where and what form these words should take. Studying grammar means knowing how different grammar element can be strung together to

make chain of words". It means Grammar is a study about how to arrange words into sentence in grammatical order.

Simple Past and Present Perfect Tense

Folse (2009:114) stated that past tense is the most common devices used to indicate sequencing of action are the use of time adverbials. It means that simple past tense used to express a definite an event in the past. And also, simple past tense used if the event happened completely in the past even the time is not mentioned. The Simple Past is used for past actions that happened either at a specific time, which can either be given by a time phrase (yesterday, last year, etc.) or understood from the context. Regular Verbs add -ed to the base form, or -d if the verbs ends with -e. Irregular verbs can change in many different ways. The verb form is the same for all persons. Uchiyama (2016) states that "The simple past tense usually means that this action ended in the past. Simple past can be used for most past actions; we can use it for actions that happened quickly, actions that happened over time, or actions that were habits in the past." According to the definition above, it can be concluded that the simple past indicates that an activity or situation began and ended at a particular time in the past.

Meanwhile, the Present perfect tense refers to a past action that has been completed at the present time. The primary difference in meaning between the two tenses is that the present perfect describes a situation that continues to exist up to the present time, while the past tense describes a situation that no longer exist or an event that took place in the particular time. Action in present perfect tense happened in the past but has a result the situation in the present, while the simple past tense refers to action which has no result situation in the present. It also refers to action which took place in unspecified time. The present perfect tense in affirmative form is constructed with have/has+ past participle. Have is used if the subjects are: I, you, we, and they. While, has is used if the subject are he, she, it or other singular subjects. The past participles in regular verbs are exactly forming the same as the simple past. The interrogative form of it is constructed with have + subject + past participle. According to Thomson and Martinet (2009: 166), stated that this tense may be said to be a sort of mixture of present and past. It always implies a strong connection with the present and it is chiefly used in conversation, letters, newspapers, and television and radio report. It means this tense is mainly used to tell action in the past but which has connection to the present.

The EFL Undergraduate Students' Difficulties in Understanding Simple Past and Present Perfect Tense

Teaching EFL (English as a Foreign Language) in Indonesia occurs mostly in classrooms, rather than during daily communication. Students who involved in the classroom of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesia are students in primary level up to the university students. So, the university

students also called as EFL undergraduate students, which mean the students who learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in the highest educational institution.

Three factors may influence the success of English as Foreign Language (EFL) teaching in Indonesia. According to Sulistiyo (2009), these are class size, students' motivation and teaching focus. These three factors align with Bradford (2007) viewed that less effective English learning and teaching in Indonesia is often due to classroom size and student motivation, although Bradford also includes the factor of teacher qualifications as contributing to the limited effectiveness of English as Foreign Language (EFL) teaching in Indonesia.

Many people would agree that in English language some of the most troublesome yet fascinating problems are concentrated in the area of tense. These problems also faced by EFL undergraduate students' in STKIP PGRI Pacitan. First, it is because tenses have sixteen patterns to comprehend by students. Second, English has infinitive, past tense, past participle verbs. Moreover, verbs in English are divided into regular and irregular verbs, which make students, need more effort to understand the material. Third, there are many almost similarities in the pattern or in the function in tenses.

By analyzing the EFL undergraduate students' difficulties in understanding simple past tense and present perfect tense, it helps them to minimize their weaknesses in simple past tense and present perfect tense to make the EFL undergraduate students' English get better.

METHOD

In this research, the researchers applied qualitative approach. They used descriptive method to describe the result analysis of EFL undergraduate students' difficulties in understanding simple past tense and present perfect tense. To achieve the aim of this research, the researcher administers interview and documentation.

The researchers collected the data from the observation and interview result of the English teaching and learning process in class Basic English Grammar, English Education study program, STKIP PGRI Pacitan in the academic year of 2019/2020. The populations of the students are 20 students.

To collect the data from the respondents, the researchers used two kinds of instruments: interview and documentation. The interview is used to acquire information about students' difficulties in understanding the two tenses. It consists of eleven questions. The questions are about the students' difficulties, students' learning style, and students' opinion about the two tenses. For getting further information, the researchers also used the interview to know lecturer's opinion about the EFL undergraduate students' difficulties in understanding simple past tense and present perfect tense during Basic English Grammar. The documentation is collected by the researchers as additional information, to know the real condition in the classroom of their difficulties in understanding those tenses.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The researchers analyzed the result of what are the EFL undergraduate students' difficulties in understanding simple past tense and present perfect tense. The researchers collected the data from the interview and documentation. Most of EFL undergraduate students who study simple past tense and present perfect tense in Basic English Grammar had difficulties in differentiating the functions of those tenses. Moreover, the students confused to distinguish if the adverb of time in the sentence was not stated.

EFL undergraduate students also had difficulties in applying the irregular verbs. They had not memorized all of the irregular verbs. They often add -ed into irregular verbs. From the lecturer explanation, many EFL undergraduate students often write *buyed* instead of *bought* in using simple past and present participle in simple past tense and present perfect tense.

