

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Grammar is one of the language components that are very important in learning a language. It is used in all language skills such as Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Without mastering Grammar properly, someone will find difficulties in understanding a language, whether a spoken or written one. As mentioned by Danny D. Steinberg quoting Chomsky's theory in his book Psycholinguistics: Language, Mind and World, the ability to produce and comprehend grammatical sentences is one of the fundamental language abilities of speakers. Without mastering the grammar properly, a speaker will find difficulties in language, both in the written and the spoken discourse. Carroll in the book of Psychology of Language also mentions that grammar is a formal device with a finite set of rules that generate the sentences in the language (1986,p.31). Thus, it is found that grammar is one of the most important factors in language learning.

In the English Education study program of Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (henceforth is called EESP), the students are directed to become English teachers who master English well and comprehensively. Therefore, grammar is one of the compulsory subjects taken by the students. English grammar, as one of language components that students

have to master, is given in a series of Structure classes starting from academic year 2006. They are: Structure 1, Structure 2, Structure 3 and Structure 4. Meanwhile, students in these structure courses do not only study about grammatical elements in English discourse, but also English tenses. The English tenses are thought at Structure 2 class. In this Structure Two class, the students are taught all tenses. According to Pedoman Akademik tahun 2006/2007 and Pedoman Akademik tahun 2007/2008, two of the basic competencies are the ability to understand, to use and to produce compound sentences with their various forms of subject, direct object, indirect object, subject complement and object complement, object of preposition and appositive using twelve English tenses and the ability to correctly write English passive constructions. Although acknowledged that one of the goals of structure courses is to prepare students with competent ability to teach English in Elementary, Secondary and Senior High school, which undeniably, one of the materials is about tense, students are often weak in it. The study by Widiati and Ngadiman in 2002 about Translation reveals that grammar proficiency is one of the problems that the students of EESP face. This problem also influences the result of their translation. So far, many students have retaken grammar courses. Furthermore, some students have to retake the same courses before they can be considered to pass that level and continue it to the next one.

The study of psycholinguistics shows that the end of language is the communication of meaning (Clark & Clark, 1977). Meaning can be

conveyed in words as well as in sentences. Every sentence has its own propositions; a unit of meaning. One important factor in making sentence understandable is the cohesive devices of sentences. One of them is verb forms. Verb form is the agreement of using certain form of verbs based on the condition of speaking and the meaning it conveys. Verb form can be determined through tenses. Thus, tenses are very important in conveying meaning, furthermore in learning a language.

However, there is an ambiguity in determining tenses. Most students get confused which verb form that they have to use although that verb form conveys meaning because by tense, people understand the relationship between the form of the verb and their concept of time (Leech and Svartvik, 1975). W. Stannard Allen tries to determine the simple understanding of tense:

“English has three main time divisions: Past, Present and Future expressed by the simple tenses. The three divisions form three main blocks of tenses each being sub-divided to express other aspects within its general time. The aspects of general time of present, past and future tense can be divided more precisely according to the time adverb which is called aspect of action. This aspect describes the progress of action.” (1970,pp.80-81)

In line with Allen, English Tenses according to Leech and Svartvik (1975,p.306), has two marked aspects: the progressive and the perfective aspects. While time frame describe the focus of an action, aspects determine the progress of an action; either it is still on progress or has been finished. So, it is not exaggerating to say that present perfect tense has difficulty lying on the aspect of perfective and Present perfect continuous

tense has two difficulties on the aspects of perfective and progressive. Furthermore, both of these tenses are first introduced when students are at junior high school. So, it is believed that a study on these tenses will give insight knowledge about students' understanding.

Previous English tenses research has been conducted to analyze the errors by the EESP students. So far, the analysis concerned about the types of errors that the students made by using the theory of error analysis. However, knowing the type of errors is not enough to provide remedial treatment and for better learning-teaching activities. It is important to analyze what mental processes actually happen in the mind of the students who commit errors. Baron (1989) mentions perhaps the most interesting technique for studying cognitive processes is verbal protocol. Krismani in unpublished paper (2007,p.27) mentions that thinking is considered as a complex process and a teacher often faces some problems to access the achievement of their students. Mostly the teachers only view the final product of the students thinking and they may have a little direct access to students' thinking process. The product here is the error encountered by the students. One disadvantage of error analysis is that it cannot provide access to the students' mind. Instead it depends on the teachers or observers analysis on the probable causes of errors.

Through this study, the writer would like to investigate further the problems in applying Present Perfect and Present Perfect Continuous Tense of the English Education study program students from WMCUS

through their interview protocols. By adopting the Think-Aloud Protocols method in interview, the writer believes that the problems encountered by the students can be thoroughly observed. When these essential problems are revealed, it will help teachers in teaching and in learning activities of English tenses into a more meaningful way and, simultaneously, give better remedial actions. In the end, better strategies can be carried out in teaching meaningful English tenses.

1.2 Statement of the problems

As the main purpose of this proposal is to reveal what actually happens in students' mind, the writer raises the following questions:

1. What are the causes of problems that EESP students encountered in applying Present Perfect Tense as manifested by their interview protocols?
2. What are the causes of problems that EESP students encountered in applying Present Perfect Continuous tense as manifested by their interview protocols?

