

**THE DIFFICULTIES FACED BY THE SECOND YEAR STUDENTS
IN UNDERSTANDING SENTENCES AT ENGLISH DEPARTMENT OF
BUNG HATTA UNIVERSITY**

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to describe the students' difficulties in understanding sentences. Relating to this, the researcher used descriptive method. The population of this study was the second year students at English Department of Bung Hatta University. The total members of this population was 104 students. The sample of this study was class C. The number of sample members of class C was 27 students. The data of this study were gathered using reading test in the form of short answer items. Before the researcher gave the real test, she tried it out since the instrument was categorized nonstandardized test. The result of the try out test was used to know the reliability of the test. It was found that the reliability of the test was high (.80). Based on the result of this study, most students have difficulties in understanding sentences. It was indicated by the fact that there were 20 students (76%) got difficulties in identifying key idea (see Appendix 8). It was indicated by the fact that there were 10 students (38%) got difficulties in locating detail. It was indicated by the fact that there were 13 students (50%) got difficulties in identifying less and more important idea. The lecturers are suggested to explain more comprehensively about identifying key idea, locating detail, and identifying less and more important idea and give more exercises to the students and the students are also suggested to learn and do more exercises.

Key Words : students' difficulties, simple sentence, complex sentence, understanding sentences.

Introduction

Reading is one of language skills that must be mastered by the students. Reading is also an important skill for academic, besides listening, speaking and writing.

Seyler (2008:3) states that reading is the process of obtaining or constructing meaning from a word or cluster of words. Reading is a process in getting information. By reading, students can get new information to enhance their

knowledge, improve their comprehension of the information and the students know about something that they do not know. In addition, by reading regularly, students are able to improve their reading skill, include the improvement their vocabulary, pronunciation, etc. The students cannot receive the information well because they do not comprehend the content of the text or they can not catch the idea. In a word, reading is very important thing in human life.

Understanding the sentences is one of important part in reading comprehension. It means that students will be able to comprehend the text that they read if they can understand sentences by the written text is constructed. According to Pardiyono (2007:9),” Sentences defined as a group of words that have been organized to express a complete thought, that include one or two clauses. A clause is defined as a group of words that at least contains a subject and a verb as the predicate”.

One of factors that make reading text is difficult to be understood by the students is that they do not understand the sentences. They got difficulties to understand the sentences because they do not know the basic message of the sentences. As a matter of fact, a sentence usually contains basic message which is modified by a number of details.

In understanding sentences, McWhorter (1986:62) states that there are some aspects that should be considered by readers. They are key idea, details, conjunction and subordination, and the more important idea and the less important idea. Key idea must appear in a sentence, and it is made up of two parts; a simple subject and a simple predicate. Details are the answer of such questions about the subject or predicate as what, which, when, who, how, or why. Coordinating conjunction in English; and, but, so, or, for, nor, and yet. Subordinating conjunction is the first word in a dependent clause. The more important idea refers to idea that has a complete meaning. The less important idea explains the key idea by describing, expressing cause, stating purpose or reason, describing conditions or circumstances, or expressing time relationship.

Based on the result of interview that the researcher did toward the second year students of English Department of Bung Hatta University, it was found that most of the students got difficulties in understanding the sentences. It is indicated by their inability to catch the basic message of the sentences. In addition, they cannot identify the key idea of the sentences, they got difficulties to locate the details, and they could not differentiate between less and more important ideas.

Based on the phenomena above, the researcher was interested in carrying out a research entitled “The Difficulties Faced by the Second Year Students in Understanding Sentences at English Department of Bung Hatta University”.

Research Method

The design of the research was descriptive research. Gay (1987:189) says that descriptive research involves collecting data in order to test the hypothesis or to answer questions concerning the current of the study.

The population of this research was the second year students of English Department of Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of Bung Hatta University in academic year 2013/2014. The total number of the population was 104 students that were distributed into three classes; class A, class B, and class C.

In this research, the researcher took the sample by using cluster random sampling technique. Gay (1987:110) state that cluster random sampling is more convenient when the population is very large. The researcher used cluster random sampling technique because the population was homogenous. The members of population had the same syllabus, material and lecturer.

Before giving the real test on June 24, 2014, the researcher did the try out test first on June 20, 2014. The purpose was to know whether the students could understand the instruction or not, whether the time to do the test was enough or not, and to identify the validity and reliability of the test.

The validity of the reading test

The researcher used content validity. As Arikunto (2010:211) states, a test is valid if it measures what is supposed to measure.

The reliability of the reading test

To find out the reliability of reading test, the researcher used split-half method by using Pearson Product Moment formula as suggested by Arikunto (2010:213) :

$$r_{xy} = \frac{n \sum XY - (\sum x)(\sum y)}{\sqrt{\{n \sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2\} \{n \sum y^2 - (\sum y)^2\}}}$$

According to Gay (1987:139), to know the coefficient of correlation of the test, the result was analyzed by using Spearman Brown formula :

$$r_{ii} = \frac{2 r_{xy}}{(1 + r_{xy})}$$

Arikunto (2010: 319) classifies the correlation coefficient as follows :

- .80 – 1.00 = very high
- .60 – .80 = high
- .40 – .60 = enough
- .20 – .40 = low
- .00 – .20 = very low

After the researcher counted the reliability of the test by using Pearson Product Moment Formula, the researcher found that r counted was .80. Then to know the test was significant or not, the researcher compared r counted .80 with r table .388 . It can be said that r counted was higher than r table. It means that the test was significant and could be categorized in very high correlation.

