

ANALYSIS OF THE USE OF PRESENT TENSES IN WRITING

I Gusti Agung Vony Purnama
STIKOM Bali

ABSTRACT

This study aims to find out the common use of present tenses in the students' writings and the difficulties they faced in using those tenses. The students under concern were the first-semester students of the academic year 2016 taking "English 1" subject at Bali STIKOM Regular Program. This study used the theory of English Grammar and theory of Contrastive Analysis. The English Grammar theory was used to identify and analyze the use of present tenses in the students' sentences, while the theory of contrastive analysis was used to analyze the students' difficulties in using those tenses in their writings. The result of the analysis shows that of the 34 student writings under analysis, 77.4% use simple present tense, 10% present perfect tense, 6.9% present continuous tense, and 5.7% present perfect continuous tense. There are some difficulties faced when using the present tenses. The students seem to ignore the function of the adverb as the basis for deciding the proper forms of the verbs to be used. The students also find it difficult to add '-s' or '-es' accordingly to the infinitive verbs to show agreement with the subjects of the sentences being constructed. In addition, they still show lack of understanding of the function of each type of the present tenses.

Keywords: Sentence, Present Tenses

I. INTRODUCTION

English is an international language used by the people around the world to communicate. This language has become very important to master in order to go international. English is taught in almost all countries in the world. It is started from the elementary school up to the university levels of learning.

The subject of English is given to the students of the first semester in STIKOM Bali. Although they have learned it in their previous schools, the fact is that many of them are still confused in using it, particularly in English writing. This phenomenon can be seen from their middle test results. It seems that it is very difficult for them to use the various types of present tenses in their writings. According to Shaw, (1986:, p.110), "**Tense** shows the time of the action or state being expressed by a verb". Since there is no specific rule about the time that affects the verb form in the students' first language system (Indonesian), it therefore becomes very difficult for them to construct correct English sentences. Besides that, there are also irregular and regular verbs in English that have to be considered in constructing a sentence, especially ones using present tenses.

Based on the above phenomenon, this study was focused on the use of the tenses, particularly the present tenses by the students.

II. MATERIALS AND METHOD

2.1 Research Design

Since this study is to identify and analyze the problems related to the students' assignment, it is then recognized as an experimental study. This study will apply the quantitative and qualitative methods. Bogdan and Taylor (Moleong, 2007:3) mention that qualitative methodology is a research procedure that produces descriptive oral or written data from the people and from the attitude of the person who is observed. In this study, the quantitative method is used to analyze the errors found in the students' assignment. The qualitative method is used to give the description to the students' errors already previously presented in the table.

2.2 Time and Place of the Research

This research took place in Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Komputer (STIKOM) Bali at Jalan Raya Puputan Renon No. 86 Denpasar, Bali. STIKOM Bali is the first computer learning institution in Denpasar. It was established in 2002 and has strong commitment to provide highly qualified teaching and learning programs. This study took about 4 months. The output is expected to have the necessary mastery of the English language knowledge and skills simultaneously.

2.3 Data Source

Data source is the subject from which the data is taken. The data in this study is primary data directly obtained from the result of the writing assignment of the students' intake of the academic year 2016 in Regular Program of STIKOM Bali. The total number of the students for this batch is 34 students. All students' writings in their middle test were used as the data analyzed in this study.

2.4 Method and Technique of Collecting Data

In this study, the method of documentation was used. Note-taking technique was used in recording the types of sentences in the students' descriptive writings whereby to find the common use of the present tenses in their writings. The recorded data was classified based on the types of tenses and presented in the form of table.

2.5 Technique of Analyzing Data

The sequence of the data analysis was done as follows. Firstly, the students' writings were evaluated to identify the tenses in use. Secondly, the sentences were classified according to the types of tenses. Thirdly, from the findings, the common types of tenses that the students used in their writings were determined in this study. The last step was to analyze the students' difficulties in using the present tenses based on their writings.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Data Presentation

The data of this research is the students' writings from their middle test. In this test, the students were asked to make a writing consisting of fifteen sentences in one paragraph. They were asked to use present tenses, including simple present, present continuous, present perfect, and present perfect continuous tenses. They were given one and half hours to complete their writings. The data is presented in the forms of tables as follows:

