

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter offers an overview of the entire contents of the research. In detail, this chapter presents the background of the research, research questions, research objectives, research significances, rationale, and previous studies.

A. Background

Coherence is an essential indicator of successful writing (Bamberg, 1984; Lee, 2002b; Richards, 1990). It helps the writer to create a good product of writing. In the practice of writing, coherence is defined in five features (Lee, 2002b). Those are cohesion, information distribution and topical development, propositional development and modification, macrostructure, and metadiscourse. In this research, coherence is seen as a clear and reasonable connection of ideas delivered in sentences and paragraphs (Fengjie, 2014). Through the good coherence of a text, the reader can easily understand the text because the ideas in the sentences and paragraphs flow smoothly (Fengjie, 2014). Furthermore, coherence is one of the aspects measured in writing to evaluate students' learning ability (Todd et al., 2004). It is a subjective aspect in assessing writing, which is mostly based on the subjective interpretations of the assessors and readers and possibly leads to reliability problems (Hoey, 1991b; Todd et al., 2004).

In the context of EFL learners, the problem in writing coherent text lies in learners' knowledge of writing English text as a foreign language. Johns (p. 251, 1986) stated that "Many students at every level are unfamiliar with the conventions of English writing which, if well integrated, result in coherent prose." Most students often face difficulties in writing a good text because they do not know how to present and organise ideas in writing text, which leads to the incoherency of the text. Moreover, they do not know how to use the right language feature of a specific genre of texts, in this case, descriptive text (Ningsih, 2014). In addition, EFL learners tend to focus more on word and sentence level during writing text rather than the coherence of the text (Ferris & Hedgecock 1998 cited in Rakhman, 2013). They face more factors that become difficulties in writing an English text, such as

linguistic proficiency, instructional, psychological, socio-cultural, and socio-political issues (Ahmed, 2010). Therefore, I assume that this problem may happen in each writing class of EFL learners.

From my limited observation in the Paragraph Writing class of English Education Department UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, I found descriptive paragraphs written by the EFL learners in the pre-writing stage of the Paragraph Writing class were not coherent. The paragraphs were not well structured, proved by the sequence of the ideas were not arranged logically. Furthermore, I presumed they were not familiar with the concept of coherence, so they did not pay attention to the coherence of their writings. Thus, I found this phenomenon interesting to be studied.

In this study, I investigated EFL learner's perception of writing coherent text to find out how they see coherence and its importance in a descriptive paragraph. I started my investigation with analysing coherence through thematic progression (Watson Todd et al., 2007) then interviewing the students to analyse their understanding and perception of English coherence.

In the previous related studies, coherence in EFL learner's writing was analysed using various methods, such as the topic-based analysis (Todd et al., 2004), the topical structure analysis (Knoch, 2007; Priangan et al., 2020), and the analysis of the absence of cohesive cues (Crossley & McNamara, 2010). Even so, this research is different from previous studies. This research focuses on analysing coherence using thematic progression theory, which focuses on theme-rheme of each sentence and the connection from one sentence to another. In addition, this research focuses on students' perceptions of coherence in their writing, more specifically, in writing a descriptive paragraph. Due to the reasons, this research focuses on investigating the coherence of the text using thematic progression analysis and the EFL learner's perception of writing a coherent paragraph. Thus, I decided to write the research entitled "COHERENCE IN ENGLISH DESCRIPTIVE WRITING: INDONESIAN EFL LEARNER'S PERCEPTION".

B. Research Questions

Because of the problems in the research background, research questions are formulated into the following questions:

1. How is the coherence of EFL learner's descriptive paragraphs during the Paragraph Writing class?
2. How is the EFL learner's perception of coherence in a descriptive paragraph after taking the Paragraph Writing class?

C. Research Objectives

Research questions in this research aim to achieve the following objectives:

1. To reveal the coherence of EFL learner's descriptive paragraphs during the Paragraph Writing class.
2. To find out the EFL learner's perception of coherence in a descriptive paragraph after taking the Paragraph Writing class.

D. Research Significances

This research is expected to have beneficial impacts on TESOL in Indonesia, both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this research is expected to give contributions to the knowledge of coherence in EFL writing by offering a method to measure coherence using thematic progression analysis. Moreover, this research is expected to be used as a reference for future research related to coherence in EFL writing, especially in writing descriptive text. Meanwhile, practically, this research is expected to help lecturers to understand students' needs in writing coherent English texts. With this understanding, lecturers then can focus on highlighting the importance of thematic progression of the text when teaching students how to write a coherence text.

E. Rationale

To assess student's writing skills, the product of writing can be assessed in both the student's linguistic ability aspects and the non-linguistic ability aspects (Todd et al., 2004). Regarding the student's linguistic ability aspect, a text must have coherence to be a good text. Coherence is used to identify the student's writings' strengths and weaknesses (McCulley, 1985). To identify student's writings' strengths and weaknesses by analysing the coherence of the writing, there are

criteria to select a method to measure coherence. Those are objectiveness, topical structure analysis or theme-rheme progression, and types of coherence (Todd et al., 2004). In addition, the second criterion (topical structure analysis or theme-rheme progression) is seen as the most suitable measurement in this research because it can be used as self-assessment strategy and may help university students to identify coherence break in their writing (Connor & Farmer, 1990; Chiu, 2004 cited in Çepni & Bada, 2019).

