

# AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' GRAMMATICAL PROBLEMS RELATED TO SIMPLE TENSES AT THE THIRD GRADE CLASS OF SMPN 12 PADANG

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to describe the kind of grammatical problems had by the third grade students of SMPN 12 Padang related to simple tenses e.g simple present tense, simple past tense and simple future tense. The design of this research was descriptive. The population was 227 students and they were divided into eight classes. In choosing the sample, the technique which was used was cluster random sampling. In this research, there were thirty students that were taken as the sample. The instrument which was used in this research was grammar test. The results of this research generally showed that the percentage of students' problems related to simple tenses was 66%. Related to nominal form in simple present tense, the problem was 11.7% errors in using of verb-be. Besides, in verbal form, there was 90% errors related to the verb form and 100% errors related to the use of auxiliary 'do' and 'does'. Furthermore, the percentage of students' problems at nominal form in simple past tense was in the use of verb-be. The result was 75.5% errors. In addition, in verbal form, the percentage was 93% errors related to the verb form. Besides, related to nominal form in simple future tense, the percentage of students' problems was 56.7%. The errors were related to the use of auxiliary 'be going to/will+be'. Then, in verbal form, the percentage of students' problems was 74.1%. It was related to the use of auxiliary 'be going to' and 'will'.

**Key words:** grammatical problems, simple tenses

## Introduction

Learning a language, especially English, has been a common thing in every schools around the world and so has it in Indonesia. English has been taught beginning from elementary school, junior high school, senior high school, to

university level. Starting from elementary school, the teacher has provided many kinds of vocabularies to increase the students' basic knowledge in English. Then, when the students continue their studies to the higher level e.g to the junior high school, they start to learn about a few

tenses and other grammar components e.g modal, noun phrases, comparative and superlative degrees, and etc.

However, based on the first survey that the researcher had done during teaching practice of 2012/2013 academic year in SMPN 12 Padang, most of the teachers told that grammar is not really focused in teaching and learning process. The first reason is that focusing on teaching grammar can decrease the students' confidence on speaking. Many students will be worried about their grammatical mistakes if they speak up in English. As the result, there is no development during they study English. The second reason to support that teaching grammar is not really focused in learning process is if teaching grammar is focused, the way of teaching still looks traditional. Probably some of students will be bored during the explanation of grammatical theory. By looking to this statement, Baron in Al-Mekhlafi and Nagaratnam (2011:69) says "the English teacher is often portrayed as an unattractive grammar monger whose only pleasure in life is to point out the faults of others". So that, according to the new curriculum, every teacher is asked to teach grammar by communicative approach of the topic e.g explaining the components on grammar by using transactional conversation and functional

monologue text. But in fact teachers just focus on how the students can understand the expression which is taught, or they just focus on how the students understand about the kind of text well. It means that the grammar explanation time is less than usual. Sometimes a few teachers do not really emphasize the grammar learning and even forget to explain about the grammatical function there. As the result, the students will not understand the grammar well and cannot differentiate the form, usage, and use of each grammar component.

Related to the problems above, surely, there will be grammatical problems faced by some students, who do not have any basic knowledge of English, when they learn it. Most of them are often difficult to compare one kind of tense to other tenses when asked to create a sentence using the right tense. Based on the researcher's experience on teaching grammar during teaching practice at SMPN 12 Padang, many students put verb-be after subject in verbal sentence. They almost could not differentiate the nominal and verbal sentence in simple present tense. Then, when they were asked to create a verbal sentence by using the third singular person, most of them forgot to add s/es in the verb which was used. In addition, many students were still confused about the verb

changes from simple present into simple past tense, especially of irregular verb, e.g the verb 'go' changes become 'went' in simple past tense. This common mistake often occurs e.g at secondary class of junior high school. When they were asked to describe an event or their experience by using simple past in recount text, many of them forgot to change the verb into the past form. Usually they just used present verb form to describe their past experience, such as this sentence: "*I go to the market yesterday.*" Beside that, in learning 'invitation card', usually simple future tense is also explained to the students. However, in learning this kind of tense, certainly most of students, who have no basic in English, were still confused about the use of 'will' and 'be going to' in a sentence.

