
THE ABILITY OF STUDENTS IN USING SIMPLE PAST TENSE AND PAST CONTINUOUS TENSE AT ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION STUDY PROGRAM BATCH 2019

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Abstract

The simple past tense and past continuous tense are the common tenses of past tense that the students still find hard to learn. Thus, the analyst attempted to discover the ability of students in using simple past tense and past continuous tense at English Language Education Study Program of Lambung Mangkurat University who already took Basic Grammar class. This research used descriptive-qualitative method by using test. There were 95 students in the population, and the sample is 32 students who already took Basic Grammar. As the result, the research discovered that the ability of students of Language Education Study Program was in poor category with the mean score was 46. It was suggested that the students learn more about vocabularies of verb II and the structures of past continuous tense.

Keyword: ability, simple past tense, past continuous tense.

INTRODUCTION

English in Indonesia is a foreign language that has to be learned and taught to the students of junior high school to university that students are hoped to improve their ability in English. Especially learning English grammar.

Like any other language, English has its own grammatical system. Swan (1989) states that tense is a verb form which shows the time of an action or event. English grammar contains many aspects. Such as phrases, clauses, tenses, etc. Grammar especially forming tenses is one of main subjects that has to be taught from junior high school to university, and it is very crucial to be learned or mastered. But some students nowadays still have difficulty to learn grammar.

In learning grammar, one common problem which is often faced by Indonesian students is tenses problem. The main reason why Indonesian students have a problem understanding the tense in English grammar is probably because of the difference between their mother language and English which resulting Indonesian students to learn something that is not familiar with.

In the past tense, for example, the simple past tense and past continuous tense. The two of these tenses are the common form of the past tense. The students need to know the structures and kinds of past tense. Although they have learned the basic of the past tense, most students still get confused about what verb what should be used in a sentence because the form of the verb in past often changes drastically from the base verb. For example, 'see' is a base verb that has an irregular form of the verb 'saw'. The verb of the past tense itself has two types: These verb with -ed at the end of a verb, and the other one with the verb that does not change its form or change it drastically. The students often could not differentiate these two forms of past verb. Therefore, they often tend to make mistakes in using and changing the base verb to past verb.

The writer interested to conduct research about the ability of students in using simple past tense and past continuous tense because the simple past tense and past continuous tense of past tense are the common tenses of past tense, and to know the current students' ability in using

simple past tense and past continuous tense, seeing the students still find them hard to use its verb. The simple past tense has two kinds of inflection of its verb, regular verb and irregular verb, where the students who make mistakes in using its verb still can be found. And the Past continuous tense has the past form of *to be* (was/were) where the students still get confused about how its structure in forming past continuous tense.

According to Halim (2018, p.27), some people assume that there are differences between the ability of the students who have taken course in using past tense, it is because the students who have taken the course and the students who have never taken the course have more time to practice English in the school or formal class. It is similar to the students' differences between the ability of high school and college students especially those who take the English course. The college students who take the English course might have more knowledge of knowing the past tense. But nowadays, college students still find it difficult to form the past tense.

Based on the statement above, the writer found that there are still many students in junior high school and even in university especially students who take English courses making mistakes in using the verb of past tense. One of the mistakes that the students often make is that they tend to get confused in choosing the right verb. Considering the problem that students face in using the past tense, the writer then formulates the research question as follow: how is the ability of the English Language Education Study Program students Batch 2019 in using past tense: simple past tense and past continuous tense who already took Basic Grammar academic year 2020/2021.

Review of literature

Hornby (1995) stated that ability is the mental or physical power or skill required to do something. In using tense. The ability of the students is to form, complete sentences of simple past tense and past continuous tense.

Grammar is a rule or guide on how sentences construct to form a proper sentence. Swan (2005, p.xix) stated that grammar is the rules that show how words are combined, arranged, or changed to show certain kinds of meaning, to produce language appropriately and correctly. In other words, grammar is the rules of how words are combined and changed to form a proper sentence.

Simple past tense and past continuous

The simple past tense is one of the tenses that is used to refer to completed events, states, or action, considers that the events, state, or action took place within finished time (Parrot, 2009, p.219). The simple past tense uses verb II to form sentences: regular and irregular verb.

Werner (2002, p.18) said that the past continuous tense describes activities that were happening or in progress in the recent past, at the specific time in the past, or during period of time in the past. In forming past continuous tense, the past form of *to be* (was/were) following the present participle (-ing) are used.

