

TENSES USAGE IN PRE- AND POST-TEST COMPOSITIONS OF INTENSIVE COURSE PROGRAM

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Abstrak

Tense adalah bagian dari tata bahasa yang harus dikuasai oleh siswa untuk mendukung kemampuan berbahasa Inggris. Dengan menggunakan *tense*, siswa dapat memahami hubungan antara bentuk kata kerja dengan konsep waktu ketika suatu tindakan terjadi. Kesalahan penggunaan *tenses* sebagian besar muncul dalam bahasa tulis karena menulis dianggap sebagai keterampilan yang paling sulit dalam bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis penggunaan *tenses* dalam karangan siswa IC. Selanjutnya, penelitian ini menyelidiki apakah siswa menggunakan *tenses* yang lebih akurat dalam postes dibandingkan pre-tes dan *tenses* apa yang paling sulit dikuasai. Penelitian ini adalah penelitian deskriptif kuantitatif. Subyek penelitian ini adalah mahasiswa tahun pertama Jurusan Bahasa Inggris di Unesa. Data penelitian adalah dokumen karangan siswa IC. Teknik analisis yang digunakan adalah analisis deskriptif yaitu mengidentifikasi *tenses*, mengevaluasi kesalahan, dan menarik kesimpulan yang disajikan dalam bentuk tabel dan kalimat. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa menemui kesulitan dalam menyusun pola *tense* tertentu.

Kata Kunci: *tense*, *tense* akurat, *intensive course*, karangan.

Abstract

Tense as a part of grammar should be mastered by the students to support the English skills ability. Tenses make learners understand the relationship between the form of the verb and the concept of time which an action happened. Error in the use of tenses mostly appears in written language since writing is considered as the most difficult skill in English. The study aims to analyze the use of tenses in IC students' composition. Furthermore, the study investigated whether or not the students use more correct tenses in the post-test than in pre-test and what tenses are difficult to master by the IC students. The study was a descriptive quantitative research. The subject of the study was the first year students of English Department in State University of Surabaya. The data of the study were the document of IC students' compositions. The analysis technique used descriptive analysis, identifying the tenses, evaluating the error, and drawing the conclusion in form of tables and sentences. The result of the study showed that the students were found difficulties in using certain tense form.

Keywords: *tense*, accurate use of *tense*, *intensive course*, composition.

INTRODUCTION

Mastering writing skill is one of the dimensions for English as Foreign Language (EFL) students. Writing is one of the productive skills in English and it is considered as the most difficult skill even by native speaker themselves since writing needs the mastery of words, grammar and also the way of organizing ideas (Oshima & Hogue, 2007).

Written work consists of certain patterns. In a composition, a correct pattern is required to build a sentence. According to Brown (1980), a sentence is a group of words that has at least one subject and one predicate which expresses a complete thought. In this

case, grammar has an important role to form correct pattern into a sentence.

Tense is a part of grammar that should be mastered to support the English skills mastery. Tense contains any forms of verb which show the time at which an action happened. Panawas & Shusatayasakul (2007) proposes that the concept of tense is very important in English. Tense is used to refer to time; past, present and future. Using tenses, learners understand the relationship between the form of the verb and the concept of time. In this case, English has the most complex tenses compared to other languages.

English contains three tenses. According to Azar (1989), the three tenses in English are present tense, past tense and future tense. It also contains four aspects. They are simple, perfect, progressive and perfect progressive. Simple tenses express state permanent situations, facts, routines and at particular time in the past or in the future. Progressive tenses give the idea that an action is in progress during a particular time. Perfect tenses give the idea that one thing happens before another time or event. Perfect progressive tenses give the idea that one event is in progress immediately before, up to, or until another time which used to express the duration of the first event. Thus, different situations use different tenses with regard to their functions.

As a learning process, language acquisition cannot be separated from making error. Making error is a package of learning process (Thornbury, 1999). In written work, EFL learners usually make errors in the form of grammar especially in tenses usage. These errors are more apparent in written language than those in spoken language. A study of McKeating (1981) declared that people were more aware of errors in written work. Therefore, students need to be more aware in composing written work.

Especially for the students of English Department, mastering entire English skills is the main determination. For that reason, a research in Intensive Course (IC) students of English Department of Surabaya State University needs to be conducted to investigate students' grammar ability especially in the use of tenses. IC program consists of an active skill practices for the freshmen regarding to students preparation in achieving English proficiency.

