

**STUDENTS' ABILITY IN USING AND UNDERSTANDING THE
PRESENT PERFECT TENSE: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY
AT SMP 31 PADANG**

THESIS

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ABSTRAK

MARLINDAWATI. 2008. Students' Ability in Using and Understanding the Present Perfect Tense: A Descriptive Study at SMP 31 Padang.

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Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk melihat kemampuan dan pemahaman siswa kelas delapan SMP 31 Padang tahun ajaran 2006/2007 dalam menggunakan *the Present Perfect Tense*. Selanjutnya, penelitian ini juga bertujuan melihat masalah yang dihadapi siswa dalam menggunakan variabel yang diteliti (*regular* dan *irregular verbs of past participle*, *auxiliary verbs*, dan *time signals* yang menggunakan *since* dan *for*).

Metode yang dipakai adalah penelitian deskriptif kuantitatif dengan menggunakan tes sebagai alat pengumpul data. Ada dua bentuk teks yang digunakan dalam tes ini, yaitu dialog dan paragraf. Siswa diminta untuk mengisi bagian yang rumpang dengan menggunakan *the Present Perfect forms* pada teks pertama dan *the Present Perfect forms* ditambah *time signals* yang menggunakan *since* dan *for* pada teks kedua dalam waktu 45 menit.

Dari hasil data analisis, ditemukan bahwa kemampuan siswa dalam menggunakan *regular verbs* dikategorikan *poor*, *irregular verbs* dikategorikan *weak*, *auxiliary verbs* dikategorikan *weak*, dan *time signals* yang menggunakan *since* dan *for* dikategorikan *weak*.

Setelah melihat hasil keseluruhan sampel dalam menggunakan *the Present Perfect Tense*, dapat diambil kesimpulan bahwa umumnya mereka tidak paham penggunaan dari masing-masing variabel seperti *auxiliary verbs*, *verb forms*, dan *time signals* yang menggunakan *since* dan *for*.

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Finally, the writer knows this thesis is not perfect. Any mistakes are, of course, the writer's own. The writer hopes there are some criticism and suggestions in order to improve this thesis.

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Marlindawati

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Problem

English is considered as one of major languages used for international communication and is not limited to any country, region, or culture. Most of the people in the world speak English and use it to build the interpersonal relation. They also use this language to access information, to get knowledge and modern technology, and to know the value of English culture itself. These phenomena make us realize how important English is so that many people learn it and enhance their English. Even, some of them try to look for some strategies in order to master this language.

In English, there are some skills and aspects that have interrelation each other and one of those aspects is grammar. The general aim of learning grammar is to know, to understand, and to use correct grammar in any subjects. By using the correct grammar in writing and speaking, people are able to deliver their ideas so that other people understand what is being discussed about. Also in reading, the people can catch the main point and get information from what they have read. Veit (1986) states that grammar makes people understand easier in reading as they can speak and write in their own languages. So, it obviously helps them to catch ideas and to be able to use standard English.

In addition, since grammar is essential in the four language skills (reading, speaking, listening, and writing), we can not neglect the existence of it in learning any language. It means that grammar should be considered in the use of the

language. Poor mastery of grammar will make the students difficult to understand what they have read, and heard. The students will have misinterpretation and the ideas of their writing will be ambiguous for the ones who read them.

Some linguists argued that by studying grammar, students would learn how to make up the language and be able to apply what they have learned as better speakers, writers, and readers. Recent linguistic theory, however, is in conflict with this assumption, and numerous research studies also have failed to show a direct link between such study and improved language skills. Whatever the controversy, and whether or not grammar has an important place in an institution teaching, it has to be accepted that having grammatical competence makes students are able to achieve skills performance. Veit (1986) says that grammar study which is a part of conscious knowledge of language influence other skills such as writing. As an illustration, in writing a series of phrases, the writer should check that they are in parallel form (not mixing noun phrases with verb phrases or clauses), as in: *She likes sport, science, “does crossword puzzles, and she reads mysteries.”* He adds, the common argument for learning grammar is that it gives students a means for talking about their writing, so they think critically about what they have done. It is not just how to put specific words together to create sentences in their writing, but how to follow and exploit some very general smaller patterns of language that regularly occur within sentences. Thus, knowledge in grammar helps the writer to produce their writing appropriately.

