An Analysis of Students' Difficulties in Writing Recount Text
(A Case Study at a Senior High School in Indramayu)

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates causes of students' difficulties, kinds of difficulties, and the most dominant problem in writing recount text written by ten students at a Senior High School in Indramayu, West Java. This study employed a qualitative research design, embracing characteristics of a case study. The data were obtained from collection of samples of students' recount texts. The findings revealed that most students have been able to implement the schematic structures and linguistic features of recount texts, which indicates the ability of students to write the texts and to achieve its purpose. However, some students found difficulties in terms of the use of tenses, the use of vocabulary, and the use of specific participants. Based on the analysis of students' writing, it was found some causes that made students did some mistakes in writing recount texts. Based on these findings, it is recommended that explicit teaching be needed to develop students' writing skills.

Key words: Writing, Recount Text, Students' Difficulties

INTRODUCTION

Language as means of communication has important position in the world. English as one of the languages in the world is considered and applied as International Language. Therefore, English has become a very popular and powerful language in the world. Most of people in the world use English in communication. In Indonesia itself, English is the most important foreign language because English has influenced many aspect of life. Language is very important to learn. Without language we cannot communicate with others to share knowledge, culture, education and many things in this world.

Based on English curriculum, there are four language skills that the learners should master. The four language skills are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Listening is an active activity that involves receiving, deciphering, and perceiving a message with intent to respond. Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving, and processing information. Reading is the process of extracting meaning from a written or printed text. Then, writing is a skill that learns about how to express the writer's

ideas in written form that involves the mastery of all elements in the target language namely are grammar, content, organization, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, and mechanics. Writing needs a complex process. Consequently, the students may have difficulties to do so. Writing requires many devices such as the use of complex grammatical devices, stylistic skill, mechanical skill, a careful choice of vocabulary, and judgment skill (Heaton, 1975: Hedge, 2005).

One of the skills that the writer focuses on this research is writing. Writing is arranging something in written form. Writing is, in fact a transaction with words where you free yourself from what you presently think, feel, and perceive (Brown, 1994: 324). It is one of the skills that usually become a hard one, not only students of elementary school, but also senior high school. Unfortunately, "writing is not always easy" (Scott and Ytreberg, 1990: 68). Teaching writing needs extra preparation to make students interest in writing activity, and learning writing is not easy, because there are mechanics to write something that make students afraid of writing.

In reality, writing is regarded to be the most difficult skill among the four skills for the students to master. Many students face difficulties in descriptive writing using charts. It is caused by many factors. One of them is the students themselves. They still have lack of grammar and vocabulary mastery which play important roles in this case (Harris, A., Mohd. Ansyar, Desmawati Radjab, 2014).

The purpose of learning English is that students are supposed to be able to communicate well either orally or written forms. As stated by Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983:149) in Ningrum (2013), "Writing should reinforce and help extend the listening, speaking, and reading skills". Writing is a process of transferring ideas into written form that is understandable. Writing is an activity of putting down the graphic symbols which has a function to present a language in order to convey some meaning so that the reader can grasp the information which the writer has tried to convey". Writing skill is difficult since it involves not only generating and organizing ideas, but also demonstrating a number of variables in their composition, such as control of content, format sentence structure, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, and etc.

One of the general problems faced by students is when they explore their ideas in written form like writing genres. The common problems appear in writing genres at least three areas; they are problems in content, vocabulary, and grammar. The first is content. There are many students who still have difficulties in producing longer paragraph. When they wrote a text, they also could not produce an effective paragraph. It is because they have

limited knowledge to develop a topic and have difficulties to express their idea in writing form. So, it makes the content of their writing is not clear and sometimes are weak. The second is vocabulary. Vocabulary has an important role in creating a good paragraph. The problems of vocabulary happen since the lack of reading. So, the students have limited vocabulary which makes them cannot easily expressing their idea. Sometimes, the students also use inappropriate word which makes their writing difficult to be understood. Those problems can be solved by reading more and practicing writing more. The last is grammar. Having strong skills in grammar allows writers to get their message to their readers in a clear and understandable way. It is important to know the rules of grammar and how to use them properly. However, for some Indonesian students, learning grammar especially tenses is difficult because there is no tense in Indonesia. Although tense has been though since elementary school, the students still cannot apply a tense rules. Many of them still have difficulties on it.