Table 3.1 Simple Present

No	Students	Simple Present
1	Student 1	10 sentences
2	Student 2	4 sentences
3	Student 3	8 sentences
4	Student 4	9 sentences
5	Student 5	8 sentences
6	Student 6	8 sentences
7	Student 7	7 sentences
8	Student 8	4 sentences
9	Student 9	6 sentences
10	Student 10	8 sentences
11	Student 11	6 sentences
12	Student 12	8 sentences
13	Student 13	7 sentences
14	Student 14	7 sentences
15	Student 15	6 sentences

16	Student 16	5 sentences
17	Student 17	1 sentence
18	Student 18	10 sentences
19	Student 19	9 sentences
20	Student 20	6 sentences
21	Student 21	8 sentences
22	Student 22	7 sentences
23	Student 23	4 sentences
24	Student 24	8 sentences
25	Student 25	12 sentences
26	Student 26	10 sentences
27	Student 27	8 sentences
28	Student 28	3 sentences
29	Student 29	6 sentences
30	Student 30	7 sentences
31	Student 31	7 sentences
32	Student 32	11 sentences
33	Student 33	10 sentences
34	Student 34	9 sentences

Based on the above table of the simple present, it can be seen that many students are able to write the sentences of simple present particularly in active sentences. Eight from thirty four students made eight sentences of simple present in their writing, and this number is the highest number of students that used this type of tense. Then it is followed by 6 students who made seven sentences, five students who made six sentences, four students who made ten sentences, three students who made four and nine sentences, and the rest who each made one, two, three, five, eleven, and twelve sentences.

Table 3.2 Present Continuous Tense

No	Students	Present Continuous Tense
1	Student 1	1
2	Student 2	-
3	Student 3	-
4	Student 4	-
5	Student 5	2
6	Student 6	-
7	Student 7	-
8	Student 8	-
9	Student 9	-
10	Student 10	-
11	Student 11	-
12	Student 12	-
13	Student 13	-
14	Student 14	-
15	Student 15	-
16	Student 16	1
17	Student 17	-
18	Student 18	-
19	Student 19	1
20	Student 20	1
21	Student 21	2
22	Student 22	1

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23	Student 23	-
24	Student 24	1
25	Student 25	1
26	Student 26	2
27	Student 27	-
28	Student 28	-
29	Student 29	2
30	Student 30	1
31	Student 31	1
32	Student 32	1
33	Student 33	1
34	Student 34	2

Based on the above table of simple continuous tense, only sixteen students used this type of tense in their writings, and the rest (eighteen students) did not use this type of tense. The maximum number of sentences using simple continuous tense is two sentences.

Table 3.3 Present Perfect

No	Students	Present Perfect
1	Student 1	1
2	Student 2	1
3	Student 3	-
4	Student 4	3
5	Student 5	3
6	Student 6	1
7	Student 7	2
8	Student 8	-
9	Student 9	2
10	Student 10	1
11	Student 11	1
12	Student 12	-
13	Student 13	-
14	Student 14	-
15	Student 15	-
16	Student 16	-
17	Student 17	-
18	Student 18	-
19	Student 19	-
20	Student 20	-
21	Student 21	1
22	Student 22	1
23	Student 23	-
24	Student 24	1
25	Student 25	3
26	Student 26	1
27	Student 27	2
28	Student 28	1
29	Student 29	2
30	Student 30	1
31	Student 31	1
32	Student 32	1
33	Student 33	1

34	Student 34	1
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Based on the above table of present perfect, there are twenty two students using this type of sentence. The maximum number of sentences using present perfect is three sentences.

Table 3.4 Present Perfect Continuous

No	Students	PresentPerfect Continuous Tense
1	Student 1	1
2	Student 2	-
3	Student 3	1
4	Student 4	1
5	Student 5	-
6	Student 6	-
7	Student 7	-
8	Student 8	1
9	Student 9	-
10	Student 10	-
11	Student 11	-
12	Student 12	-
13	Student 13	-
14	Student 14	-
15	Student 15	-
16	Student 16	-
17	Student 17	-
18	Student 18	-
19	Student 19	-
20	Student 20	-
21	Student 21	-
22	Student 22	1
23	Student 23	1
24	Student 24	-
25	Student 25	2
26	Student 26	1
27	Student 27	-
28	Student 28	-
29	Student 29	4
30	Student 30	-
31	Student 31	1
32	Student 32	1
33	Student 33	1
34	Student 34	2

Based on the above table of present perfect continuous, there are thirteen students using this type of sentence. The maximum sentence of Present Perfect Continuous is four sentences.