Based on an interview with the coordinator of IC team 2012 period said that IC program trained the students through the intermediate level of communicative approach including listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Moreover, he mentioned that writing skill was a major focus in comparison to other skills since he believed that the other skills will automatically follow when writing skills was mastered.

The IC coordinator reported that students' handout in IC provided enrichment materials including writing for grammar. Although tenses as part of grammar was implicitly taught in the classroom, but the students should make portfolio which consisted of tenses usage in each meeting. Since the lecturer also gave them revisions and feedbacks for each portfolio, students' tenses ability would be trained intensively.

The use of tenses aspects were the most problematic cases for the students. A study of Yuningsih (2011) at third semester students of English Department in Poltek Telkom Bandung found that 85.94% of the students have difficulties in understanding tenses aspects especially on

how to use simple past tense and present perfect tense. Most learners face problem in understanding those tenses aspects since they were not exist in Indonesian language.

Indonesian language does not have differences in using verb. In Indonesia, we can use *makan* for *eat* no matter in yesterday, today or tomorrow. While in English, *eat* is used in different forms in each aspects including *eating* in present progressive, *has* or *have eaten* in present perfect, and *has* or *have been eating* in present perfect progressive. The forms of past and future tenses aspects are also different. This phenomenon possibly happens in students of English Department in State University of Surabaya. Therefore, an analysis of students' accuracy in using tenses and tenses aspects before and after immersing the IC program needs to be conducted.

Therefore, the research questions of this study are formulated as: (1) how is the use of tenses in compositions made by Intensive Course students? And (2) what tenses are difficult to master by the IC students. Since the research questions being proposed, the objectives of the study are: (1) to identify the use of tenses made by the intensive course students before and after joining the program through their pre- and post-test compositions, and (2) to identify the types of tenses which difficult to be mastered by the IC students.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study was a descriptive quantitative research designed to describe the observed phenomena with words and numbers. Johnson & Christensen (2004) proposed that the form of final report of a descriptive quantitative study contained statistical report including correlations, comparisons of means, and statistically significant findings. In this study, statistical report used to make the analysis easier in identifying whether or not the students' used more correct tenses form in the post-test rather than in their pre-test composition.

Subject of the Study

The subject of the study was the first year students of English Department in State University of Surabaya. These subjects were chosen under the consideration that this study aimed to analyze the freshmen' ability development in terms of tense accuracy in compositions before and after immersing the IC program. In choosing the sample, purposive random sampling was used. The data were 30 subjects under three classifications, elementary level, pre-intermediate level, and intermediate level from pre-test. Each level consists of 10 subjects. The data were chosen randomly without considering the class

the students come from. The purpose of choosing the data based on the level was to analyze the result of errors in using the accurate tenses in each level and compare whether or not the students developed the ability in tenses usage in the pre- and post-test.

Data Collection Technique

The data used in this study were the documents of freshmen pre- and post-test compositions. After collecting the data of students' original writing, then they were copied. The last, the results were presented in the form of numbers and sentences.

Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis technique used descriptive analysis. The first step was identifying the tenses to analyze how the use of tenses in students' compositions is. All of the accurate and inaccurate sentences from each subject are collected and put into tables using tallies. The second step was evaluating the errors. In this case, the prediction of possible causes of error in tenses made by the students in compositions was provided. The last step was drawing the conclusion. After analyzing the errors and the cause of error, the conclusion was provided in form of table and sentences to explain the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The focus of the analysis was on the errors in tense usage in students' composition. The sentence was considered as an error if there was deviation in applying the rules of tenses. Since there were 30 students as the subjects of this study, there were 30 compositions from pre-test and 30 compositions from post-test were analyzed.

The Use of Tenses in Students' Compositions

The first step to analyze the data was identifying the tenses. From 30 subjects of the study, the samples were divided into three levels. Those were represented by ten students from intermediate level, ten students from pre-intermediate level and ten students from elementary level.

The result of the analysis showed that in the pre-test, there were 733 sentences produced by the students and 15.96% of them contained errors in tenses usage. Whilst in the post-test, there were 313 sentences produced by the students and 6.39% of them contained errors. Table 1 showed the percentage of occurrences on tenses usage in students' compositions.

The result of Table 1 showed that there were significant improvements in tenses usage made by the students from the pre-test to the post-test, in which the errors were decreased from 15.96% to 6.39% of the total sentences. The students used more accurate tenses in their post-test than in their pre-test compositions.

