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STUDENTS' ABILITY IN THE TOEFL-LIKE STRUCTURE SUBTEST (A Study at STKIP PGRI of West Sumatera)

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Abstrak

Structure subtest merupakan masalah yang dimiliki oleh mahasiswa bahasa Inggris STKIP PGRI dalam menyelesaikan tes TOEFL. Berdasarkan data mahasiswa bahasa Inggris yang telah lulus, ditemukan bahwa skor tes tata bahasayang didapatkan jauh dari harapan. Sulit bagi mahasiswa untuk menentukan penggunaan setiap particular of speech pada kalimat. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi kemampuan tata bahasamahasiswa tahun ketiga jurusan Bahasa Inggris STKIP PGRI Sumatera Barat pada setiap variabel yang ada pada test TOEFL, khususnya bagian tata bahasa. Hasil penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa secara statistik kemampuan mereka pada level unsatisfactory. Hampir setengah dari subjek peneletian (42.30%) berada pada level rendah. Dengan demikian, dapat disimpulkan bahwa kemampuan mahasiswa dalam test tata bahasa TOEFL masih rendah.

Abstract

Structure subtest is a student's problem of English Department of STKIP PGRI in solving the TOEFL test. Based on data from the English Department graduated student, it is found that the result from the test scores is far from expectation. It is difficult for students to determine the use of any particular of speech in a sentence. This research aims to identify the structure of third year student ability of English Department of STKIP PGRI West Sumatra on every variable that exists on the TOEFL test, particularly the grammar part. Results of the study show that statistically their ability is at unsatisfactory levels. Nearly half of the research subjects (42.30%) is at a low level. Thus, it can

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be concluded that the ability of students in grammar TOEFL test is still low.

INTRODUCTION

TOEFL is designed to evaluate the proficiency of the English learners. It is developed to be the standard of English proficiency for all English native speakers in the United States. Nowadays, TOEFL is used to be the standard of English proficiency for English non-native speakers, including Indonesian. Many universities and colleges in Indonesia, including STKIP PGRI of West Sumatera, decide TOEFL as one of requirements to pass the Bachelor program, especially for English Department. English Department students who will graduate have to take TOEFL as one of the requirements to get the Bachelor degree. They have to take the TOEFL test before graduating from their Bachelor program.

However, it is not easy to get a high TOEFL score. Based on the data from STKIP PGRI of West Sumatera, from 52 test takers of English Department students, only 11 test takers got TOEFL score above 400 as the minimum score in Mei 2010. From another data in September 2010, only 10% from the test takers got TOEFL score higher than 400. It can be shown that the English students have difficulty to achieve the high TOEFL score.

Actually, there are four subjects of grammar class that should be taken by the students. The students start from the Grammar I. Then, it continues up to Grammar II, III, and Advanced Grammar. The students learn the basic part of grammar such as nouns, adjectives, articles, verbs, and many others in Grammar I. Then, they learn all the concepts and rules of tenses in Grammar II. In Grammar III, they learn how to collaborate tenses into

several types of sentences. Finally, the students learn the TOEFL structure subtest in Advanced Grammar.

Even they have passed those classes, their TOEFL scores, especially structure section score, are still far from the expectation. Because of that, the researcher wants to conduct a research in order to find the English students' ability in the TOEFL structure subtest.

This section is designed to measure the ability of understanding language and the standard of English written expression. The test takers have to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in vocabulary, grammar and proper usage of standard North American written English. Bossers in Cummins (2000) says that assessing vocabulary and grammar knowledge is one of the bases to assess language proficiency. Hughes (2003) states that "structure and written expression" remains as one part of the TOEFL tests which tests the use of different structures and usefull expressions in language output to be effective and efficient speakers and writers. In addition, Read in Xin (2008) says that "Structure and written expression" in the TOEFL focus on meaning in the strandard form of formal written English. It is asked the ability in determining function words (articles, prepositions, pronouns, conjunctions, auxiliaries, and others), and content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs). Moreover, they will have to recognize vocabulary items of an academic nature; this means that there will be subjects related to science, the arts, literature, culture and history. Based on ETS