Based on the problems above, the researcher would like to formulate the problems as follows:

1) What are the students' difficulties in writing recount text?
2) What are the causes of students' difficultiesin writing recount text?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Writing

Writing is one of the skills that is very important to be mastered by the students. There are many skills in English such as reading, speaking, listening and writing. In this era, English is one of the International languages that is very important to learn. Writing is, as Ann Brown states, that "witing is important in our lives and as a communicative act that transmit information and link people together". It means that we can communicate with the other people by using English language. It will make us easy to communicate with the other people if we could mastered English language. Writing skill has a role to help students in developing their English. Harmer (2004: 31) states that the importance given to writing differs from teaching situation to teaching situation. In some cases it shares equal billing with the other skills where students write their learning of the grammar and vocabulary of the language. It means that writing activity can be done by students to increase their English. Writing should become familiar in students' daily life, because they do writing in order to complete many tasks of their studies. Writing practice can help the students to improve their vocabulary and of course increase their ability in grammar.

Related to the opinion, Raymond in Herlinawati (2011) points out that "writing is more than a medium of communication. It is a way of remembering and a way of thinking as well. Write makes words permanent, and thus expands the collective memory of human beings from the relatively small store that we can remember and pass on orally to the infinitecapacity of a modern library". Communicating by using English language the students are automatically develop their skill in speaking and also in writing.

For students, writing is usually thought to be the most difficult skill to acquire. In fact, writing is more complicated than the other skills. It is because writing needs more aspects not only grammatical and vocabulary but more. It is as Lindstrom in Westwood (2006:57) said that writing is a complex skill involving multiple processes and abilities that problems can arise for some students. There is reason to suppose that the number of students with writing difficulties is even greater than the number experiencing difficulties in reading with understanding. It can be concluded that writing is complex activities that every students have different difficulties to do it. This skill is more difficult than the other skills. Considering the definition above, the researcher concludes that writing is complicated activities which need of knowledge about what we are going to write. However, the students can learn writing by much practicing and reading a lot to get inspiration. The students hopefully can convey their ideas, feeling, and desires, and knowledge by writing.

The Purpose of Writing

According to Ur (1991) "the the purpose of writing, in principle, is the expression of ideas, the conveying of a message to the reader". In other words, writing is one of the skill that is used to express the feeling or the idea that someone need to express. In other words, writing is the medium to share the information to the reader for example by writing an essay, article, and so on. As Diestch in Pensius et al. (2016) states that "the general purpose of writing may be primary to inform, to persuade, to express and to entertain. The specific purpose involves responding to a certain need for writing", there are so many purposes of writing, but the specific one is to make the readers get enough information that the writer writes. It means that the writer has to make the readers understand in reading the text, the information should be clear.

In addition, there are still so many purposes in writing a text. In this research the author will focus on recount text. As a teacher, it is expected that the students are able to write a text. Text here means that the teacher gives the assignment to the students and the students are able to write what is the teacher's instruction. The purpose of learning English is that

students are supposed to be able to communicate well either orally or written forms. As stated by Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983:149) in Ningrum (2013), "Writing should reinforce and help extend the listening, speaking, and reading skills". Writing is one of the skills that makes the students complicated in exploring their ideas. But writing skill should reinforce the other skills. It will be easy if the students are able in writing a text, so the students will be confident in exploring their ideas.

In other words, writing is useful for many purposes. It includes structure, vocabulary, word formation, and the other aspects such as spelling, capitalization, punctuation as well. The writing difficulties are one of the most significant problems that affect not only in native English speakers, but also many students that are learning English as a foreign language around the world. The fact is that students do not have interests in composing recount text, having low scores in their courses, lacking vocabulary when arranging sentences, and creating incoherent paragraphs. In this opportunities, the researcher has a purpose to know what are the difficulties of students in writing recount text. By conducting this research the reseacher hopes that the teacher will learn about students' difficulties in writing recount text. And the teacher should learn from the specific points in this research about the students' difficulties in writing recount text. It helps the reader especially the teacher to know what are the students' difficulties in writing a text especially in recount text.

While according to Miller (2006), "a writer's purpose is essentially the same as a writer's motive both terms are used to describe what a writer hopes to accomplish. The benefit of having a clear sense of purpose is obvious; the writer is much likely to accomplish his objective". He divides the purpose of writing into ten points as follows:

- Writing to understand experience.
- Writing to report information.
- Writing to explain information.
- Writing to evaluate something.
- Writing to analyze images.
- Writing to analyze texts.
- Writing to persuade others.
- Writing to inspire others.
- Writing to amuse others.
- Writing to experiment with form.