Related to simple past tense problems, Oktoria (2011:3) in her research at second grade of students in SMPN 16 Padang states that the case samples also showed their mistakes on grammar when they were asked to make paragraph in recount text about their holiday's experience. There were many error sentences which were resulted by the students e.g *I visit my grandmother last Sunday* and *I go to Singkarak last week*.

In other research result, Andersson (2008:7) describes that there were 106

(90%) errors of simple present tense made by the 9<sup>th</sup> grade learners of English in Sweden. Related to simple past tense, she also says that there were 43 or 54% errors found (2008:10). In learning simple future tense, Andersson (2008:15) describes that there were 49 or 74% errors for the expressions of 'will' and 17 or 26% errors for the expressions of 'be going to' which were made by the learners.

Actually grammar instruction is really important to build the students basic language skill. Language without grammar will give no function. Although other natives can understand what we say, if there are still errors grammar found, all the sentences produced will not be admitted in written form either. From the research proof above, there is almost no difference about the grammatical cases faced by every students. It seems that the grammar instruction needs to be taught extra more. Meanwhile, in contrast with the current situation, the grammar instruction is moreover given less in the classroom. It is because the grammar course is hardest at all and perhaps it can give the bad impact for other language skills in teachers' perception.

Considering the grammatical problems above, the researcher wanted to prove them scientifically by conducting a research which analyzed about the

students' grammatical problems related to simple tenses e.g simple present tense, simple past tense, simple future tense at thirdgrade class of SMPN 12 Padang. The researcher chose the third class as the sample because the researcher took the data in the new academic year 2013/2014, in which the teaching and learning process was not begun.

### **Method**

Based on background of the problem, the type of research design which was selected to conduct this research was descriptive. Gay (1987:189) says "descriptive research involves collecting data in order to test hypotheses or to answer questions concerning the current status of the subject of the study". It means that this design is used to analyze the current status or a variety of problems that happen in education which aim to answer questions. In descriptive research, usually the data must be described as the fact.

Related to this research, the researcher analyzed the grammatical problems related to simple tenses which were faced by the students of third grade class in SMPN 12 Padang.

According to Gay (1987:102), "population is the group of interest to the researcher, the group to which she or he would like the results of the study to be

generalizable". Due to this research, the population of the third grade students at SMPN 12 Padang was 227 students and they are divided into eight classes.

Gay (1987:101) says, "sampling is the process of selecting a number of individuals for a study in such a way that individuals represent the larger group from which they were selected". Individual is referred to a sample, while larger group is referred to as a population. In descriptive research, a sample of 10 % of the population is considered minimum. For smaller population, 20 % may be required. Related to this research, the size of sample was 13% in which 30 students were selected.

In choosing the sample above, the technique which researcher used was cluster random sampling. Gay (1987:110) says, "cluster sampling is sampling in which groups, not individuals, are randomly selected". Cluster random sampling was used because of the similar characteristics for each cluster. It means that all members which were selected must have the similar materials and also for the time allocated in English instruction. In selecting a sample, the researcher took one class from those several classes. The way of selecting a sample was by writing down the name of each class on several sheets of paper. Then the researcher rolled and put

them into a box. After that, they were mixed up. Finally the researcher chose one class which was IX.8 as a sample.

Brown (2004:3) states, “a test, in simple terms, is a method of measuring a person’s ability, knowledge, or performance in a given domain”. So that, related to this research, the instrument that the researcher used was grammar test. This test was aimed to identify the grammatical problems related to simple tenses that were faced by the third grade class at junior high school students of SMPN 12 Padang. According to Brown (2004:200), “An extension of simple gap-filling tasks is to create sentence completion items where test-takers read part of a sentence and then complete it by writing a phrase”. Hence, related to this research, the grammar test which was conducted was infill-in the blank form.