Regular and irregular verbs

In English past tense, there are kinds of inflection of its verb. They are called regular verb and irregular verb.

1. Regular verb also known as weak verb consists of the stem of the verb followed by a suffix -ed (Declerck, 2006, p.23). In other words, the regular verb is any verb whose conjugation follows the typical pattern by adding -ed to the base form of the verb.
2. Irregular verb is a kind of verb which has completely different form to the basic form of the verb, but sometimes the form stays the same as the basic form.

Relevant research

There are studies conducted by some previous researchers related to this research.

Ridha (2008) investigates students' ability in making sentences of past tense at eighth grade of SMP Negeri 23 Banjarmasin. The conclusion of the research stated that students' ability in making past tense was low at the time. One of the common problems was the students had forgotten many materials of past tense had been taught. They were more familiar with simple present tense instead of simple past tense.

The next research discussed here was presented by Maisaroh in 2013 also found that the ability of students SMP Negeri 3 South Tangerang in using past tense were poor. It was stated that most students found it hard and did not understand the use of simple past tense, specifically in making sentences.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research used a descriptive-qualitative method to describe the ability of students of English Language Education Study Program batch 2019 FKIP ULM in using simple past tense and past continuous tense. Frankel and Wallen (2012,p.14) mentioned that descriptive study is to a given state of affairs as fully and carefully possible. Thus, in descriptive research, the writer concerned with providing the description of phenomena that occurs naturally without any manipulation of an experiment or treatment from the writer. In other words, this descriptive research referred to the investigation which utilizes the existing data or non-experimental research. This research also used a quantitative approach, because the analysis used statistical formulation.

Population and sample

The population in this study were students of English Language Education Study Program of FKIP ULM batch 2019 who already took Basic Grammar and is currently taking Intermediate Grammar academic year 2020/2021.

This study sample was taken by using purposive sampling. According to Frankel and Wallen (2012), a purposive sample consists of individuals who have special qualifications of some sort or are deemed representative on the basis of prior evidence. The writer believed that the students in batch 2019 of students English Language Education Program Study have already learned about the simple past tense and past continuous tense. There were 32 students who responded out of three classes of Intermediate Grammar that had been used as the sample.

Instruments

The instrument of this study was a test. The test was used to measure the ability of English Language Education Study Program students batch 2019 FKIP ULM academic year 2020/2021 in using simple past tense and past continuous tense.

Heaton (1988) stated that there are ten most common types of objective items used to test awareness of the grammatical features of the language, two of them are completing items, and transforming items. In this research, the writer used a test in the form of completing items and transforming items.

There were 50 valid items in the test taken from British Council Grammar and Azhar's book, and it was divided into three parts. The first part was about completing sentences of simple past tense consisting of 20 items. The second part consisted of 20 items about past continuous tense of transforming tense. The last part was about the simple past tense and past continuous tense of transforming tense. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the test is formed and written using Google Form.

Table 1 Test specification

Content	Indicator	Item Nummer
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Simple Past tense	Completing the sentences with the Appropriate verb II (Past tense)	20
Past Continuous tense	Completing and transforming the sentences using the words in the parentheses	20
Simple Past tense vs Past Continuous tense	Completing and transforming the sentences using the words in the parentheses	10

Data collection

Frankel and Wallen (2012, p.110) state that the data to types of information obtained by the researcher in their research subject. The technique of data collecting in this research was a test. The test was given individually to the sample students to get score.

Frankel and Wallen also state that achievement or ability test measures an individual knowledge or skill in a given area or subject. They are mostly used in school to measure learning or the effectiveness of instruction. The purpose of the test was used to know the ability of English Language Education Study Program students batch 2019 FKIP ULM in using simple past tense and past continuous tense who already took basic grammar, and currently taking Intermediate Grammar.

Data analysis

Population in this study were students of English Language Education Study Program of FKIP ULM batch 2019 who already took Basic Grammar and is currently taking Intermediate Grammar academic year 2020/2021.

There are several steps that the writer has taken to gather data, they are:

1. Scoring the students' ability in using simple past tense and past continuous tense. Furthermore, the total score of each student is gained by using the following formula according to Sudjiono (2009):

$$\text{Score} = \frac{\text{Number of correct answer}}{\text{Total correct answer}} \times 100$$

2. using a category to classify students' ability in using simple past tense and past continuous tense.