3.2 Analysis and Discussion

Based on the previous data presentation, a conclusion is taken as presented in the table below. As can be seen from the table, the data presented include types of present tenses, number of sentences for each present tense type, and number of sentence in terms of percentage..

Table 3.5 Present Tenses Observed in Students' Writing

Tenses	Number of Sentence	Percentage
Simple Present Tense	247	77.4
Present Continuous Tense	22	6.9
Present Perfect	32	10
Present Perfect Continuous	18	5.7
TOTAL	319	100

As shown in the table 3.5, Present Tenses Observed in Students' Writing sample includes; (1) Simple Present Tenses, (2) Present Continuous Tense, (3) Present Perfect, and (4) Present Perfect Continuous. *Simple Present* is used to talk about the things in general, to say something happening all the time or regularly, and also to talk about a timetable. *Present Continuous Tense* is used to talk about something which is happening at or around the time of speaking. *Present Perfect* is used to talk about an activity that happened in the past but has a connection with the present time. *Present Perfect Continuous* is used to talk about an action which began in the past and has recently stopped or has just stopped.

Among the Present Tenses, the type of Simple Present takes the highest frequency (79.7%). Its predominance is significant compared to the other types of present tense, namely to the present perfect tense (9%), the present continuous tense (6.2%), and the present perfect continuous tense (5.1%). The frequency of each category is given based on the data found in the sample writings.

3.2.1 Simple Present Tense

There are five out of thirty four students who made the most frequent use of the present simple tense. One of their writings is analyzed below for illustration.

Writing 33: Handphone as Primary Device for Us

1. Long time ago, when you wanted to talk with your friend, parent, family, and another person, you must come to their house and meet them there.
2. **When you have a pen pal, you must write and send a letter to your pen pal.**
3. **Maybe you think there is another way to contact another person without meet or send a letter, but what is the solution?**
4. **Don't worry because you just need one device and you can solve that problem, and the answer is "handphone".**
5. **So, tell that to your Mom so you can contact any person as you want.**
6. And of course your Mom will tell someone "He has not written letter since a month ago".
7. **Handphone can help you with your job task or your homework, for example, if you want to access Internet for your task, you don't have to access it with your PC, because your handphone can do it.**
8. Handphone has been helping you since you buy it, give thanks to technology.
9. **In this globalization that happening right now handphone is our daily need.**
10. **With much program/application, we can do anything we want.**
11. **But, don't forget to responsible with what you do with your handphone.**
12. **Don't use it for crime or hack, because that's not the main function of handphone.**
13. Handphone was created to help you contact your family and do your homework and job task.
14. **Thank you for the technology era, because without it we can't finish our job as fast as we want.**

As shown at the above sample writing, there are ten sentences using simple present. The sentences include number two, three, four, five, seven, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, and fourteen. The characteristics of present simple are represented by the use of *Verb I(s/es)* expressing or referring to the regular activities. Most of the sentences are correctly constructed, but there is a repetition of one word written in almost all sentences. The word is 'handphone' of which actually the correct name should be 'cellphone' or 'mobile phone'. However, the word 'handphone' is familiar in Indonesia, therefore, frequently its correct name is not used by the students.

Mistake and error are also found in a few sentences, particularly in the sentences using simple present. In sentence three, “*Maybe you think there is another way to contact another person without meet or send a letter, but what is the solution?*”, the error is that after the preposition *without*, the appropriate forms of the verbs *meet* and *send* should be *meeting* and *sending*. The other error is in the sentence number nine, “*In this globalization that happening right now handphone is our daily need*”. In this sentence, the use of the appropriate form of ‘*to be*’, namely ‘*is*’ omitted before the word ‘*happening*’ and the use of comma is necessary after this word.

3.2.2 Present Continuous Tense

There are sixteen out of thirty four students who used sentences in the present continuous tense. One of their writings is analyzed below for illustration.

Writing 5: My Computer

1. Computer is one of today’s technology relating to an information so that all users will receive all information.
2. I have bought my computer for one years.
3. **That information technology is already providing an application program since 2 years.**
4. I have an information in accordance with the quality.
5. I am captured an advancing information.
6. I have approved in an application that is being developed.
7. I am alter to change the program time yesterday.
8. I have an alleviating task or an application program.
9. I like with a computer.
10. I have adjoined a program to from a game.
11. I am acquaint a sophisticated information technology.
12. **I am reading with a computer.**
13. I can destroy the virus from the program I created.
14. I enjoy to learn information.
15. I have looking friends making program.