In the try out test, the total questions which were tested to the sample were 30 items. In scoring the try out test, the researcher gave 1 as a mark for each item because the researcher would multiply every correct score with the total of questions. The highest score in the try out test was 27 and the lowest score was 3. Then, for the real test, the researcher also gave 30 items. The time which was given to the sample to finish the test was for 40 minutes.

Gay (1987:130) says that content validity is really important for a test. Content validity requires both item validity and sampling validity. Hence, the items of the test which were given to the sample were based on the syllabus and teaching material when they were at second grade class. This consideration was taken, because the researcher took the data in the new academic year 2013/2014 in which the students still did not study yet after the promotion of the class.

Besides that, a test must be reliable too. Reliability is the degree to which a test consistently measures whatever it measures. The certain method to test the reliability of the grammar test that the researcher used in this research was split half method. The formula which was used in this method was Pearson Product Moment (Arikunto, 2009:72). It could be described as the following:

$$r_{xy} = \frac{N\sum XY - (\sum X)(\sum Y)}{\sqrt{[N\sum X^2 - (\sum X)^2][N\sum Y^2 - (\sum Y)^2]}}$$

Where:

r : the correlation coefficient of variable x and y

N : the number of students

x : the odd item score

y : the even item score

$\Sigma xy$  : total score of cross product xy

Gay (1987:139) says to find out the coefficient correlation of the whole test, the formula which was used was Spearman-Brown formula. It could be described as the following:

$$r_{total\ test} = \frac{2r_{split\ half}}{1 + r_{split\ half}}$$

Where:

$r_{total\ test}$ : the reliability coefficient of the test

$r_{split\ half}$ : the coefficient of correlation of two halves of the test

After analyzing the coefficient of correlation of the try out test, the result which was gotten was (.91). From this result, the researcher started to compare  $r$  counted with  $r$  table where  $\alpha=.05$  and  $df$  (degree of freedom)=28;  $df=n-2$ . The result of  $r$  table which was gotten was (.36). It could be concluded that  $r$  counted was bigger than  $r$  table. It meant that the test was reliable and it could be categorized into very high correlation.

According to Arikunto (2009: 75), the coefficient of correlation of the test is categorized as follow:

.80 – 1.00 : very high correlation

.60 – .80 : high correlation

.40 – .60 : moderate correlation

.20 – .40 : low correlation

.00 – .20 : very low correlation

In gathering the data, the researcher did several procedures, such as: giving the grammar test to the students, explaining the rule of grammar test such as: the students must finish the test during 40 minutes, collecting the test, drawing a frequency table, then classifying the students' problems in terms of simple tenses and indicators and finally counting the students' problems by using percentage formula.

In this research, the data which were analyzed were the students' errors on the grammar test. In analyzing data process, the researcher did several steps as the following: (1) First, the researcher drew a frequency table, (2) Second, the researcher classified the students' problems in terms of simple tenses and indicators and calculated the total of incorrect sentences for each indicator, (3) Third, the researcher counted the total of whole sentences for each indicator, (4) Finally, the researcher counted the percentage of students' problems by using the formula below:

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$$

Where:

P = percentage of students' grammatical problems

F = frequency of incorrect sentences

N = the total of whole sentences

## Results and Discussions

Based on the data analysis of students' grammatical problems related to simple tenses, it was found that the students had problems in using *verb form*, *auxiliary* and *be*. In general, the percentage of students' problem related to simple tenses was 66% errors.

Specifically, the results of this research can be described as follow:

### 1. Students' Grammatical Problems Related to Simple Present Tense

After analyzing the data in simple present tense, the problem was 11.7% errors found at nominal form related to the use of verb-be.

Besides, in verbal form, the problem was 90% errors related to the use of verb. In addition, the other percentage of students' problem in verbal form was 100% errors related to the use of auxiliary *'do'* and *'does'*.