Miller (2006) states that there are ten purposes of writing, it depends on what are the context of each purposes. It means that if the context is about how to evaluatee something so writing has the purpose itself. It depends on the situation and the context of writing.

The Types of Texts

There are many text types that the students should learn, there are: Narrative, Recount, Procedure, Descriptive, Report. Each of them has a purpose to learn. And the generic stucture of the texts are different based on the social functions. For example, narrative text is text type that tells a story and its purpose is to present a view of the world that entertains or informs the readers or listeners. And each text are different in functions and the purposes.

Recount text

Recount text is a piece of text that retells past events, usually in the order in which they happened. The purpose is to give the audience a description of what occurred and when it occurred. Recount is reconstruction of something happened in the past. According to Davies (2000:8) a recount recalls and reconstructs events, experiences, and achievements from the past in a logical sequence. Some recounts will be purely informative, while others will aim to both inform and entertain. Recount texts are usually use to tell about the experiences of someone or it talks about something happened in the past. Recount text has three elements: orientation or setting, events, and re-orientation or concluding statement of the story.

➢ Generic structure of recount text, the first is orientation. The orientation provides all the necessary background information to enable the audience to make sense of the text. To ensure that orientation is detailed and through, use the 5 x w formula (who, what, when, where, why). And the second is event. Events are usually sequenced chronologically, but students should be encouraged to experiment with flashbacks or arranging events in order of importance. And the last is re-orientation. This final section concludes the recount by summarising outcomes and results, evaluating the topic‟s importance or offering personal comment or opinion. (According to Davies, 2000:9).

➢ Language Features in recount text. The main language features used in recounts are: nouns, action verbs, conjunctions and time connectives, adverbs and adjectives. According to Keir (2009:5) the language features of recount text are as follow:

- Use word such as "I" or "we"
- Use of passive voice
- Use of abstract words.

- Use conjunctions, time connectives and adverbial phrases to connect events and build topic information.
- Descriptive language.
- Use past tense.

RESEARCH METHOD

Basically, this study employed a case study which constitutes a form of qualitative research since it attempted to investigate authentic data of students' recount texts (Woodside, 2010; Creswell, 2008; Marshal & Rossman, 2006). Frankel & Wallen (1996: 142) say that 'research studies that investigate the quality of relationships, activities, situations, or materials are frequently referred to as qualitative research'. In line with this, Holliday (2002: 4) mentions that 'qualitative research addresses areas in social life and investigates them directly'. Based on the classification of research design from Nunan (1992), this research was in the sense of discourse analysis because it examined authentic data which was produced spontaneously rather than elicited experimentally.

Then, researcher collected the data to analyze the students' recount texts and what are the points that the students faced in writing recount text. There are ten participants. The participants consist of one boy and nine girls. The first step that the researcher did is the researcher was asking the participants to write a recount text based on the topic that has been given by the reseacher. The topic is talking about their holiday, they have to write at least 3 paragraphs.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of Schematic Structure

The Schematic Structure of All Texts

There are teen texts analyzed in this study. In the texts, the students write their experience during school study tour. From texts written by students of a Senior High School in Indramayu (grade X), there are eight texts (text 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 10, 13, and 14) that already meet the schematic structure of recount text. They are orientation, record of events and reorientation.

The orientation is to orient the readers to the events that follow which introduce character(s) in a setting of time or place (or sometimes both). The orientation of the text analyzed is in the first paragraph. It introduces a setting of time, characters and a specific setting of place of the text as in *"Last semester, I, my friends and my teachers went to*

Maribaya for study tour" (text 1). From the analysis of the texts, there was only one text that does not have orientation (text 8) which means it did not meet the requirement of a recount.

The record of events gives a sequence of events. The series of events in the text are in the rest of the text. There is no re-orientation found in text 1, 6, 7, 11, and 12 to return the readers to the point of departure. Reorientation concludes and summarizes the outcomes and sometimes offers personal comments on the whole sequence of events.

From the explanation above, it is clear that the control of the generic structure of the recount text is already meet the essential conventional elements. The elements are orientation, and the series of events. It can be seen from the story that is delivered based on the schematic structure of a recount text which is orientation, and the series of events. It indicates the ability of the writer to write a recount text and the demand of the generic form of recount text to achieve its purpose (Emilia, 2005).

Students' Difficulties in Writing Recount Text

According to Derewianka (2004), a recount text has some linguistic features, they are:

- The use of specific participants

  In terms of specific participants, the students have been able to implement this by setting the participants in proper nouns, i.e. "*I, my friends, my teachers, and my school",* and pronoun "*We*".