Tabel 1. The percentage of occurrences on tenses usage in students' compositions

Tenses form	Percentage			
	Pre-Test		Post-Test	
	Accurate	Inaccurate	Accurate	Inaccurate
Simple Present	68.35%	8.87%	77.64%	4.15%
Present Progressive	0.41%	0.41%	0.64%	0.32%
Present Perfect	0.68%	0.41%	3.51%	0.32%
Present Perfect Progressive	0.14%	0.00%	0.32%	0.00%
Simple Past	9.00%	5.59%	8.63%	1.60%
Past Perfect	0.00%	0.27%	0.32%	0.00%
Simple Future	5.46%	0.41%	2.56%	0.00%
Total	84.04%	15.96%	93.61%	6.39%
	100%		100%	

Basically, there are 12 tenses form (Azar, 1989) commonly used in English grammar. But in this analysis, there were only 7 tenses form mentioned in the table because the students did not produce the rest of the tenses form.

Moreover, the students used simple present tense mostly in the compositions because the task required students to describe about themselves. Some students used another tenses form as additional information to their composition. Therefore, the most errors in tenses form made by students were in the use of simple present tense. The Table 1 showed that in pre-test, the total errors of simple present tense was the highest of the total errors. It reached 8.83% out of the total 15.96% errors. Whilst in the post-test, error of simple present tense form was 4.15% out of the total 6.39% errors.

The Difficult Tenses to Master by the IC Students

The next step to analyze the data was evaluating the errors made by the students. Evaluating the errors aimed to give the deeper analysis on how was the error made by the students and was analyzed to know what tenses are difficult to master by the IC student. The following description will explain the students' error in tenses usage.

Errors of to be in simple present tense

The analysis pointed that most students made errors on this type. Firstly this error happened when the students omit the use of *to be* (*is, am, are*) in constructing non verbal sentences. Secondly, the students add *to be* in which there should be only one verb in a sentence. Here were some examples of the errors from the students' pre-test composition.

[1] Learn another language is looks interesting to me.

[2] My name MSH, you can call me H.

[3] My nickname I.

It can be seen from example [1], the students' added *to be* (*is*) before verb which tended to create errors. A correct sentence form only needs one verb or one *to be* (*is, am*) followed by the object. Whilst the asterisk sign in

example [2] and [3] showed the students' failure in creating a non verbal sentence correctly based on the grammatical rules. They tended to omit *to be (is)* after the singular subject in which *to be* is needed to be formed when there is no verb in a non verbal sentence.

The analysis resulted that in the post test, the number of errors in this type was decreasing. Even though the mistake was still the same, but there were only three students made this kind of errors. Here were three students who made the errors in this type.

[4] I'm study more and more to be the great one.

[5] I am more understand about grammar.

[6] My English ability better because of it.

Two of three errors of the use of *to be* in the post-test composition were made by the students of elementary level. In example [4] and [5], the students' added *to be (am)* in which those should not exist before verb. Whilst in example [6] performed that the student tended to omit *to be (is)* before the object.

Errors of verbal ending –s or –es in simple present tense

This error occurred because the students tended to omit the verbal ending *–s* or *–es* for the third singular subjects or add the verbal ending *–s* or *–es* for the first singular subject in simple present tense. Although this type of error was not as many as the occurrences of the previous type, there were numbers of students who made error in this type. Here were some examples of the errors from the students' pre-test composition.

[7] Success need process.

[8] That make me choose to be a student in English Department.

[9] I dreams to be a writer.

Example [7], [8] and [9] showed that students did not add the ending *–s* in the verb stem as it should be if the subject is the third singular subject. Whilst in example [9], the students added the ending *–s* in the end of verb in which it should not exist when the subject is the first singular subject.

In the post test, this type of error was still occurred though the number was less than in the pre-test. There were three students made the errors in this type. Here were the examples of the errors of this type made by the three students.

[10] English also communicate one people with the other people.

[11] My grammar also show increasement.

[12] My brother and my sister always supports me.

Example [10] and [11] proved that the students tended to omit the verbal ending *–s* after the verb which there should be because the subjects were third singular subject. Whilst the example [12] performed that the students added the ending *–s* in the verb which it should not be because the subject was third plural subject.

Errors of the use of have or has in simple present tense

This type of error marked by the presence of *have* or *has* before verb in the sentence or the students exchanged the use of *have* by *has* or vice versa. The analysis showed that the students tended to use *have* instead of *has* for the third singular subjects. It meant they used the regular marker for irregular ones. The examples of sentences belonged to this type of error in students' pre-test composition were:

[13] This great department have the some course to make our english ability higher and develop.