### 2. Students' Grammatical Problems Related to Simple Past Tense

The percentage of students' problem at nominal form in simple past tense was 75.5% errors related to the use of verb-be.

Then, in verbal form, the percentage of students' problem was 93% errors related to the use of verb.

### 3. Students' Grammatical Problems Related Simple Future Tense

Based on the data analysis at nominal form in simple future tense, the percentage of students' problem was 56.7% errors related to the use of auxiliary *'be going to/will+be'*.

Furthermore, in verbal form, the percentage of students' problem was 74.1% errors related to the use of auxiliary *'will'* and *'be going to'*.

Based on the results of students' grammatical problems above, it could be discussed as follow:

### 1. Students' Grammatical Problems Related to Simple Present Tense

In simple present tense, there were still many errors found at nominal form. For example: item 3 should be *'You are a shy person'*, but the incorrect sentence

was *'You can a shy person'*. Then, item 2 should be *'Am I a good student in my class this semester?'*, but the incorrect sentences were *'Are I a good student in my class this semester?'*, *'Is I a good student in my class this semester?'* and *'Can I a good student in my class this semester?'*. By looking at the incorrect sentence in item 3, modal auxiliary *'can'* was used to replace verb-be *'are'*. Then, at the incorrect sentences in item 2, verb-be *'are or is'* and modal auxiliary *'can'* were still used to replace verb-be *'am'*.

Furthermore, in verbal form, the common errors were still often found for the use of auxiliaries and the verb form. Related to the use of verb, for example: item 8 should be *'He studies English everyday'*, but the incorrect sentences were *'He are study English everyday'*, *'He studying English everyday'*, *'He always study English everyday'*. It could be concluded that there were still many errors found in that sentence. From the first incorrect sentence above, there was verb-be *'are'* found. Furthermore, at the second incorrect sentence, there was *verb-ing* found. Actually, it had to be *'studies'*, because the

subject which was used was the third singular person. Hence, the verb had to be added with *-es*. Then, for the third incorrect sentence, there was an additional adverb of frequency e.g *'always'*.

Then, for the use of auxiliaries *'do'* and *'does'*, the problems could be described as the following examples: item 7 should be *'Jack does not describe the picture in front of the class'*, but the incorrect sentences were *'Jack isn't describe the picture in front of the class'*, *'Jack can't describe the picture in front of the class'* and *'Jack describe the picture in front of the class'*. From the first and second incorrect sentences, verb-be *'is'* and modal auxiliary *'can'* were used to replace auxiliary *'does'*. Furthermore, there were no auxiliary *'does'* and *'not'* at the third incorrect sentence. Then, the errors were also found in the item 10 which should be *'Do you eat fried rice daily?'*, but the incorrect sentences were *'Are you eat fried rice daily?'* and *'Can you eat fried rice daily?'*. From these both incorrect sentences, verb-be *'Are'* and modal auxiliary *'Can'* were used to replace auxiliary *'do'*.



## 2. Students' Grammatical Problems

### Related to Simple Past Tense

In simple past tense, there were still many errors found related to the use of verb-be 'was' and 'were' at nominal form. For example: item 15 should be '*I was really frightened at midnight last night*', but the incorrect sentences were '*I am really frightened at midnight last night*' and '*I can really frightened at midnight last night*'. It meant verb-be 'am' and modal auxiliary 'can' were used to replace verb-be 'was'. Besides, the errors were also found in the item 17 which should be '*Was the movie really funny an hour ago?*', but the incorrect sentences were '*What the movie really funny an hour ago?*', '*Are the movie really funny an hour ago?*' and '*Were the movie really funny an hour ago?*'. It could be concluded that there were W-5 question e.g. 'what' and verb-be 'are' found in the first and second incorrect sentences. Actually, it had to be 'was'. Moreover, there was still an error found related to the use of verb-be for singular subject, e.g. '*The movie*', the verb-be which was used was 'were'. Actually, it had to be 'was'.