As shown at the above sample of writing, there are two sentences using present continuous tense. The form of the present continuous is ‘*to be in the present + present participle*’. The sentences of this category include sentences number three and twelve. Both sentences are correct in terms of this tense structure, but, in sentence three the use of time adverb ‘*since 2 years*’ is not correct. The time that can be used with this tense is ‘*now, at this moment, or nowadays*’. The time marked by ‘*since*’ is usually used in the present perfect continuous tense. As for the sentence number twelve, the structure is correct, but has no connection with the previous sentence.

Besides that, on the above writing, almost all sentences are started with the same subject “*I*”. The monotonous way in writing can cause a lack of focus.

3.2.3 Present Perfect Tense

There are twenty two out of thirty four students who made sentences of the present perfect tense. One of their writings is analyzed below for illustration.

Writing 4: My Smartphone

1. My smartphone is like my girl.
2. She is always with me everyday.
3. **I have bought my smartphone for two years.**
4. **She has done my homework quickly, because her.**
5. **She has helped me with her internet.**
6. I always play music on my smartphone when I feel boring.
7. She has helping me to call my friends, my family, etc.
8. I am happy to have my smartphone.
9. My smartphone based on Android.

10. She has 8 GB internal memory and 1.5 GB RAM.
11. My smartphone also has camera with primary 8 MP, f/2.4.31mm.auto focus, and LED flash.
12. Resolution my smartphone is 720 x 1280 pixels.
13. I am enjoy play with my smartphone.

As shown at the above sample of writing, there are three sentences using the present perfect tense. The form of the present perfect tense is *'have/has + past participle'*. The function of this tense is to refer to the action or activity that happened in the past but is still with an impact in the present time. There are three sentences of this tense; namely sentences number three, four, and five. In general, those sentences are correct in terms of the structure. Sentence number three has a correlation with the previous sentence as well as the fourth sentence. Sentences number four and five actually can be combined into one sentence by adding a conjunction. Besides that, there is an error in sentence four, after the conjunction *'because'*. After this conjunction, there must be the preposition *'of'* to make up a clause introduced by the phrase *'because of'*.

3.2.4 Present Perfect Continuous

There are thirteen out of thirty four students who made sentence using the present perfect continuous tense. One of their writings is analyzed below for illustration.

Writing 29: My Smartphone

1. I have used a smartphone from yesterday.
2. He plays with that gadget almost everyday.
3. He plays with that gadget almost everyday.
4. He is using it even in the classroom.
5. **He has been using it his smartphone too much.**
6. However, he still plays with smartphone.
7. He has played all the games there.
8. He is loving it very much.
9. **He has been watching films there too.**
10. He even uses his smartphone to find information.
11. He is using it solve his task.
12. **He has been doing that with his friend.**
13. That gadget is very important to his life.
14. So, he has kept his smartphone with care.
15. He put in his special pocket.
16. **His smartphone has been staying in the safest place.**

As shown at the above sample of writing, there are four sentences using the present perfect continuous tense. The form of the present perfect continuous tense is *'have/has + been + present participle'*. The function of this tense is to refer to the action which is started in the past and still continues until now or has just stop. There are four sentences of this tense; namely sentences number five, nine, twelve, and sixteen. In sentence five, *"He has been using it his smartphone too much."*, the form of the tense is correct, but the use of *'his'* and *'smartphone'* are not necessary since it is already represented by pronoun *'it'*. In sentence number sixteen, in terms of the form, it is correct, but the content is inappropriate. Instead of using active voice in the present continuous tense, it is more appropriate if the sentence is in the passive voice. Besides that, the use of verb *'stay'* is also not appropriate since the subject is a thing. It is better to replace the word *'stay'* with *'keep'* so that the sentence becomes, *'His smartphone has been being kept in the safest place'*. While in sentences number nine and twelve, there are no errors and mistakes.

3.3 Discussion

Based on the analysis regarding the use of present tenses, particularly the simple present, present continuous tense, present perfect, and present perfect continuous, there are some findings

worth discussing. There were thirty four students' writings used as the data in this study. All of the students' writings were in the form of paragraphs, and the theme of their writing was technology. Most of the students chose to write about their own smart phone, which is something that they really like most due to their need of it almost all of the times. Writing with this theme seemed to be easier for them, particularly in terms of the content. Their writing must include the use of present tenses since they had learned this tenses during the semester and had practiced it many times.