Generally, grammar is a knowledge that takes many years to master. Many students get difficulties in understanding grammar even though their teachers have

taught it to them. It is because the students should know many rules in order to learn to master grammar. In addition, nowadays grammar is not taught independently anymore but it has been integrated to other materials like transactional and interpersonal dialogues, functional and monologue texts (genre). Moreover, learning English is more concerned to achieve certain literacy phase such as performative (ability to read, write, listen, and speak), functional (ability to use language to fulfill daily needs like reading newspaper, manual or instruction), and informational (ability to access knowledge by having language competence). But, in some schools including SMP 31 Padang, grammar has been taught separated from other materials despite one meeting (2x40 minutes).

In School Based Development Curriculum, it is stated that learning English for Junior High School is focused on functional level that the students are trained to be able to communicate in oral and written form in order to solve their daily problems. Grammar, as one of supporting knowledge, is functioned as a means of explaining the significant and functional patterning of words in the making of meaning so that it can produce complete and coherent texts. The correctness of grammatical structure should be taken notice by students. Therefore, they are demanded to have grammatical knowledge in order to possess good ability in English.

Grammatical structure consists of many parts like gerunds, parts of speech (pronoun, verb, noun, adjective, adverb, preposition, conjunction, and article), modal auxiliaries, passive voice, tenses, etc. Many students might make mistakes in applying these structures due to the complexity of patterns and rules of English

grammar. For instance, in studying passive voice, the students face difficulties in changing active form become passive form. They do not know the fundamental distinctions between active and passive. Consequently, they miss the constituents of those sentences.

In fact, since the first year in Junior High School, the students have been learning various parts of grammar including English tenses and one of them is the Present Perfect Tense. According to Biber et.al (in Cox, 2005), the Perfect is more common in British and Australian English in the registers of both conversation and news besides the Simple Past Tense. Related to this statement, there were some experts that have done researches to investigate more this study. First, Elness (in Cox, 2005), in her finding revealed that auxiliary *have* and *has* are more frequent in written British English. Second, Engel and Ritz (in Cox, 2005) analyzed two samples of Australian radio talk, one a 60 minutes sample of news bulletins and the other a 60 minutes sample of chat-show segments. The news show produced 19,96% Simple Past and 15,24% Present Perfect, while the chat shows produced 26,36% Simple Past and 11,65% Present Perfect. Third, Engel (in Cox, 2005) analyzed a 60 minutes sample of a BBC broadcast and found that the news items contained 19,4% Simple Past and 22,6% Present Perfect and that magazine program reports contained 13,2% Simple Past and 7,5% Present Perfect. It can be said that the Present Perfect Tense is compulsory used in English speaking countries besides the Simple Past Tense and the portion of the use of this tense is also significant either in oral or written form.

Based on Lestari (2006), when she took Grammar III and Writing III classes at English Department of UNP and also a pre-survey of some students' paragraphs, it was found that there were some mistakes in the use of tenses. The common errors were in applying the Simple Past Tense and the Present Perfect Tense. For example, the students indicated that they knew the predicate of the Present Perfect is formed by adding *has/have* to the past participle form. Yet, they used past form of verb as in *I have "wrote" two letters this morning*. Moreover, during the writer's teaching practice in SMP 31 Padang at eight grade, she found many mistakes made by students in using the Present Perfect Tense. It was proved by the result of the daily test that was given by their teacher. That test showed that the students got problems in using auxiliary verbs, verb forms, and time signals.

In this study, the writer is interested in finding out students' ability in using and understanding the Present Perfect Tense since it is estimated that this part has not been researched yet.

B. Identification of the Problem

As stated on the background above, the problems in grammar are mainly caused by the vagueness in understanding the basic concepts of grammar itself. The students find it difficult to differentiate and apply some rules in grammar even though they have learnt them. One of grammatical components that is studied by students in school is tenses. They learn the Simple Present Tense, the Present Continuous Tense, the Simple Past Tense, the Past Continuous Tense, the Present Perfect Tense, the Present Perfect Continuous Tense, and the Simple

Future Tense. In spite of the fact that they have learnt tenses, they still got difficulties in using them. Some problems that are mostly had by students in learning these tenses are the use of verbs, *be*, auxiliary verbs, and time signals. In addition, since English has many tenses, it is possible that the students make some mistakes and errors in each of them such as in using the Present Perfect Tense. These are the examples of sentences made by the SMP 31 students in their daily test that indicate they got problems in using it. *I have “bayed” a car. She has lived in Padang “since” three months. The children “has” played badminton “for” ten o’clock.* In these cases, the students just did it simply by adding *-ed* for irregular form of the verb, they used inappropriate auxiliary verb for plural subject, and they had problems in differentiating the use of *since* and *for* in this tense.

