

THE STUDENTS' COMPETENCY IN WRITING DESCRIPTIVE PARAGRAPH AT ELECTRICAL AND MECHANICAL DEPARTMENT, FACULTY OF ENGINEERING, TRIDINANTI UNIVERSITY PALEMBANG

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to describe the students' ability in writing descriptive paragraph at electrical and mechanical department. This study is descriptive in the sense that it aims at describing the knowledge and skill of electrical and mechanical department. The two kinds of data were correlated by applying the Spearman Rank Order Coefficient. The subjects of this study were 45 sample students selected from the students who attended English II at Faculty of Engineering, Tridinanti University. The general results indicate that the majority of the subjects were good at writing a descriptive paragraph. And it was also found that there were a relationship between the students' knowledge of descriptive paragraph and their performance in writing descriptive paragraph at electrical and mechanical department, Faculty of Engineering, Unanti Palembang ($r=0,831$). It implies that an increase in the knowledge in writing descriptive paragraph of the students' score is accompanied by a corresponding increase in the skill of writing descriptive paragraph.

Key words: Students' ability, Descriptive paragraph, Electrical and Mechanical Department

English proficiency plays an important role in every sector for the development of Indonesia. Not only is it important for education but also for engineering. Therefore, writing descriptive paragraph for electrical and mechanical depart-

ment is an important skill for the students. According to the syllabus of Electrical and Mechanical Department of FT UNANTI (Tridinanti University) Palembang, students should have a good ability in writing English for electrical and mechanical engineering. In addition, writing English for electrical mechanical engineering was one of the compulsory subjects. Thus, the electrical and mechanical engineering graduates should be well-prepared to communicate through English for electrical and mechanical engineering. In spite of its importance, acquiring this ability, however, requires a great effort.

Furthermore, in line with our national policy, this problem is relevant to the aim of teaching and learning English in Indonesia. The Minister of Education underlines the importance of English to speed up the development of our country and nation (maximum development of human and engineering resources) and to have our students obtain a working knowledge of English. Institutionally, this article contributes itself to the improvement of the teaching and learning for electrical and mechanical engineering writing materials for the students of FT, Engineering department, UNANTI Palembang in particular and the lecturers of English for Academic Purposes in general. Therefore, writing descriptive paragraph is very important. Paragraph is a basic unit of organization in writing in which a group of related sentences develops one main idea (Oshima, 1981). In addition, paragraph has five elements such as topic sentence, supporting detail, concluding and coherence as well as unity (Oshima et al, 1988). First, writing English for electrical and mechanical students is crucial in an engineering field, because an engineer is concerned with electricity and machines. In addition, engineers are concerned with reading text in electrical and mechanical engineering materials. Second, writing for electrical and mechanical engineering material is essential in the electrical and mechanical engineering system because without it an engineer cannot function (Murphy, 1984, William, 1980). Particularly in this global world, electrical and mechanical engineering system is crucial. Therefore, the ability in writing English for electrical and mechanical department cannot be neglected, otherwise they are not able to develop their electrical and mechanical engineering activities effectively (Murphy, 1984).

The study was related to the sentence grammar, figures, facts, punctuation, spelling, content, organization. In general, the results of this study indicated that the subjects' writing was good but there were some weaknesses on grammar and spelling (Tedjo, 1992).

Unlike that study which investigated almost all aspects of general writing, this study only focused on a certain aspect, namely the content and organization

dealing with notion/function as well as the theory concerning English for electrical and mechanical engineering students . Furthermore, this study focused itself in the investigation of sentences, such as describing and explaining. In relation to the formulation of problems. They are : 1) How well do students at the Engineering Department of FT UNANTI Palembang write English for electrical and mechanical engineering?, 2). Is there a correlation between students' knowledge of descriptive paragraph writing and descriptive paragraph-writing skill?. Furthermore, in regard with hypothesis, It is 'as the scores on the knowledge of descriptive paragraph-writing increase, the scores on descriptive paragraph-writing skill tend to increase too.

The purpose of this study was to describe the students' ability in writing descriptive paragraph at electrical and mechanical department, Faculty of Engineering, Unanti Palembang and the relationship between the direct and indirect measures.