In gathering data, the researcher used the procedures as follows :

1. The researcher administered the test to the students
2. The researcher collected the result of the test
3. The researcher checked the students' answer
4. The researcher classified the types of difficulties made by the students based on the criteria as follow:
 - a. Students had difficulties in identifying key idea if they could not identify the subject and verb correctly in a simple sentence.

- b. Students had difficulties in locating details if they could not locate details (what, who, where, when, which, why, and how) in a simple sentence.
 - c. Students had difficulties in identifying more and less important idea if they could not differentiate between more and less important idea in a complex sentence.
5. The researcher rechecked the students' answer and made the table of students' difficulties in understanding sentences (identifying key idea, locating details, and identifying more and less important idea).

In analyzing the data, the researcher used the procedures as follows:

1. The researcher checked the table that indicated the difficulties of students in understanding sentences.
2. The students were said to have difficulties if the percentage was above 50% and they had no difficulties if the percentage was less than 50%.
3. The researcher classified the students into those who had difficulties and those who did not have difficulties.
4. The researcher gave the checklist (✓) on the table no

difficulties (ND) and the table difficulties (D).

5. The researcher used the formula below in counting the percentage of students who had difficulties in each components (key idea, locating details, more and less important idea) :

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

Findings and Discussions

1. Findings

1.1 Students' Difficulties in Identifying Key Idea

Based on the result of the data analysis, it was found that most students got difficulties in identifying key idea. It was indicated by the fact that there were 20 students (76%) got difficulties in identifying key idea. Besides, it was also found that most students had difficulties in identifying verb and subject. It was indicated by the fact that there were 60% students got difficulties in identifying verb of key idea and 18% students got difficulties identifying subject of key idea.

1.2 Students' Difficulties in Locating Detail

Based on the result of the data analysis, it was found that less than half of students got difficulties in locating detail. It was indicated by the fact that there were

10 students (38%) got difficulties in locating detail. Besides, it was also found that most students had difficulties in locating detail (which, how, why, when, what, and where). It was indicated by the fact that there were 20% students got difficulties in locating detail (which), 17% students got difficulties in locating detail (how), 10% students got difficulties in locating detail (why), 7% students got difficulties in locating detail (when), 7% students got difficulties in locating detail (what), 3% students got difficulties in locating detail (where).

1.3 Students' Difficulties in Identifying Less and More Important Idea

Based on the result of the data analysis, it was found that half of students got difficulties in identifying less and more important idea. It was indicated by the fact that there were 13 students (50%) got difficulties in identifying less and more important idea.

2. Discussion

As already discussed in the findings of this study, the writer found students' difficulties in identifying key idea, locating detail, and less and more important idea. The data also described that many students faced difficulties in identifying key idea. Students difficulties in each components of

understanding sentences will be discussed below.

2.1 Students' Difficulties in Identifying Key Idea

As already discussed before, it was found that most of students (76%) had difficulties in identifying key idea. It indicated that the most of students were still confused about key idea of sentence. To be able to identify the key idea of a sentence, the students should know which one is subject and predicate of the sentence. The following are the examples of students' difficulties in identifying key idea.

1. Question number 6 :
Taking a walk in the city park is an enjoyable activity at the weekend.
Students' answer : Taking a walk.

From example above, 25 students (96%) had difficulties in identifying key idea. They state that key idea of sentence is *Taking a walk* instead of *talking a walk is*; *Taking a walk* is subject and *Is* is predicate.

2.2 Students' Difficulties in Locating Detail

As already discussed before, it was found that less than half of students (38%) had difficulties in locating detail. It means

that some students were still confused about locating detail . The following are the examples of students' difficulties in locating detail.

1. Question number 8 : Many shoppers clip coupons to reduce their grocery bill.

Students' answer :

How

From example above, it showed that 20 students (76%) had difficulties in locating detail. *How* instead of *why*.

1.3 Students' Difficulties in Identifying Less and More Important Idea

As already discussed before, it was found that half of the students (50%) had difficulties in identifying less and more important idea. It indicated that many students could not differentiate between less and more important idea. The following are the examples of students' difficulties:

1. Question number 6 : The writers who already write tens of books will earn a lot of money from the royalty.

Students' answer : The more important idea : Earn a lot of money from the royalty
The less important idea : The writers who already write tens of books

From example above, 26 students (100%) had difficulties in identifying less and more important idea. The correct answer of this question is that more important idea is *the writers will earn a lot of money from the royalty*, and the less important idea is *who already write tens of books*.

Conclusions and Suggestions

1. Conclusions

Based on the findings, in general it can be concluded that second year students of English Department of Bung Hatta University had difficulties in understanding sentences. The more specific conclusion were drawn as follows.

1. The second year students of English Department of Bung Hatta University had difficulties in identifying key idea. It was indicated by the majority of the students (76%) faced difficulties in identifying key idea.
2. The second year students of English Department of Bung Hatta University had difficulties in locating detail. It was supported by the data, 38% students had difficulties in locating detail..

3. The second year students of English Department of Bung Hatta University had difficulties in identifying less and more important idea. It was indicated by the fact that 50% students faced difficulties in identifying less and more important idea.

2. Suggestions

Related to the findings, there are several suggestions proposed in this research.

1. Since many students faced difficulties in identifying key idea, locating detail, and identifying less and more important idea, the researcher suggests the lecturers to give the students more information and exercises about indentifying key idea, locating detail, and indentifying less and more important idea.
2. The students are suggested to study harder and do more exercises about the three components of understanding sentences.
3. Further researchers are suggested to do relevant research like finding the cause of students' difficulties.

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