Handbook (2010), there are two parts for this section. The first part is Structure. The test takers are asked to complete some incomplete sentences. They have to fill the blank with the appropriate words or phrases complete the sentence. According to Harley (1990), multiple choice written test can be used in measuring grammar proficiency. It is also supported by Hughes (2003), gap filling, which provides multiple choice structure can be used to measure the proficiency of grammar. The second part is Written Expression. Every sentences in this part has four underlined words or phrases which are signed by A, B, C, and D. One of the words or phrases must be changed into the correct one. In another word, the test takers have to choose one of the underlined words that is predicted in the wrong form of syntactical rule. According to Oller in Purpura (2004), grammar proficiency can be evaluated by asking the students to integrate linguistic form, semantic meaning, and pragmatic use.

There are some variables of the structure subtest that are tested in TOEFL. The variables are explained in all TOEFL preparation books such as Sharpe (2005), Sharpe (2007), Sukur (2007), Walter (2008), and ETS Handbook (2010). All of the theorists have the same idea about the variables that are tested in the TOEFL structure subtest. Because of the reason, the researcher can conclude that the variables of the TOEFL structure subtest as follow:

Verbs

Verb is the most problem of sentences in the Structure Section. The verb can be classified as transitive, intransitive, and complement such as nouns, pronouns, adjective, and adverbs. The test takers will be asked to choose the correct verb from the four possible verbs.

Auxiliary Verbs

Be, Have, or modal are the examples of auxiliary verbs. Test takers will be asked

to select the correct auxiliary verb to accompany with the main verb.

Nouns

A noun is a word that names persons, objects, and ideas. Nouns are classified into countable and uncountable nouns. In the structure section, the test takers will be asked to identify the correct noun.

Pronouns

A pronoun is a word that can be used to indicate a noun. It may be used as the subject, object, or preposition of a sentence. The test takers will be asked to choose the correct pronoun for the incomplete and incorrect sentences.

Modifiers

A modifier can be an adjective or an adjectival phrase that describe a noun or an *-ing* form. Also, it can be an adverb or adverbial phrase. The test takers will be asked to identify the correct modifier.

Comparative

A comparative expresses the degree of comparison by using adjectives and adverbs. The test takers will be asked to identify the correct comparative to express the similarity or difference.

Connectors

A connector is a word or phrase that joins words, phrases, or clauses. In the second section of TOEFL, the test takers will be asked to choose the correct connector in order to show the relationship or the sentence such as cause and result, contradiction, substitution, addition, exception, example, and purpose.

Sentences and Clauses

In some sentences in the Structure Section, the test takers will be asked to distinguish between a sentence, also called a main or independent clause, and a subordinate or dependent clause that is attached to a sentence.

Point of View

Point of view is the relationship between the verb in the main clause of a

sentence and other verb, or between the verbs in a sentence and the adverbs that express time. The test takers will be asked to identify errors in point of view. This type of concept usually find in the second part of the structure section.

Agreement

Agreement is the relationship between a subject and the verb or between a pronoun and noun, or between a pronoun and other pronoun, or between a part of speech and another part of speech. The test takers will be asked to identify errors in agreement. It usually appears in the second part of the structure section.

Introductory Verbal Modifier

Introductory verbal modifiers are *-ing* forms, participles, and infinitives. A phrase with an introductory verbal modifier occurs at the beginning of a sentence and is followed by a comma. The test takers will be asked to determine errors in introductory verbal modifiers and the subjects that they modify.

Parallel Structure

Parallel structure is the use of the same grammatical structures for related ideas of equal importance. Related ideas of equal importance often occur in the form of list that are connected by conjunction, such as *and*, *but*, and *or*. The test takers will be asked to figure out errors in parallel structure.

Redundancy

Redundancy is the unnecessary repetition of words and phrases. The test takers will be asked to identify errors in redundancy.