1.3 Objectives of the study

In conducting this thesis, there are several objectives of this study as follows:

- a. to know the problems in applying present perfect and present perfect continuous tense as shown by their interview protocols
- b. to make conclusion what commonly causes the problems

By doing this study, the writer believes that it gives contribution in further teaching-learning process.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

This study is based on some theories. They are the theory of think-aloud protocols in investigating the process in making errors, the role of grammar in language proficiency, and the theory of teaching grammar.

Think-aloud protocol according to Benardini (2005) is believed as one way to investigate human mind at work because there is no way that people are able to know what mental processes happen in somebody's mind. In line with Bernardini, Angus Beaton also supports this idea:

“..As we can not see the brain performances, think-aloud protocols are of particular value because they focus on the problems a user has; when the user is working without difficulty, direct observation (and hence the think-aloud protocol itself) is of very limited use..”(Angus Beaton, www.hclecture.com/ 12/11/08).

Through think-aloud protocols adapted method; people are able to know what mental processes happen in somebody's mind because the user utters his thought. In this way, the observer can get insight view on the mental process that is going on. Consequently, the problems of Present Perfect and Present Perfect Continuous that happen in the users' mind could be analyzed and the analyst or observer can find the most probable causes by using interview adopting think-aloud protocols method.

In acquiring a language, to be able to use it either in written or oral communication, people need a set of rules that make the communication

meaningful. This set of rules is called grammar. There has been a hot debate whether teaching language should focus on meaning or focus on forms. It is thought that when teacher teaches grammar, the student will think that the focus of the language is learning the rules. Despite the never ending debate whether to teach grammar or not, there is another argument about how actually teachers should teach grammar. There are two approaches that are popularly used: deductive approach and inductive approach. These two approaches hold on strong in the heart of their practitioners and become another debatable issue.

However, this study does not discuss whether one approach is preferable or not, but it concerns on how grammatical feature, in this case, tense, can be wrong in its application and what causes it. Last but not least, the theory of tenses, especially Present perfect and Present Perfect Continuous Tense is used to give thorough analysis on the students' protocols.

1.5 Significance of the study

In writing this study, the writer hopes that several improvements can be taken by the language teachers in order to cope with English tenses, especially Present Perfect Tense and Present Perfect Continuous Tense.

1.6 Scope and Limitation

This study is part of a bigger study under the title of The Problems in Applying English Tenses faced by the EESP Students WMSCU as manifested by Their Think-Aloud Protocols supported by I-MHERE Research Grant. While the title mentioned above is concerned about the problems in applying English tenses in general, this study is narrowed down into the problems in applying Present Perfect and Present Perfect Continuous. Realizing how vast the field that needed to study and the limitation of time and energy, the writer deems it necessary to set limitation upon this study. The students under study were English Department students who had passed Structure two class. In this way, it was expected that they possessed sufficient knowledge on English tenses, especially Present Perfect Tense and Present Perfect Continuous Tense. One disadvantage of Think Aloud Protocols, stated by Angus Beaton, is that it takes time as researchers must give tasks to subjects under observation and record their verbal thoughts. To better efficient time and energy, the writer adopt this method in the form of interview. Before conducting the interview, the writer has given the tasks to the students and during the interview, the subjects under observation only have to verbalize their thoughts on the wrong numbers only.

1.7 Definition of key terms

To avoid misunderstanding, several terms are defined first, and they go as follows:

- a. Tense: Any of the forms of a verb that may be used to indicate the time of the action or state expressed by the verb. (www.wikipedia.com, free encyclopedia)
- b. Present Perfect Tense: a tense which expresses indefinite time that begins in the past and extends to the present and ends at the moment of speaking without concerning beyond the moment of speaking.
(Marcella Frank, 1972)
- c. Present Perfect Continuous Tense: a tense which stresses the duration of a single past-to-present action that has a beginning and an end and suggests the middle of an event rather than the beginning or an end of an event. (Marcella Frank, 1972)
- d. Think-Aloud Protocols: a method used to gather data in usability testing in product design and development, in psychology and a range of social sciences and involve participants thinking aloud as they are performing a set of specified tasks. (www.wikipedia.com, free encyclopedia)
- e. Interview: An interview is a conversation between two or more people (the interviewer and the interviewee) where questions are asked by the interviewer to obtain information from the interviewee.
(www.wikipedia.com, free encyclopedia)

1.8 Organization of the Study

In brief, the writer discusses the background, the research questions and objectives in chapter one. In chapter two, the writer shows the related theories in conducting this study. The theories are the theory of interview protocols in investigating the error making process, the theory of grammar in language proficiency and the theory of teaching grammar, the theory of English tenses especially Present Perfect and Present Perfect Continuous Tense.

In chapter three, the writer discusses the steps that she takes in conducting this study. Mainly, she presents the nature of the study and the individuals involved. Chapter four, the core of the study, is about the data findings and analysis that the writer makes. In the last chapter, the writer discusses the conclusion and suggestion for future researches and the improvement of teaching methods.