The last, few EFL undergraduate students still had difficulties in understanding the pattern. The students admitted that they have difficulties in using the agreement such as *was*, *were*, *has*, and *have*. To overcome the problem, the respondents said that they need additional exercises, review, and tips from the lecturer in distinguishing simple past and present perfect. The EFL undergraduate students also tried to understand more by doing exercise in grammar book, sharing with their classmate, and reviewing the material at home. They also suggested that in teaching the two tenses the lecturer should make sure that all students are involved in teaching learning process and explain slowly, detail and also in fun way.

In nutshells, based on the analyzing of the result, it can be concluded that the EFL undergraduate students had difficulties in applying adverb of time, the irregular verbs, and the agreement into simple past tense and present perfect tense.

Discussion

There are eleven questions addressed to the respondents, the first question is "*What is your motivation for understanding tenses?*" 75% respondents said that they want to be able to construct sentences in grammatical order while 25% of them just want to pass the Basic English Grammar. Second question is "*What do you understand about simple past and present perfect tense?*" 25% respondents understand the pattern of simple past and present perfect tense, 35% of them only understand the pattern of simple past, only 25% respondents only understand the pattern of present perfect, and there were 25% do not really understand the pattern of both tenses.

Next question is "*What do you not understand in learning those both tenses?*" 30% of them did not understand in distinguishing the two tenses because both of them are used to tell past event, 45% respondents did not understand in using regular and irregular verbs, and 25% respondents did not understand in using agreement. Fourth question is "*What is your difficulties in learning simple past and*

present perfect tense?” They had difficulties in understanding adverb of time in simple past and present perfect tense (20%) in memorizing irregular verbs (25%), lack of vocabulary (45%), and lack of motivation (10%). The fifth question is “*What is your difficulties in understanding different function of simple past and present perfect tense?*” The respondents had difficulties in distinguishing because those tenses are used to tell event in the past (60%) and the rest of the respondents wrote unclear answers (40%). The sixth question is “*How to overcome your problem?*” based on this question, they overcome the difficulties by reading and doing the exercise in grammar books (55%), sharing with their friends (20%), reviewing the material at home (25%). Seventh question is “*What do you need to improve your understanding in learning both tenses?*” From their answer, the researchers noted that they need tips in distinguishing simple past and present perfect tense from the lecturer (50%), need to join courses (5%), more grammar books (10%), and need partner in learning the two tenses (35%).

Question number eight is “*What is your effort to understand simple past and present perfect tense?*” The EFL undergraduate students tried to understand more about it by doing exercises in books and internet (65%), sharing with friends (5%), memorizing formula (15%), using it in daily conversation (15%). For the ninth question, the researchers asked the respondents’ opinion with question “*How should these tenses be conveyed?*” From the respondents’ answers, the EFL undergraduate students want simple past and present perfect are explained in detail, slowly and clearly (45%), giving more examples and exercises (35%), using *Bahasa Indonesia* in explaining these materials (10%), and by discussing (10%).

The tenth question is “*How did your teacher actively involve you in the learning process of these two forms in the classroom?*” according to this question, it can be known that they were involved in teaching learning process by discussing and sharing the material in a group (65%), by answering questions on whiteboard (20%), and just by listening to the teacher (10%) and the rest of them by giving unclear answer (5%). The last question is “*What are your suggestions for learning simple past tense and present perfect tense to be more effective?*” From their answer, the researchers knew that simple past and present perfect tense should be taught in fun way (55%). The lectures should add exercise and homework (15%), and explain the materials in detail (30%).

Then, for getting additional information, the researchers tried to explore more about the EFL undergraduate students’ difficulties in understanding simple past tense and present perfect tense by interviewing the lecturer.

From the explanations of lecturer who taught Basic English Grammar, the researchers knew that the lecturer use some techniques such as TPS (Think Pair Share) of Cooperative Learning in teaching simple past and present perfect tense. One of her reason is because she wants the EFL undergraduate students involve in teaching learning process. The lecturer who taught Basic English Grammar also said that she used English and also *Bahasa Indonesia* if it is needed in explaining the materials since she wants

the students to understand her explanation. In teaching learning process, the EFL undergraduate students were asked to discuss and found out the materials as much as possible with their groupmates. They had to share to the other groups. Next, the lecturer added the detail information about it. Finally, she asked to the EFL undergraduate students to do those exercises. The lecturer added that she usually explains simple past before present perfect tense. The lecturer admitted that the students had difficulties in differentiating the two tenses if the adverb of time was not stated or unclear in the sentence. Then, she helped them by giving the traits of those tenses. Finally, the lecturer who taught Basic English Grammar suggested that the students who learn simple past and present perfect had to be careful in applying the irregular verbs, and adverb of time.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research, the researchers concluded that many EFL undergraduate students who take Basic English Grammar found several difficulties in understanding simple past tense and present perfect tense. The difficulties are distinguishing the functions of the tenses, applying irregular verbs, and understanding the pattern of the two tenses.

First of all, most respondents had difficulties in distinguishing the function since the two tenses are used to tell the past events. The EFL undergraduate students still confused in the test if the adverb of time is not clear or stated in the sentence. As the result, they doubted what tense they have to use. Second, the EFL undergraduate students had difficulties in using the irregular verbs. Many of them had not memorized all of the irregular verbs. As the result, they often add –ed into irregular verbs. The last, few EFL undergraduate students had difficulties in understanding the pattern of present perfect tense. In addition, the students admitted that they had difficulties in using the agreement such as *was*, *were*, *has*, and *have*.

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