Topical structure analysis was first developed by Lautamatti (1987), which studied the thematic progression and built the consideration of readers' expectations on how the written texts are structured (Çepni & Bada, 2019). The expectation is then developed by the coherence in the text. Connor (1996) cited in Watson Todd et al. (2007) stated that topical structure analysis involves dividing sentences into theme and rheme.

To measure coherence seen from the theme and rheme of the text, thematic progression is the most suitable one to use. Thematic progression deals with how a whole text (paragraphs and chapters) relates together to produce meaningful text (Sharndama, 2013). It plays a role in exploring the ideational and interpersonal meaning of the text (Soepriatmadji, 2009). Not (1996) cited in Soepriatmadji (2009) quoted that "Thematic progression is necessary for the construction of an optimally coherent and grammatically cohesive structured text." Thus, thematic progression is considered to play essential roles in constructing coherence of the text.

In the relation of thematic progression and writing process, especially for EFL learners, thematic progression can broaden student's choices when structuring their English writing, whether it is suitable or not for the specific text genre of academic writing they are studying (Hawes, 2015). With this in mind, paying attention to the process of writing based on the genre is important. Writing based on genre means that writing must relate to the social context so that readers can understand the text. Each genre has its characteristics relating to the needs of the text and the purpose of the text. For example, the descriptive text aims to describe something, the

narrative text aims to amuse readers, and the discussion text aims to discuss a particular issue.

Descriptive text is one of the texts that is frequently used in daily life so that it is necessary to learn how to write a descriptive text. It has a function to describe a particular person, place, or thing (Gerot & Wignell, 1994). Thus, it has a description in its generic structure, which comes after identification. To produce a coherent descriptive text, each sentence in the description must be presented in good order and linked to one another so that information from the author's ideas will be organized neatly and create a good meaning (Lee, 2002b).

F. Previous Study

There are four previous researches in connection with coherence, thematic progression, and student's perception. First, the research was conducted by Fengjie (2014) which aimed to analyse the problems of coherence in college student's writing on the scale of the syntactical problems on the coherence of student's writing. The researchers conducted the research in their university, which was one of a university in Tianjin, China. This research contributed to the knowledge of writing learning, which was problems found in college students' English writing and the reasons for the problems that occurred. As a result of the research, it was found that college students had problems in sentence effectiveness when they wrote a coherence text. There were six problems found in students' writing through this research: separation of words; use of pronoun; use of modifier; use of number; changes of voice, tense, or mood of verbs; and use of different forms to express parallel ideas. Furthermore, the researchers found five main reasons that caused students to make mistakes in writing. Those were lack of self-identity in English writing, limitation of English vocabulary, poverty in English grammar, and lack of awareness for revising and summarising.

Second, the research by Muroda et al. (2017) aimed to analyse thematic progression in the background of the thesis proposal written by English Education Department students to measure the coherence of the text. The research took place in UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya and involved eight-semester students who had passed the thesis proposal examination as the participants. This research contributed

to the research on linguistics and discourse analysis, which focused on thematic progression in students' thesis proposals and was expected to be one of guidance in the learning process of writing coherent and cohesive text. From this research, it was found that the reiteration pattern dominated the type of thematic progression patterns which enhanced coherence and brand new theme dominated type of thematic progression which obscured coherence.

Third, the study was conducted by Putri et al. (2016). The research aimed to develop a system based on the thematic development method to analyse coherence in a text so that the system would be similar to human judgment. Furthermore, the system was compared to the previous approach/method of analysing coherence, such as centering theory and entity transition value. This research took 3 data; essays from human experts (lecturers and students of Bina Nusantara University), writing examples from IELTS test, and paragraph examples in academic writing books and websites that explain Theme-Rheme. As one of the studies conducted in language study, this research contributed to help both lecturers and students in evaluating and assessing the coherence of the text. The result of the research showed a significant result. The average result of thematic development analysis was 91%, meanwhile the average result of centering theory analysis was 29%, and entity transition value analysis was 0%. In addition, the result of analysis using a system based on thematic development method is *nearly* similar to human judgment, with 92% of similarities.

Fourth, the research by Friatin (2018) aimed to find out students' perceptions of using a Facebook group as media in learning writing. The research took place in SMAN 2 Ciamis where English teachers had used the Facebook group as media to learn EFL writing. As a result of the research, this research contributed to fill the gap in using social media platforms to learn writing and student's perception of using it. From this research, it was found that students gave positive responses to the use of the Facebook group, and they perceived that the Facebook group motivated and made them enjoy learning writing.