- The use of the past tense, as in the texts, it is found in the clauses *"I, my friends and my teachers went to Bandung; we went to Maribaya; my friends helped me; we saw beautiful view (text 1), the air was cool, we arrived in Lembang (text 3)."*

  In terms of linguistic features, the writers used past tense appropriately in most clauses (*went, saw, helped),* but they made few mistakes as in "*I have an experience; when I will fall to water (text 1); the scenery is beautiful, we arrive at Kubah Mas Mosque; I am very happy (text 4);* ". The student did not seem to be aware to all past verb in her writing. The students also made some mistakes in spelling as in "*I want (went) to Bandung with my friends* (text 5); *we sow (saw) many types of animals (text 12); and than (and then) we went to restaurant for breakfast.* It is in line with Byrne (1995) and Nation (2009) who say that English spelling is difficult and become a problem for many English users, native and non-native, therefore explicit teaching and reading habit will help students to improve their writing ability. Those explanations show that careful attention to spelling and verb formation are needed to be given explicitly and repeatedly to the students because it is

crucial in teaching writing (Byrne,1995; Derewianka, 1998; Thornburry, 2002; Ellis, 2009; Emilia, 2010).

- The use of temporal and additive conjunctions to connect the messages of clauses (Martin, 2009:156) and help make the text cohesive, as in *"The first we went to Maribaya; than we went to floating market; and then we went to the farm house.*

- From the text, we conclude that the vocabulary used by the students is limited because she repeated her story and mostly used verb "went" to deliver the story. It means that their knowledge about English words needs to be improved because vocabulary becomes the basic element of learning language and has important role in language learning and teaching (Thornbury, 2005; Ur:1996). Walkins, as cited in Thornbury (2005:13), says "without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed".

There are so many points that the students will learn in writing text especially in writing recount text. Such as how to use grammar properly, how they explore their ideas in writing recount based on the topic that the teacher has been given to them, how the students are able put the punctuation mark, and how they use the word choosing and so on. In this case, most of students are lack in using tenses or grammar and the other students are lack in both of the point. Because in grammar there are so many tenses that the students should master in order to make them easier to understand what the text is about. In other words, tense is one of the complicated lessons because the students have to master at least sixteen tenses wih the different explanation and also with the different function in each tense. So that the students' major mistake is the using of grammar itself. For example, students got difficulties in using simple past tense. Based on the data of students' test, it was found that students have poor ability in using simple past tense in their writing. In writing learning, the students will find the difficulties to write. The students do not develop and improve their writing techniques in learning English. The students' abilities for getting ideas depends on how much they write about their topic. The students feel confused on how to make a good paragraph with their words and vocab choice. The students also do not know how to make a good correlation between one sentence to the next sentence or one paragraph to the next paragraph. In students experiencing difficulties on literacy often find it very difficult to learn to write clearly and effectively.

So that there are many students who are still confused how to write which is has a good correlation in every sentences. But the most mistakes that the students do is they are still confused on what tenses that the students have to use in write recount text. Most of them still

use the simple present tense and they are still get confused in grammar usage. Most of them use simple present, for example, I took the example from one of the students in 6b. "*I go to the...*" but the correct one is "*I went to the....*"that is one of the example that I take from my participants. And for the other example is like. "*There we watch the movie...*" but the correct one is *"there, we watched the movie..."*. So I conclude that the most mistakes that the students do is they still use the simple present which has a meaing to express the fact or the habit of someone. But the students use simple present tense.

The next difficulties that the students got in writing recount text was how they use subject-verb agreement. Here, the students are able to write based on the topic that the teacher asks to write, but not all the students are able to write correctly based on the the topic that the teacher gives. A few of them still get little bit confused about where do they put *his* or *her* in the middle of the sentence.

Causes of Students' Difficulties in Writing Recount Texts

There were some causes that made students got difficulties in writing recount texts. First, Interlingual transfer is one of important factors that make students difficult to write their ideas because the features of Indonesian is really different from English. They translated word by word into English. The different structure between Indonesian and English made students get confused when they wanted to transfer their ideas into written form. The way of students used Indonesian influenced their way in using English. Because of this different language structures, students got difficulties when they tried to use English in the real form. To use English in the real form. Beside those are the difficulties in writing recount text, the mother tongue highly influences how they can explore their ideas in writing a text. The next cause of students' difficulties in writing recount texts was intralingual transfer. Based on the data, all of students did grammar errors in their writing recount texts. Students did many errors in choosing correct action verb, linking verb, pronoun and using correct simple past tense.