Word Choice

Word choice is the selection of words that express the exact meaning of an idea. Sometimes it is necessary to make a choice between words that are very similar in appearance but very different in meaning. The test takers will be asked to identify errors in word choice.

METHODOLOGY

Design of the Research

This study was conducted by using a descriptive research. In this particular work, the researcher investigated and identified the abilities of English Department students of STKIP PGRI of West Sumatera in the TOEFL structure subtest.

Subject of the Research

This research was conducted in the English Department of STKIP PGRI of West Sumatera. The subject of the research was the third year students in academic year 2010/2011 who have accomplished Grammar I, II, III, and Advanced Grammar. They were divided into 14 classes (2008 A-M). Around 35 students join each class. It means the total population was around 455 students. Because the total of the subject was too large, the researcher took 10% of the students randomly. The researcher rolled 35 numbers of papers. After that, four numbers of paper were taken randomly. The process was done for all classes. The chosen number of each class based on the attendance list would be the subject of the research.

Instrumentation

The instruments of the research was a test. The test given was the Structure and Written Expression of the TOEFL test used in STKIP PGRI of West Sumatera. Based on the information from the Head of English Department of STKIP PGRI of West Sumatera, this test was a standardized test because it was constructed by adopting, and adapting the TOEFL test from several TOEFL Institutions such as ITP, and ITI. Also, the test was taken from some standardized TOEFL books such as Barron, and Cambridge. Furthermore, the test has been used for testing English

determine their average score, the result of the first and the second test was divided by two. The students' results determined which sub skills were acquired or not by the students.

Technique of Data Analysis

Mean + 1.5 SD A:
Very Good

B: Good

C: Fair

D: Low

E: Unsatisfactory

Findings

Because the test was modified, it was needed to find the item difficulty of the test. From the calculation, it was found that the score was 0.82. It can be concluded that the test had very high correlation of reliability. It indicated that the test could be used as the instrument of the research.

The data was taken from the sample's score of Structure and Written Expression test of TOEFL. The test was given twice to get the students' scores. The second test was given one week after the first test. To

Score	Numbers of Students	Percentage
A (Very Good)	7	13.46%
B (Good)	13	25%
C (Fair)	10	19.23%
D (Low)	13	25%
E (Unsatisfactory)	9	17.30%

After calculating the students' score, it was gotten that the mean score was 21. Hence, the standard deviation was 4.15. After getting the mean score and the standard deviation, the researcher calculated the standard point for each level of ability. The students could be placed in A if they got 27 points, B if they got 22 until 27 points, C if they got 19 until 22 points, D if they got 15 until 19 points, and E if they got 15 points. After knowing the standard point for each level, the researcher counted how many students placed for each level. After counting the students, it was gotten that 13.46% of the students were in the level of A, or around seven students had "very good" in the TOEFL structure subtest. On the other hand, 25 % of the students were in the level of B, or 13 students got "good". The researcher also found 19.23% of the students were in the level of C, or 10 students got "fair" since 25% of students were in the level of D, or 13 students had "low" in the TOEFL structure subtest. At last, 17.30% of students were in the level of E, or 9 students got "unsatisfactory".

It was found that most of the students were placed in the level of B and D. There was the same percentage for "Good" and "Low". Meanwhile, few students got A (Very Good). It indicated that the students have to improve their ability in the TOEFL structure subtest.

2. Students' abilities in each of the TOEFL structure variable

The following analysis is the description the distribution and frequency made in each structure variable.

Verb

Verb was one of variables tested in the TOEFL structure section. After analyzing the data, it was found that 98.07% of the students (51 students) were able to choose the correct verb form for the questions

given. The degree of the correctness of their answer was 57.05%. It was indicated that from six "Verb" questions, around four questions could be answered correctly. It can be concluded that even nearly all students could answer the "Verb" questions, they could not answer all the questions related with "Verb".