[14] UNESA have the best quality for education and talent.

It can be seen from the example [13] and [14], the students used *have* instead of *has* for third singular subjects. This type of error appeared twice for the whole sentences made by the students. It meant that this kind of error did not exist in students' post-test compositions. There were some *have* or *has* in sentences in students' post-test composition and they were correctly made by the students.

Errors of the misuse of past tense (V2) for simple present tense (V1 or V1+s/es)

This error appeared when the students applied the rule of past tense for simple present tense. It might happen because the students forgot to differentiate between something done in the past and something do in present time. In the pre-test, some examples of this error were:

[15] I lived in Perum, Gunung Anyar, Surabaya.

[16] I loved English since I was Elementary School.

[17] Since Junior High School, I interested in English.

Example [15], [16] and [17] proved that the students changed the verb into past form (V2) instead of present form (V1). Past form shows that the condition had done in the past but based on the context, those conditions on students' sentences did not finish yet. Therefore, they should use the present form. In the post-test, this type of error did not appear anymore. The students already knew how to put the (V1) based on the context of the sentence.

Errors of the misuse of present tense for past tense

This type of error was the most common mistake made by the students for the simple past tense form. This error happened when the students forgot to change the verb into past form although the adverb showed it should be written in the past. Here were some examples of this type of error in students' pre-test compositions.

[18] When I was kid, I like to learn English with my Dad.

[19] At my Elementary School, I think English was very difficult and just could make my head fell so dizzy.

The whole time signals in the examples showed that the action or condition of the sentences had already done in the past. Therefore, the verbs mentioned in example [18] and [19] should be written in (V2) form instead of (V1). This type of error mostly happened in the students'

pre-test composition, whilst in the post-test there was only one student who made errors in this type. The sentence was:

[20] The worst on my English ability before I study here is listening and writing. When I do the assignment on listening I always missed some words. And when I do the writing assignment, sometimes I forgot to care about what tenses did I write, and the verbs was so messy.

It can be seen that the student told the readers about his/her ability in listening and writing before he/she joined the IC class. It also showed that he/she had already got the listening and writing test based on the context in example [20]. Therefore the verbs mentioned in the example [20] should be changed into past form instead of present form.

Errors of the past form or past participle of an irregular verb

This type of error appeared when the students did not know the past form or past participle of an irregular verb. They simply add *-ed* in the end of the verb without knowing the verb belonged to regular or irregular type. Here were some examples of the sentences in students' pre-test compositions.

[21] I choosed English language teaching as my major in University.

[22] I have been choosen by UNESA to be their student.

From the example [21], it can be seen that the student did not recognize the past form of the italic verb. The student added the ending *-ed* to the irregular verb *choose* in which it should be *chose* instead of *choosed*. Whilst in example [22], the student used the word *choosen* as the past participle of *choose* in which it should be written as *chosen*. In the post-test, there were no students made this type of error.

Errors of the order of the sentence

This error happened when the students made the incorrect placement of a morpheme or a group of morphemes in a sentence. It was the most uncommon error made by the students. There were two errors out of the total errors found in students' pre-test compositions. The sentences were:

[23] Seems like it useless because that club was vacuum for a long time.

[24] My parent never I send a letter.

A correct sentence form consists of subject followed by verb then object or adverb. The simple sentence consists of subject followed by verb. The asterisk sign in example [23] and [24] indicated that students made mistakes in ordering the sentence. The subject of the sentence in example [23] was *it* that should followed by *seems*. Whilst the asterisk sign in example [37] had *my*

parent as the subject which should followed by *never send* as the verb and then *me* as the object.

Discussions

Based on the results, it can be seen that the students made some errors in terms of tense usage in their pre-test and still a few errors in their post-test. This condition proves the theory of language acquisition that human learning is fundamentally a process that involves the making of mistakes (Brown, 1980).

The study showed that the students' most errors is in the use of *to be*, this type of error is caused by over-generalization as proposed by James (1998). James (1998) proposed that there are four possible causes of errors which are viewed from intralingual causes; they are over-generalization, ignorance of rules restriction, incomplete application of rules and false concept hypothesis.

Over-generalization is appeared when there is a deviant structure produced by the students because they tend to use their previous knowledge of the target language in new situations. It may happen due to superficial similarities which lead the students to be unable to construct a sentence. In this case, the students think that each tense in English grammar has the same rule. This case can be seen from the sentence produced by subject 29, *I dreams to be a writer*. In this sentence, the student added the use of verbal ending *-s* for the first singular subject. He possibly regards that all personal pronoun have verbal ending *-s* in simple present tense. This sentence might be influenced by the sentence in which the subject is not the first singular subject. For example: *He dreams to be a writer*.