METHOD

This study basically aims at describing the levels of the students in writing descriptive paragraph for electrical and mechanical engineering at Electrical and Mechanical Department, FT UNANTI Palembang The quantitative descriptive design was used. This study is descriptive in the sense that it aims at describing knowledge and skill of the students in writing English for engineering. The two kinds of data were correlated by applying the Spearman Rank Order Coefficient.

The accessible population of this study was the electrical and mechanical engineering students who were taking English for Scientific Purposes in the Second semester of the first year in 2005 There were 90 in 6 groups. The sample, 45 students, r half of the accessible population was selected on a random basis by drawing a lot, and cluster sampling was used because the class or the group had the same mixture of characteristics. The heterogeneity was balanced.

RESULTS

This unit presents the research findings as the product of the data analysis. These findings were in tended to answer the two research questions. The students' ability in writing descriptive paragraph was presented to answer the first question. The second research question was to determine whether there was a relationship between the direct, namely the content and the knowledge of a de-

scriptive paragraph and the indirect measurements, that is the knowledge of function and the theory of the writing of English. In relation to research question 1 is how well do students at the Electrical and Mechanical Department, FT, UNANTI Palembang write a descriptive paragraph.

The students' ability was presented in terms of the quality of the writing English, especially Electrical and Mechanical engineering.

The Subjects' Ability on Objective and Subjective Tests

The result showed that the subjects who obtained scores 4 were 6,66% and those who got scores 3 were 9,20% and 46,66% of the subjects got scores 2 or the passing grades. Therefore, the percentage of the subjects who got above the cut off was 72,66%. Next, the results of the objective test showed that the subjects who got 4's were 13,33% and those obtaining 3's were 24,44%, and 42,22% of the subjects got 2's which were exactly at the cut off. Consequently, the percentage of the subjects obtaining scores above the cut off was 79,33%. The over all results showed that the subjects had lower scores on subjective test than on objective test.

Table 1. The Subjects' Ability on Objective and Subjective Tests

Grade	Objective Test		Subjective Test	
	Freq	%	Freq	%
4	6	13.33%	3	6.66%
3	11	24.44%	9	20%
2	19	42.22%	21	46.66%
1	9	20%	12	26.66%
	45	100 %	45	100%

Table 1 reveals that of the 5 points of analysis encountered in the subjects' descriptive paragraph, problem in terms of topic sentence occurred the first highest (40%), problem in diction occurred the second highest (35%) and problem in description occurred the third highest (25%).

The two sets of scores were correlated and it was done by comparing the test scores of subjective test and the knowledge of descriptive paragraph writing. Computation using the Spearman Rank Order Formula revealed that $\rho_{xy} = 0,831$ ($p < .05(0,297)$), the correlation of the knowledge of descriptive paragraph-

writing and the descriptive paragraph skill was significant. The quotient of rho xy 0,831 shows that the master of the subjects on the knowledge of descriptive paragraph writing seems to follow their ability in writing descriptive paragraph. In other words, the subjective test was highly correlated with the objective one. As shown by the correlation coefficient of 0,831 means that there is a positive correlation between the knowledge of descriptive paragraph-writing and the descriptive paragraph-writing skill. It implies that an increase in the knowledge in writing descriptive paragraph of the students' score is accompanied by a corresponding increase in the skill of writing descriptive paragraph.

DISCUSSION

The findings were interpreted in relation to the order of question (s) or hypothesis. The results of this study were consistent with Tedjo's finding (1992), concerning the students' ability in using the appropriate language for electrical for electrical engineering, Tedjo's finding indicated that the students' problem was on the grammar, whereas the results of this study the content or the language and the organization of the descriptive paragraph. The general results showed that the majority of the students obtained scores above the passing grades, and there is a correlation between the cognitive and the psychomotor of the descriptive paragraph writing of electrical and mechanical engineering students.

It implies that an increase in the knowledge in writing descriptive paragraph of the students' score is accompanied by a corresponding increase in the skill of writing descriptive paragraph of the students' scores but some types of errors that occurred frequently were organization and diction, content and coherence. In addition, the present study did not find many errors regarding requests. For example, the small number of errors in mechanics showed that the majority of the subjects focused on the mastery of commonly used sentences in engineering. To pass the criteria of writing descriptive paragraph is difficult for the students, it was expected that each of the descriptive paragraph would fulfill the requirements, such as using the appropriate diction with a right register. Furthermore, the technical jargon or language level refers to the language for electrical and mechanical engineering and other communication (Murphy, 1984:48). With respect to diction, 15,5% of the subjects failed. The finding indicated that the subjects did not include some parts of the basic element of a good paragraph such as concluding and controlling idea found in the descriptive paragraph writ-

ing written by the subjects.