Related to the students' grammatical problems at verbal form in simple past tense, the common problem was often found related to the verb use. For example: item 21 should be '*We spent our holiday in Paris last summer*', but the incorrect sentences were '*We are spend our holiday in Paris last summer*', '*We were spend our holiday in Paris last summer*', '*We spending our holiday in Paris last summer*' and '*We spend our holiday in Paris last summer*'. From the first and second incorrect sentences, the error was about the placement of verb-be before verb e.g. 'are' and 'were', then, the verb form which was used was still in Verb-I form. Besides, from the third incorrect sentence, the use of verb-ing was found e.g. '*spending*'. It had to be 'spent'. Then, in the last incorrect sentence, the form of Verb-I was still used e.g. '*spend*'.

## 3. Students' Grammatical Problems Related to Simple Future Tense

In simple future tense, the common error was often found related to the use of auxiliary 'be going to/will+be' at nominal form. For example: item 26 should be '*They will be glad to spend their*

*vocations here on this summer season*', but the incorrect sentences were *'They are glad to spend their vocation here on this summer season'* and *'They will glad to spend their vocation here on this summer season'*. From the first incorrect sentence above, verb-be *'are'* was used there. Actually it had to be *'will+be'*. Then, there was only *'will'* without *'be'* before the adjective. Besides, the other problem was found in the item 25 which should be *'Is he going to be a teacher here next month?'*, but the incorrect sentence was *'Will he going to be a teacher here next month?'*. It showed that the error was the replacement of auxiliary *'will'* with verb-be *'is'* in that sentence.

Furthermore, in verbal form, the common error was related to the use of auxiliary *'will'* and *'be going to'*. For example: item 29 should be *'She will not visit her grandmother next month'*, but the incorrect sentences were *'She is visit her grandmother next month'* and *'She will visit her grandmother next month'*. From the first incorrect sentence, verb-be *'is'* was used to replace an auxiliary *'will'* and there is no *'not'* available.

Then, at the second incorrect sentence, auxiliary *'will'* had been used, but there was no *'not'* available. Then, other errors were also found in the item 24 which should be *'I am going to get up before eight o'clock'*, but the incorrect sentences were *'I going to get up before eight o'clock'*, *'I be going to get up before eight o'clock'* and *'I want to get up before eight o'clock'*. From the first incorrect sentence, there was no verb-be *'am'*. Besides, there was only *'be going to'* found at the second incorrect sentence. Actually, it had to be *'am going to'*. Then, at the third incorrect sentence, there was *Verb I* found after subject. Actually, it had to be *'am going to'*.

## Conclusions

After analyzing the data of the students, it could be concluded that the third grade students of SMPN 12 Padang had problems in comprehending the simple tenses. It could be described as follow:

1. The highest percentage of students' grammatical problems in simple present tense was related to the use of auxiliary *'do'* and *'does'* at verbal form. The percentage of error was 100%.

2. The highest percentage of students' grammatical problems in simple past tense was related to the verb form. The percentage of error was 93%.
3. The highest percentage of students' grammatical problems in simple future tense was related to the use of auxiliary 'will' and 'be going to'. The percentage of error was 74.1%.

### Suggestions

By looking at the conclusions, there are several suggestions that are aimed for the teachers, the students and the next researchers as follow:

1. Based on the result of this research, there were many grammatical problems faced by students in learning English. From this fact, grammar instruction should be more taught by the teachers in the teaching and leaning process. Moreover, teachers should not only teach English as the foreign language, but the teachers also must emphasize the grammatical functions to the students, in order to make English instruction is effective to the students.
2. Then, the students must avoid the negative thinking which tells that

grammar is really hard to learn. In addition, students must do more exercises related to simple tenses and comprehend them well.

3. Furthermore, the next researchers are suggested to find out other problems of simple tenses, such as: the students' problems related to the time signal for each simple tenses or the students' problems related to other grammar aspect.

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