C. Limitation of the Problem

Based on the identification of the problems above, this study is limited to see the students’ ability in using and understanding the Present Perfect Tense. Then, the writer described the problems that were faced by the students. The writer chose this aspect because it seemed difficult for the eight grade students of SMP 31 Padang to use this tense correctly. Meanwhile, tense is one of important points in grammar that helps significantly in differentiating time frame in order to comprehend when some actions happen.

D. Formulation of the Problem

Based on the limitation, the problem of this study is formulated in the following question:

“How was the ability of the eight grade students of SMP 31 Padang in using and understanding the Present Perfect Tense?”

E. Research Questions

In order to make the formulation of the problem become more specific, the question above is developed into the following questions:

1. How was the ability of the eight grade students of SMP 31 Padang in the use of regular and irregular verbs of past participle in using and understanding the Present Perfect Tense?
2. How was the ability of the eight grade students of SMP 31 Padang in choosing *since* or *for* in using and understanding the Present Perfect Tense?
3. How was the ability of the eight grade students of SMP 31 Padang in the use of auxiliary verbs in using and understanding the Present Perfect Tense?

F. The Purposes of the Research

The purposes of this study are:

1. to know the ability of the eight grade students of SMP 31 Padang in the use of regular and irregular verbs of past participle in using and understanding the Present Perfect Tense.

2. to know the ability of the eight grade students of SMP 31 Padang in choosing *since* or *for* in using and understanding the Present Perfect Tense.
3. to know the ability of the eight grade students of SMP 31 Padang in the use of auxiliary verbs in using and understanding the Present Perfect Tense.

G. Significance of the Research

The finding of this study is expected to provide useful information to anyone who is interested in learning English grammar. The writer hoped that this study would be beneficial for English teachers to have a better description about students' ability in using and understanding the Present Perfect Tense. This study is also expected to give information to the students in order to make them pay more attention to the usage of this tense. Finally, it is hoped that this analysis would enrich the literature of grammar studies and can be a source for the next researchers.

H. Definitions of Key Terms

1. The Present Perfect Tense : a tense used to express actions or situations that occurred at unspecified time in the past.

It may also describe actions that began in the past but are still true in the present. It also expresses repeated past action (Werner, 2002).

2. Descriptive Study : a study that gives description about the way things are and without treatment to the researched object/ respondents (Gay, 1987).

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

A. Conclusions

As mentioned in chapter I, the purpose of this study was to find out the ability of students in using and understanding the Present Perfect Tense. After analyzing the data, it was found that the ability of the eight grade students of SMP 31 Padang in using and understanding the Present Perfect Tense was categorized weak. Many students can not use this tense appropriately. They made some mistakes and errors in the use of regular and irregular verbs, auxiliary verbs, and time signals beginning with *since* and *for* in using the Present Perfect Tense.

Based on the data analysis and findings, some conclusions can be drawn as follows:

1. The ability of students in using regular verbs was poor. It became the most difficult item for students among all of variables of the Present Perfect Tense that were researched. They misspelled some verbs and they use base forms instead of past participle forms.
2. The ability of students in using irregular verbs was considered weak. They got some troublesome in the use of these verbs since they can not memorize the form of each verb.
3. The ability of students in using time signals beginning with *since* and *for* was also considered weak. They can hardly differentiate which one should be followed by beginning time and which one should be followed by period of time.

4. The ability of students in using auxiliary verbs was categorized weak. They got difficulties in differentiating plural subjects and singular subjects so that they placed the wrong auxiliary verbs to certain subjects.

From the conclusions above, it can be interpreted that the eight grade students of SMP 31 Padang registered in academic year 2006/2007 did not understand the use of the Present Perfect Tense since their general abilities in using this tense was categorized weak. The lower ability of the students could be triggered by some causes such as lack of vocabulary or unfamiliar words that were found by them.

B. Suggestions

Based on the findings of the research, the writer would like to propose some suggestions for the improvement in the future as follows:

1. The students should pay more attention to the use of the Present Perfect Tense. They should do more exercises to make improvement.
2. The students should also be active in teaching learning process in order to make a good learning conductible.
3. It is suggested to the teachers to be aware to this problem by giving extra exercises and remedial program for the students.
4. The teacher should also give clear explanations and more examples to the students.
5. This study may be useful to help the reader more understand and interest to do a study about tenses. It is suggested to the next researchers who want to

do a research in this field can complete this research by conducting further and more details studies.

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