The fact showed that the several subjects did not connect their sentences and ideas well, while the appropriate coherence, refers to the sense for wholeness of interconnection among, sentences. And ideas within a paragraph or among the paragraphs within any piece of writing. Coherence quality, therefore, could be analyzed by examining how ideas are linked and carried forward from one sentence to the next within any piece of writing (Himstreet, 1981). In relation to the notion/functionalism, the fact showed that several subjects had some difficulties to lie on this factor, some of the subjects sentences were unclear, this is probably be caused by the subjects; attention on basic element of the 5 qualities and it may be the subjects violation of the Grice's theory of the maxims on pragmatics, especially the maxim of manner, i.e be short, be polite, be clear and be relevant.

To conclude, in evaluating the subjects' descriptive paragraph and other factors, such as content, grammar, notion and function should be considered. Based on the results of this study, among the five components of a good paragraph, diction contributed the least. This indicated that the subjects, when they wrote, were more concerned with development of ideas, coherence and some sentences related to notion and function with less attention to organization. With respect to the knowledge of descriptive paragraph writing for electrical and mechanical engineering and the writing skill, both appear to have strong and weak points. Anyway, the subjects scores on the knowledge of descriptive paragraph-writing was a little bit higher than the descriptive paragraph -writing skill. It implies that an increase in the knowledge in writing descriptive paragraph of the students' scores is accompanied by a corresponding increase in the skill of writing descriptive paragraph.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

In response to the first research question, the results of subjective test indicate that the subjects who obtained scores 4 were 6,66% and those who got scores 3 were 9,20% and 46,66% of the subjects' got scores 2 or the passing grades. Therefore, the percentage of the subjects who got above the cut off was 72,66%. Next, the results of the objective test showed that the subjects who got 4's were 13,33% and those obtaining 3's were 24,44%, and 42,22% of the subjects got 2's which were exactly at the cut off.

Consequently, the percentage of the subjects obtaining scores above the cut

off was 79,33%. The overall results showed that the subjects had lower scores on subjective test than on an objective test. In answer to the second question, there was a positive correlation between students' knowledge of descriptive paragraph-writing and the descriptive paragraph writing skill. In other words, it seems the mastery of the subjects on the knowledge of descriptive paragraph -writing was highly correlated with their ability in writing descriptive paragraph skill. In other word, it implies that an increase in the knowledge in writing descriptive paragraph of the students' score is accompanied by a corresponding increase in the skill of writing descriptive paragraph.

The curriculum designers, the material designers and syllabus writers could give more stress on notional and functional syllabus into the engineering syllabus design and consider the information of the weak points, such as content and organization from this study, because it describes the students' ability in writing descriptive paragraph for maintaining, modifying and/or revising curriculum as well as materials by knowing the correlation between students' knowledge of writing and their ability to write English for engineering.

To the writing instructor at the electrical and mechanical Department, FT, UNANT1 Palembang, the method and technique of teaching for descriptive paragraph -writing being employed should take into account and emphasize both the theory and the exercise of writing English more specifically descriptive paragraph.

To the book writers, this study could give information about the primary stress on the mastery of the writing theory and the writing skill for revising, modifying and/or maintaining the prescribed books and students' handbook.

To the researchers, other similar studies or replication involving the explanation of the students' competency in writing descriptive paragraph are recommended at other institution. For instance by knowing the sources of errors such as organization, diction and mechanic. It will be possible to redesign writing syllabus design which deals mostly with content or idea, organization and mechanic as well as diction. It would be good to investigate the descriptive writing of the students in terms of essay that focuses on the thesis statement. Furthermore, future research probably designs the quasy-experimental study on the effect of a theoretical knowledge to the main gain score of the students. Alternatively, the experiment can be set up involving two different kinds of treatment: A descriptive essay instruction using more theoretical knowledge or cognitive of the experimental group, and more writing exercises as the control group.

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