Table 2 data interpretation

Score	Category	Grades
>80	Outstanding	A
77 - < 80	Exceclent	A-
75 - < 77	Very Good	B+
70 - < 75	Good	B
66 - < 70	Above Average	B-
61 - < 66	Average	C+
55 - < 61	Below Average	C
50 - < 55	Weak	D+
40 - < 50	Poor	D
0 - < 40	Very Poor	E

(Source: ULM Classification Score 2018)

3. Calculating the average score using following formula:

$$\frac{\sum fx}{N}$$

$\sum fx$: the total of students' score

N : the total number of testees (students)

(Heaton, 1988)

4. Categorizing the percentage of students' score for each with following formula below:

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

F : the total of students' answer correctly on each item

N : the total number of testees (students)

Table 3 criteria and scale for students' percentage

Bobot	Indicator	Grades
>80	Outstanding	A
77 - < 80	Exceclent	A-
75 - < 77	Very Good	B+
70 - < 75	Good	B
66 - < 70	Above Average	B-
61 - < 66	Average	C+
55 - < 61	Below Average	C
50 - < 55	Weak	D+
40 - < 50	Poor	D
0 - < 40	Very Poor	E

(Source: ULM Scoring System)

- Calculating the average percentage for each part:

$$\text{Score} = \frac{\text{Total percentage}}{\text{total items}} \times 100$$

- Describing the result of the data that have been analyzed
- Making a conclusion about the students' ability in using simple past tense and past continuous tense.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

After the writer has conducted the test to the students, the writer gave score to the students' work and listed them in the table. The result was found that the ability of the English Language Education Study Program students batch 2019 academic year 2020/2021 in using simple past tense and past continuous tense was in poor category with the average score 46. The table shows the average score.

Table 4 The average Score

Students	Part I	Part II	Part III	Score	Category
1	10	2	4	16	Very Poor
2	2	0	0	2	Very Poor
3	26	38	14	78	Exceclent
4	14	16	10	40	Poor
5	36	38	14	88	Outsanding
6	20	0	4	24	Very Poor
7	26	14	18	58	Below Average
8	24	26	14	64	Average
9	16	2	2	20	Very Poor
10	24	14	6	44	Poor
11	26	18	16	60	Below Average
12	18	20	10	48	Poor
13	24	8	16	48	Poor
14	20	18	22	60	Below Average
15	20	16	16	52	Weak
16	12	0	4	16	Fail
17	16	24	14	54	Weak
18	22	12	8	42	Poor

19	18	18	14	50	Weak
20	14	0	2	16	Very Poor
21	18	14	10	42	Poor
22	22	24	14	60	Below Average
23	22	22	8	52	Weak
24	28	28	10	66	Average
25	22	24	12	58	Below Average
26	22	22	10	54	Below Average
27	6	0	6	12	Very Poor
28	22	24	8	54	Weak
29	36	28	16	80	Excellent
30	8	20	6	34	Very Poor
31	16	16	8	40	Poor
32	18	22	2	42	Poor
Average				46	Poor

The table above shows the list of students' score from each part of the test and the total score with the average score of 42 as 'poor' category.

To be more specific about the test result, the table below shows the average percentage of Part I: completing items of simple past tense (completing the sentences using appropriate word using correct tense), Part II: completing items of the past continuous tense (completing the sentences and changing the form of the verb given in the parentheses), and part III: completing items of the simple past or past continuous (completing the sentences and changing the form of the verb given in the parentheses).

Table 5 Average percentage of the test contents

Test Part	Content	Percentage%	Category
Part I	Simple Past tense	49%	Poor
Part II	Past Continuous tense	41,5%	Poor
Part III	Simple Past vs Past Continuous	46%	Poor

The average percentage of completing sentences of simple past tense (part I) is 49%, changing the form of tenses to past continuous tense (part II) is 41,5%, and changing the form of tenses to simple past tense or past continuous tense (part III) is 46%. Meanwhile, the highest result of the average percentage is 49% of part I, and part II of the test is the lowest with the average percentage is 41,5%.