Auxiliary Verb

The second structure variables asked in the TOEFL structure subtest was auxiliary verb. From the data, it can be seen that only 57.69% of the students (30 students) could select the correct auxiliary verb to accompany with the main verb. Thus, the degree of the correctness was only 30.76%. It means each of the students only could answer around one question from two questions given about "Auxiliary verb".

Noun

The following variable was noun. The students had to be able to identify the correct noun. There were 49 students (94.23% of the students) could answer the questions of 'noun' correctly. The degree of the correctness was 54.48%. It is indicated that the students could answer around two questions from three questions of "noun" given.

Pronoun

Pronoun was another structure variable in the TOEFL structure subtest. The data showed that there were 51 students (98.07% of the students) were able to choose the correct pronoun for the incomplete and incorrect sentences. The students who had the correct answer related to "pronoun" could answer around two questions from three questions given (65.38%).

Modifier

Besides verb, auxiliary verb, noun, and pronoun, modifier was also asked in the TOEFL structure subtest. From the result, it can be seen that the students only

could answer 50% of the questions. It means only one question could be solved from two questions given. Hence, there were 80.76% of students (42 students) had the correct answer.

Comparative

Another variable was comparative. There were three questions related to “comparative”. From those questions, around two questions from three questions (65.38%) could be answered. The percentage of the students who had the correct answer was 96.15%, or 50 students answered the questions correctly.

Connector

There were 49 students (94.23% of students) succeed answering the “connector” questions. It can be seen from three questions given, the students could answer around two questions. It means the degree of the correctness was 48.07%.

Sentence and Clause

From the result, it can be seen that 98.07% of the students or 51 students from 52 students were able to answer the question related to “sentence and clause”. They could distinguish between main clause and subordinate clause. The degree of the correctness was 75%. It means around two questions could be answered from two “sentence and clause” questions.

Point of View

Four questions related to “point of view” had to be answered. However, the students only could answer two questions from four. As the result, the degree of the correctness was 53.84%. Hence, 98.07% of the students or 51 students got the correct answer.

Agreement

The structure variable that could be answered by nearly all students was Agreement. It can be proved by the result. It is shown that 98.07% of the students succeed. Moreover, the percentage of the correctness was 81.73%. It means nearly all

students could answer all the questions related to “agreement”.

Introductory Verbal Modifier

Another variable included in the TOEFL structure subtest was “introductory verbal modifier”. There were only 41 students or 76.84% of the students could determine errors in introductory verbal modifiers and the subjects that they modified. Moreover, the students only could answer the average of one question from two questions given. It showed the degree of the correctness was 45.19%.

Parallel Structure

Actually, there were four question related to this variable. From the data, it can be seen that 51 students or 98.07% of the students could figure out errors in the parallel structure. However, even nearly all students answered the “parallel structure” questions correctly; the degree of correctness was only 63.94% (three questions from four).

Redundancy

Redundancy was also included in this TOEFL structure subtest. This variable asked the students to identify the unnecessary repetition in the questions given. From 52 students, there were 48 students (92.30% of the students) could identify the errors in redundancy. Most of the students who succeed in answering these questions could answer only one question from two questions given. It was indicated that the degree of correctness was 67.30%.

Word Choice

The last variable must be answered was “word choice”. There were two questions for this variable. However, the degree of correctness was 55.76% or the students only could answer the questions in the average of one from two questions. The total of the students who succeed in identifying errors in word choice was 43 students or 82.69% of the students.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

It can be calculated that nearly half of the students (42.30%) are placed in the level of D and E. It can be indicated that majority of the students are placed in the low level. It can be concluded that the ability of the students in acquiring structure variable of TOEFL is unsatisfactory. The students should be aware to the use of and the usage of all structure variables in the TOEFL test. They should do more exercises to improve their ability.

The lecturers should prepare the appropriate remedial program to improve the students' ability.

For the following researchers who want to conduct the similar research, it is suggested for them to consider the technique of choosing the sample of the research. Hence, the result of the research will be generalized for all total population.

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