Sturm and Koppenhaver in Westwood (2008:57) told us that the composing for writing involves complex thinking that must integrate multiple components including the topic of the theme, choice of words, organization, purpose, audience clarity, sequence cohesion, and transcription. From that statement, we know that writing is complicated activity which the competence in writing in different purposes relies heavily on possession of adequate vocabulary, knowledge of syntactical structure, and appropriate strategies for planning, composing, reviewing and revising written language which the problems can arise for some students.

According to Thornbury (2002:27), anyone who has learned a second language will know that some words seem easier to learn than others. Easiest of all are those that are more or less identical, both in meaning and form, to their L1 equivalents. The factors that make some words more difficult than others are:

a. Pronunciation: Research shows that words that are difficult to pronounce are more difficult to learn.

b. Spelling: Sound-spelling mismatches are likely to be the cause of errors, either of pronunciation or of spelling, and can contribute to a word's difficulty.

c. Length and complexity: Long words seem to be no more difficult to learn than short ones. But, as a rule of thumb, high frequency words tend to be short in English, and therefore the learner is likely to meet them more often, a factor favoring their "learn ability".

d. Grammar: Also problematic is the grammar associated with the word, especially if this differs from that of its L1 equivalent. Remembering whether a verb like enjoy, love, or hope is followed by an infinitive (to swim) or an–ing form (swimming) can add to its difficulty.

Another cause that made students got difficulty in writing recount texts is lack of vocabulary. Lack of vocabulary makes what learners write become uninteresting, and boring (Farooq, et al., 2012: 186). Lack of vocabulary makes students cannot express their ideas. They do not know what words they have to use to put their thought in their writing. Also, because of lack of vocabulary, the students use the same words in different context. This condition will affect the students' writing quality, because the choice of words in writing will influence the content of their writing. Readers will get difficulties to understand and comprehend students' writing because the words that are used will influence the meaning of the writing. By giving the students writing activity the students are able to learn how to write correctly and they are able to know and get the new vocabulary so that the students are rich in using vocabularies.

The Description and Analysis of Grammatical Errors

Beside they lack in grammar use, there are also points that should be considered by the teacher about what the students face in writing recount text. The writer found the students' difficulties in grammar. For example of the data: *"after finishing enjoying the scenary..."* that is wrong becuse in recount text the use of sentence is passt continuous and the corrrect one should be like *"after I enjoyed the beautiful view there...".* that is the example of the grammar error in writing recount text.

According to Norrish (1983), there are three causes of errors:

a. *Carelessness*: It is often closely related to lack of motivation. Many teachers will admit that it is not always the students' fault if he loses interest; perhaps the material and/or the style of presentation do not suit him.

b. *First language interference*: Learning a language (mother tongue or a foreign language) was a matter of habit information. The learners' utterances were thought to be gradually shaped towards those of the language he was learning.

c. *Translation*: Probably the most of students make errors is translation. This happens because a student translates his first language sentence of idiomatic expression in to the target language word by word.

DeCapua (2008:192) states that ESL/EFL learners have the same problems using the do auxiliary in the simple past that they do in using it with the simple present. These problems include:

a) Learners still use simple present tense of to be intended as a simple past tense.

b) Forgetting to insert *'did'* for questions and negative Statements.

c) Using *'did'* together with the – *'ed'* inflection or the irregular form the verb, rather than leaving the main verb in its base form.

d) At times Learner used *'do'* instead of *'did'*.

The indicator supposed by Cohen (1994) in writing recount text is grammar that included simple past tense and word order. It was the partial component in writing recount text because many students had problem in this indicator. Based on the data had been collected, the researcher found that the students' at Wiralodra University especially in 6b English Education department had *poor* category in term grammar.

CONCLUSION

The objectives of this research are to analyze the students' ability, kinds of students' problems, and the most dominant problems in writing recount text by the students is the grammar use. Based on the analysis of students' writing, it was found some causes that made students did some mistakes in writing recount texts. Based on the analysis of students' writing, it was found some causes that made students did some mistakes in writing recount texts. The first cause is interlingual transfer. The students' mother tongue was still influenced the way of students' writing. The next cause of students' difficulties is intralingual transfer. It related with the students' knowledge in using correct grammar. Students had lack of grammar knowledge that made them did many errors in their writing. The last cause of students'

difficulties in writing recount texts is lack of vocabulary. Based on students' writing, it was found that students used some inappropriate vocabulary to show their ideas.

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