



ASSESSING THE STUDENTS' COMPREHENSION ON DESCRIPTIVE TEXT THROUGH RECOMBINATION AND APPROXIMATION STRATEGY

Simon Petrus Kita Ngatu
Institut Nasional Flores
Simonpetruskitangatu4@gmail.com

ABSTRAK. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengevaluasi apakah rekomendasi dan pendekatan sesuai untuk pemula, siswa menengah, dan lanjutan dalam menulis. Minat akademik yang semakin meningkat terhadap pemahaman menulis dalam pengajaran bahasa mendorong setiap guru bahasa untuk mencari strategi yang tepat dalam mengevaluasi kemampuan menulis siswa. Rekombinasi dan pendekatan tampaknya dikenal sebagai dua strategi penting untuk mengevaluasi kemampuan menulis siswa. Evaluasi itu sendiri mencakup konten, ketepatan tata bahasa, organisasi, dan kosakata beserta koherensi dan kohesi. Penilaian dalam studi ini didasarkan pada pendekatan diskursif. Data dikumpulkan dari kursus bahasa Inggris swasta di Yogyakarta. Dua siswa dari setiap tingkat diambil secara acak. Jadi, jumlah peserta total adalah 6 siswa. Ujian menulis dan wawancara semi-struktural diterapkan dalam studi ini. Hasil ujian menulis dianalisis menggunakan rubrik penilaian analitis. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa rekombinasi cocok untuk siswa pemula, sedangkan aproksimasi cocok untuk siswa menengah dan lanjutan.

Kata kunci: teks deskriptif, pendekatan wacana, rekombinasi, aproksimasi

ABSTRACT. The paper considers to assess whether recommendation and approximation are suited to beginners as well as intermediate and advance students in writing. The growing academic interest towards writing comprehension in language teaching leads every language teachers to find appropriate strategies to assess the students' writing ability. Recombination and approximation are apparently known as two important strategies to assess the students' ability in writing. The assessment itself covers content, grammatical accuracy, organization, and vocabulary along with its coherence and cohesion. The assessment of this study was based on discourse approach. The data collected from a private English course in Yogyakarta. Six students were randomly selected for the study, with two from each level participating. This study employed a combination of methods, including a writing test and a semi-structured interview. The results of the writing test were then subjected to a thorough analysis, employing analytical scoring rubrics as a methodological framework. The findings indicate that recombination is an appropriate learning strategy for novice students, while approximation is more suitable for intermediate and advanced students.

Keywords: descriptive text, discourse approach, recombination, approximation

INTRODUCTION

Understanding grammar and vocabulary is essential in becoming proficient at writing, as it shapes how meaning is derived from words used in sentences and paragraphs. The text's grammar, vocabulary, cohesion, and coherence ensure logical sequencing, allowing readers to interpret and understand the intended meaning appropriately. A paragraph's composition involves combining words and sentences integrate grammar, vocabulary, ensuring comprehensive understanding.

Discourse analysis is crucial for language teachers in creating teaching materials and activities to enhance learners' language proficiency. Text-based teaching materials such as descriptive text can enhance students' proficiency in writing the target language. Kirvalidze (2007) explained that when comparing or contrasting text segments, relations such as phenomenon - reason, cause - consequence, and problem - solution are identified through universal logical sequencing. Logical sequencing, matching, and text cohesion, known as "discourse," are fundamental in ELT text interpretation.

Language teachers can assess students' comprehension using descriptive text and various



strategies in the discourse approach. Cook (1989) and Widowson (1978) cited in Cook (1989) provided two kinds of strategies: recombination and approximation. The study examines strategies for different student levels and explores applying discourse analysis to writing instruction by defining the term. Olshtain and Celce - Murcia (2001) in their argumentation on the interface of discourse analysis and language teaching explained that Two discourse worlds in human communication: 1) conveying messages; 2) interpreting them - involving construction and interpretation strategies.

Olshtain and Celce-Murcia historically emphasized sentences as the primary focus in traditional language learning approaches. In the more recent approaches to language learning and teaching, discourse or text has become the basic unit of analysis. The traditional approach focused on single sentence elements for de-contextualized language practice. It seems that language practice emphasized norms, not fostering coherent understanding as sentences lacked depth. Conversely, the appearance of more recent approach of language learning gives new light on how to practice language in meaningful context.

Hong Hai (2004) documented that discourse analysis is the analysis of language beyond the sentence. This contrasts with traditional approach which paid more attention on syntax, semantics, and phonology. Discourse analysts go at greater length focusing on meaning derived from combination of sentences. Paltridge cited in Hong Hai (2004) Discourse analysis also observe how users obtain unified meaning of language. Furthermore, Hong Hai argued that coherent sentences in a piece of discourse, like a short story, form a unified, meaningful message. In the study of written texts, Discourse analysis aids in teaching language by developing topics cohesively. Paltridge (2000) notes that written discourse achieves cohesion and coherence through linking sentences to create a unified text.