Table 6 Students' score percentage in completing sentences of simple past tense

Content	Item Number	Corrected Answered	Percentage %	Category
Simple Past tense	1	26	81%	Outsanding
	2	16	50%	Weak
	3	8	25%	Very poor
	4	7	22%	Very poor
	5	19	59%	Below average
	6	24	75%	Very good
	7	19	59%	Low
	8	10	31%	Very poor
	9	20	62,5%	Average
	10	19	59%	Below average
	11	15	47%	Poor
	12	18	56%	Below average
	13	15	47%	Poor
	14	8	25%	Very poor
	15	19	59%	Below average

	16	20	62,5%	Average
	17	8	25%	Very poor
	18	12	37,5%	Very poor
	19	11	34%	Very poor
	20	20	62,5%	Average
Total	20		979	
Average score = total percentage/total items			49%	Poor

From the table above, it could be seen that only item number 1 is categorized as outstanding with 26 students who answered the item correctly (81%). Item number 6 is one item that is only categorized as very good with 24 students answered the item correctly (75%). Three items number 9, 16, and 20 students are categorized as average with the three of each item is answered correctly by 20 students. Four item numbers 5, 10, 12 and 15 are categorized as below average with 18 to 19 students answered correctly. Item number 2 is categorized as weak with the percentage average is 50% and is answered correctly by 16 students. Lastly, the items number 3, 4, 8, 14, 17, 18, and 19 are categorized as very poor due to the item were answered correctly by 7 to 12 students.

It could be concluded based on the result that the average percentage of students who answered the first part correctly is 49% and categorized as poor.

Table 7 Students' score percentage in changing form of tense into past continuous tense.

Content	Item Number	Corrected Answered	Percentage %	Category
Past Continuous tense	1	17	53%	Weak
	2	12	37,5%	Very poor
	3	5	16%	Very poor
	4	12	37,5%	Very poor
	5	21	66%	Above average
	6	18	56%	Below average
	7	6	19%	Very poor
	8	10	31%	Very poor
	9	17	53%	Weak
	10	10	31%	Very poor
	11	11	34%	Very poor
	12	9	28%	Very poor
	13	20	62,5%	Average
	14	7	22%	Very poor
	15	12	37,5%	Very poor
	16	22	69%	Above average
	17	20	62,5%	Average
	18	14	44%	Poor
	19	9	28%	Very poor
	20	14	44%	Poor
Total	20		831.5	
Average score = total percentages/total items			41,5%	Poor

According to the table above, all items in this part of the test are only categorized as very poor up to above average. There are two items that are categorized as above average are item numbers 5 and 16 with the item answered correctly by 21 to 22 students. Item number 13 is the only one that is categorized as average with 20 students (62,5%) answered the item correctly. Item number 6 is categorized as below average with 18 students (56%) answered it correctly. Two items number 1 and 9 are categorized as weak with each item is answered by 17 students correctly. Item numbers 18 and 20 belong to poor category with each item is answered by 14 students. The rest of the item numbers 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, and 19 are categorized as very poor that only 5 to 12 students answered correctly.

To summarize the result of the average percentage of this part, Part could be categorized as poor with the average percentage 41,5%.

Table 8 Students' score percentage in changing form of tense into simple past tense and past continuous tense

Content	Item Number	Corrected Answered	Percentage %	Category
Simple Past vs Past Continuous	1	9	28%	Very poor
	2	10	31%	Very poor
	3	17	53%	Weak
	4	20	62,5%	Average
	5	8	25%	Very poor
	6	15	47%	Poor
	7	19	59%	Below Average
	8	21	66%	Above Average
	9	14	44%	Poor
	10	10	31%	Very Poor
Total	10		44,5	
Average score = total percentages/total items			45%	Poor

It could be seen on the table above that the result of the categories are variant in each item except for very poor categories. Item number 8 is categorized above average with 21 students (66%) answered the item correctly. Item number 4 belongs to the average category with the item answered correctly by 20 students (62,5%). Number 7 is answered correctly by 19 students (59%) which is categorized as below average. Item number 3 is categorized as weak with 17 students answered the item correctly. Two items number 6 and 9 are categorized as poor where the items are answered by 14 to 15 students. And for the rest of the item numbers 1, 2, 5, and 10 are categorized as very poor due to the items are answered only by 8 to 10 students.

Based on the analyst, the average percentage of students in changing the form of tenses given in the parentheses of sentences into simple past tense and past continuous tense is 45% and categorized as poor.

Discussion

The ability of students English Language Education Program study batch 2019 academic year 2020/2021 in using simple past tense and past continuous tense were identified as poor. In the other words, students still have many problems in using simple past and past continuous tense. It could be proven from the average score that the students got from the test with the average score is 46.

Furthermore, the writer discussed each part of the test. First, based on the table 5, it shows that Part I is in the category of poor which is 49%. It could be stated that students' ability in completing sentences of the simple past tense is poor. From the table 6, It could be seen that students have many problems answering most of the items in part I especially items number 3 and 4. In item number 3, some students answered with the incorrect form of the verb where they answered with *readed* that was supposed to be *read*, some students also had the problem of choosing the appropriate verb. Meanwhile, in item number 4, most students answered with *come* or *came*, where it should be *visited*. Some students also answered with other verbs that are out of context to the sentence. The rest of the items also had similar problem of using the correct verb.