From the previous analysis, only nine out of thirty four students wrote four types of present tenses in their writing, five students wrote three types of present tenses, fourteen students wrote two types of present tenses, and six students wrote only one type of present tenses. It seems that the students found it difficult to manage their writing with four types of present tenses. Moreover, few of them wrote only one type of the present tenses, namely only the simple present. It is considered that the students tend to use Verb I in their writing. The assumption in the Contrastive Analysis (CA) is that L2 learners will tend to transfer to their L2 utterances features of their L1. As Lado puts it, individuals transfer the forms and meanings and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture (Lado, 1957:2). In this case, L1 or first language of the students is Bahasa Indonesia. In their L1, there is only one type of verb. Therefore, they are familiar only with using one verb form which they associated with the infinitive form, namely with Verb I in their English writing.

In terms of number of sentences, the largest number in the students' writings is simple present. All students wrote this type of tense in their writing due to their familiarity with the infinitive verb. In fact, there are also some rules that have to be considered in using the infinitive verb, such as the affixing of '-s' or '-es' to the infinitive verb if the subject of the sentence is the third person singular (he, she, it). Some of the students made errors in using the infinitive verb in their writings. Most of them only wrote the infinitive verb after the subject, without considering the addition of 's' or 'es' to the verb. The second largest number of sentence is those using the present perfect tense. Based on the analysis, most of the students' writings with this type of tense is correct in terms of form and function in their writings. However, a few students made mistakes in writing the sentences as, for example, exemplified by the sentence '*Thanks to my parents because I had bought this laptop.*' It seems that this student made a mistake in using the subject 'I' in this sentence. In fact, the student should use the subject 'they' which in the context of the writing refers to the parents. It might be concluded that the students were able to use the form of present perfect correctly, however, they have difficulty in terms of the content. The third largest number of the sentences is those in the present continuous tense. It seems that almost all students were able to use the correct form. However, there was found a sentence in the present continuous tense with inappropriate time signal which was already analyzed previously. Then, it might be concluded that the student wrote the sentence without clarity concerning the time of the activity before they chose the correct form of tenses. The least number of the sentences is those in the present perfect continuous tense. It was rarely used by the students in their writings. The form of this tense is too complex for the learners, since in their first language they only need to change the adverb of time without necessarily changing the Verb form and add the correct modal verb. Since this tense is very complex, the students were, therefore, unable to use it in their writing with minimum errors and mistakes. Furthermore, the students must understand that tense is actually about the time and, therefore, in choosing the correct form of tense, the specific time of the activity must be clearly specified before the deciding the form of the verb to be used.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conformity with the aims of this study, there are two problems that have been discussed. The first problem is to find the common type of the present tenses used by the students in their writings, and the second problem is to find out the students' difficulties in using present tenses in their writing. Based on the analysis already done, it is found that the first largest tense used by students in writing is the simple present (77.4%), then, the second largest is present perfect tense (10%), followed by present continuous tense (6.9%) and at last the present perfect continuous tense (5.7%). Those percentages show that the simple present tense is the easiest for the students to use in their writing, since the number of this tense is significantly bigger compared to the other types of tenses being used. Moreover, it seems that almost all students chose to write the form of simple present since this tense uses infinitive verb, while

the other tenses need to use present participle and past participle to form the appropriate tenses. Besides that, the function of simple present is also the easiest easy to use in describing something.

However, there are some difficulties that might be concluded here. The first one is represented by mistake in using the correct adverb of time. Since the meaning of tense is associated with time, therefore the students must decide the time of the activity previously before they chose the verb form to be used in the sentence. The second difficulty is that they seem to ignore the subject in forming the simple present. Therefore, the omission of '-s' or '-es' from the use of the verb is commonly practiced. The last is the lack of understanding concerning the correct function of each type of the present tenses in their writings. Forming the tenses correctly is very important in writing, but still more important is the correct way to arrange the sentences so that the writings are coherent and meaningful.

In this case, exercises are very much needed since writing skill is an integral part of language learning. The more they take exercises in using different types of tenses in writing, the more they get familiar with those tenses and the better they can manage their sentences properly. Furthermore, by giving them motivation in learning the L2 which is different from their L1, it is hoped that they will be able to increase their ability particularly in mastering the present tenses.

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