Over-generalization is also caused by the influence of learners' first language. Hasyim (2002) stated when someone tries to learn new habits the old ones will interfere the new ones. This cause of error leads the students to generalize their target language based on their previous knowledge in L1. The example of this case can be seen from the sentence produced by subject 17, *My name MSH*. From that sentence, it can be assumed that the student uses their previous knowledge in forming Indonesian sentence as their L1. In Indonesian language, there is no *to be*. The pattern of non verbal sentences in Indonesian language is *S + Adj/N*, for example *Namaku Adit*. Therefore, the student generalizes the pattern of L1 to form another sentence in English.

Another cause of errors made by the students in this case is ignorance of rule restrictions. This cause of error is proposed when the students fail to observe the restriction of the existing structures (James, 1998). It means that the learners do not apply the application of rules to the context. The example of error caused by

ignorance of rule restriction is in the sentence *UNESA have the best quality for education and talent* produced by subject 23. From that sentence, the learners fail to observe that in simple present tense, the word *mempunyai* in English has two form that is *have* and *has*. When the subject is third singular, the verb should use *has* instead of *have* otherwise when the subject is first singular, the verb should use *have* instead of *has*. Therefore the subject 23 should write the verb as *has* because the subject of the sentence is third singular subject.

The last cause of error that can be suggested in this study is false concepts hypothesized. False concept of hypothesized deals with error derived from faulty comprehension of the rule distinction in the target language (James, 1998). In this case, the learners usually misinterpret the use of certain structures of the target language. The students tend to exchange the use of certain rule of tense form with another rule. The example of error caused by false concept hypothesized is presented from the sentence produced by subject 6, *I lived in Perum, Gunung Anyar Emas E-17 Surabaya*. In that sentence, the student misinterpreted the use of simple past tense. He/she fails to observe the function of simple past tense. Since the sentence tells about a fact happens in the present and not yet finished, therefore the tense form used should be simple present tense.

Based on the analysis, the most significant improvement in term of tense usage is shown by the students of pre-intermediate level. Some subjects from pre-intermediate level said that their ability in tenses usage was better since they had to practice and were drilled to use correct tenses both in spoken and written language every day in the classroom. The tasks given by the lecturer required them to form a better tense every day although tense forms were explicitly taught in the classroom. After doing papers, the lecturer always gives them feedbacks and it makes them understand their mistake. Feedback tends to make the students occupy a central and active role in the learning process and they are actively involved in monitoring and regulating their own performance (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006).

On the other hand, the students of intermediate levels' improvement are not significant because basically they already have a good understanding in terms of tense usage. Some of the subjects of intermediate level said that they were practiced their grammar through the written work every day in the classroom. This treatment was brought a good effect for the students of pre-intermediate level but not for the students of intermediate level. The basic knowledge of the students of intermediate level is already good therefore they need a higher treatment to improve their ability. This proves the theory of input hypothesis (*i+1*) in second language acquisition that the

material being taught should be one step higher than the basic knowledge of the students (Krashen, 1982).

The different case is performed by the students of elementary level. Although most students in this level improve their ability in tenses usage but still some students said that their ability in tenses usage especially in written language was less than in spoken language because they only drilled in speaking skill and lacked of writing exercises. It may caused by the fact that each lecturer uses different method in teaching the students. Some students said that the lecturer tended to train them in speaking skill. Therefore their ability in tenses usage is better in spoken language rather than in written language. They claim that they can speak using a correct tense nevertheless they cannot write it because they are not trained in written work. The students need to practice more in writing since acquiring a language needs practices (Krashen, 1982).

CONCLUSIONS

After analyzing the students' compositions, it is found that students are able to use tenses in the correct pattern in their post-test than in their pre-test composition. Even, some students made no error in terms of tense usage in the post test. The most significant improvement is performed by the students in pre-intermediate level.

Based on the result, simple present tense is the most commonly used form in the composition and most of the students' mistakes are in the use of this tense. Specifically, the first commonly error is in the use of *to be*. The students tend to omit the use of *to be* in forming a non-verbal sentence and add *to be* although the verb has already mentioned in the sentence. The second commonly made error is the misuse of tense. Students tend to change the function of simple present tense to past tense and in vice versa because they fail to observe the function of each tense.

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