In the second test, the average percentage is 41,5% which is in the category of poor, and this part is the lowest category among the three parts. It could be said that most students could not answer the test of this part correctly and had a hard time when it comes to changing the verb into the verb of past continuous tense, and the past form *to be*. Most students tended to answer the items using the normal *to be* instead of their past form (*was/were*). Some of them also answered

incorrectly by having a hard time determining the use of *was/were*. For example, item number 7 where some students answered the item with incorrect the past form of *to be* (*was/were*). Students answered it with *was* where it should have been *were*. Some students also made mistakes when transforming the tense into question form of past continuous tense. It could be from the result of the item number 3 is categorized poor where the item is a question/interrogative form of past continuous tense. Some students answered the item with incorrect order in making interrogative tense. Their answers where *I was talking*, where it should have been *was I talking*, but some students also answered without the pronoun *I*. The reason why most students could not determine which the past form of *to be* (*was/were*) is probably students did not see carefully the noun in the sentence resulting the students to make mistakes, especially item number 7. Most students answered the item with *was* where it should have been *were*. It is probably because the noun in the item number 7 is *my sister and I*, and students might think the noun was only *I*, and making them think that pronoun in the sentence is the first person.

In the last part of the test, the average percentage is 45%, which is in the category of poor. In this part of the test, the students found it difficult to differentiate between simple past tense and past continuous tense. In item number 2 for example, some students answered the item with verb II where it should have been the past form of *to be* (*was/were*) followed by present participle (-ing). Some students also answered the items that the correct answer are past continuous verb especially item number 5 using the past form of *to be* (*was/were*) incorrectly. The reason why most students could not determine using these two tenses is probably students did not pay attention to adverb of the time in each sentence, and could not differ it resulting in students to answer with the wrong tense.

Parrot (2006, p.218) said that learners often have difficulty mastering the form of simple past. In this research, most students answered the simple past tense test items with incorrect verb II. In past continuous tense test items, the students could not determine which *to be* (*was/were*) is used in the test item. In addition, most students also had a problem when constructing the interrogative tense of past continuous tense.

Parrot also stated that the simple past tense is once of the tense we use to refer to completed events, states, or actions. We choose the simple past when we consider that the event, state, or action took place within a finished period of time (2006, p.219), while the use of past continuous is used to describe something which began before a particular point in the past and is still in progress at that point. The action may continue after that point (2006, p.203). In other words, the difference between the simple past tense and past continuous tense is the completion of the action of the time in the past where the simple past tense is used to describe an action or event that completed in the past, while the past continuous tense is used when the action or event still going on in the past. In the part three of the test, most students had a hard time determining between the use of simple past tense and past continuous tense. Most students did not pay attention to the adverb of the time in each sentence resulting in students answering it with incorrect verbs.

CONCLUSION

Parrot (2006, p.218) said that learners often have difficulty mastering the form of simple past. In this research, most students answered the simple past tense test items with incorrect verb II. In past continuous tense test items, the students could not determine which *to be* (*was/were*) is used in the test item. In addition, most students also had a problem when constructing the interrogative tense of past continuous tense.

The goal of this research was to describe how is the ability of English Language Education Study Program students batch 2019 FKIP ULM who already took Basic Grammar class academic year 2020/2021 in using simple past tense and past continuous tense. Based on the research findings, it could be concluded that the ability of the students is in 'poor' category with the average score of 46.

In each part of the test, the students answered part I of the test correctly with the average of 49%, most students still have difficulty in determining the appropriate verb II based on the context of the sentence, most students also answered some items with the incorrect form of verb II. In part II, the average is 41,5%. Many students forgot to put the past form of *to be* (was/were) in their answers, and some students formed the past continuous tense in interrogative sentence incorrectly. Meanwhile in part III of the test, the average of the last part of the test is 44% which many students had a hard time determining to use simple past tense and past continuous tense. In addition, the three parts of the test are categorized as poor.

Suggestion

Based on the result above, the writer would like to give some suggestions as follow:

1. The students should learn more the vocabulary especially the verb II and its irregular form and the structure of past continuous tense
2. The students have to learn more about the simple past tense and past continuous tense because the two tenses in the past tense or grammar are very important in English lesson.

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