Cohesion and coherence are two important devices within discourse analysis in written text. Flowerdew (2013) Cohesion focuses on text meaning; coherence relates to sentence links. Coherence involves how sentences refer to others. By combining words, texts gain meaning and become easier to interpret. Those are known as discourse competence (Sáez and Martin, 2005). Sáez and Martin (2005) in their study, discourse competence in the EFL classroom is described as the knowledge of organizing sentences coherently. Saez and Martin discuss sentences arranged logically. Controlling sentence order involves various aspects. The topics covered include writing, organization, logic, style, rhetoric, story techniques, comprehension, and text structure. Discourse competence is evident in how sentences are organized for unified meaning through coherence and cohesion (Canale & Swain, 1980) and Canale (1983). So, it can be inferred that cohesion and coherence are two internal parts of discourse competence. In relation to language teaching, Murcia and Olshtain (2001) summarize five areas of discourse analysis. Five key notions in discourse analysis—cohesion, coherence, information structure, conversation analysis, and critical discourse analysis—are crucial for understanding discourse, especially for the study's writing task.

Various cohesive ties are used to link all text proportions together for textual cohesion. It may embrace grammar and vocabulary which refers to reference, substitution, ellipsis, discourse markers and lexical cohesion. Furthermore, Halliday & Hasan (1976) define Cohesion is the relationship of meaning within a text that defines it, providing unifying meaning to the text as a whole. Lexical ties and reference can be seen in the using of appropriate article, both definite and indefinite articles. Grammatical cohesion is apparently refers to the use of appropriate pronouns, conjunctions, tenses and substitutions (Murcia and Olshtain 2001). Murcia and Olshtain (2001) define coherence as the relationship of single sentences and when they are joined each other shows its unity of discourse. Richards, Platt and Platt (1993) also claim that coherence as the relationships which link the meanings of sentences in a discourse. Both arguments suggest coherence is about linking sentences to convey meaning effectively. The cohesion in language is evident when units are organized, supporting coherence in discourse.



There are two important points within the term of information structure, namely, old and new information Murcia and Olshtain (2001). Old information is what is known, while new information is additional. Murcia and Olshtain claim that old information as topic or theme, and new information as rheme or comment. Writers use information structure to build new content from existing knowledge, seen in how old and new information connect in discourse coherence.

McCarthy (1991) proposes that it is impossible to construct a good discourse in language teaching without considering the important of grammatical aspects. Discourse grammar covers conjunctions, clauses, adverbs, pronouns, tenses, and their role in reference, theme, and rheme (Murcia and Olshtain, 2001). McCarthy (1991) claims that grammatical links fall into three types: reference, ellipsis or substitution, and conjunction. McCarthy (1991) distinguishes three reference types: anaphoric (referring back), cataphoric (referring forward), and exophoric (referring to common knowledge), through pronouns and demonstratives. Ellipsis in English, explained by McCarthy (1991), omits elements needed in grammar when assumed obvious from the context. Types include Nominal (omiting nouns), Verbal (with echoing and auxiliary contrasting), and Clausal (omitting clause elements). Conjunctions show text order and relationships. Murcia and Olshtain (2001) explain theme (known details) and rheme (new data). Understanding requires linking theme and rheme. Tense and aspect choice matters in discourse for clarity.

McCarthy (1991) defines lexical cohesion as precise word repetition and key semantic relationships that enhance textuality, setting it apart from random sentences. Furthermore, Halliday and Hasan (1976) claims that there are two principal kinds that show the relationship between vocabulary items: collocation and reiteration. McCarthy (1991) defines collocation as the likelihood of words co-occurring, without implying a semantic relationship between them. Reiteration in discourse involves repeating an item directly or using lexical relations to prompt readers or listeners to adjust their word associations for specific text goals. In discourse, Students expect fixed word meanings, but teachers need to clarify that vocabulary connections can differ in texts to assist interpretation.

McCarthy (1991) claims that there is a difference between grammar words and lexical words in language. Demonstrative words like 'this' and 'that' carry grammatical meaning, while words like 'go' and 'read' carry lexical meaning. This distinction also appears sometimes as function words versus content words, or empty words versus full words. The distinction helps us separate closed systems words with grammatical meaning from open systems ones that are part of major word classes like noun, verb, adjective, and adverb. Grammatical and lexical words must be organized for readers to identify the author's text-patterns and anticipate the discourse structure.

The discourse approach can be used to analyze descriptive texts that describe specific features of things. Oshima and Hogue (1997:50) argue that Descriptive text appeals to the senses by depicting how something looks, feels, smells, tastes, or sounds through vivid "word pictures" imagined by the writer. Oshima and Hogue (1997:50) propose the descriptive text's generic structure has two main parts: identification introduces the subject, while the description of features elaborates on its characteristic features. A descriptive text has distinct language features including specific nouns, detailed noun groups for information, varied adjectives, relating verbs for details, thinking and feeling verbs to convey personal views or insights, action verbs for behavior description, adverbials for extra behavior details, and figurative language like similes and metaphors, common in literary descriptions. The structures and language of descriptive texts are logically organized for cohesive meaning. Teaching writing through discourse analysis involves recommendation and approximation strategies.

Cook (1989) notes that recombination involves students rearranging sentences to their original order in a strategy to change sentence order. The recombination strategy helps students understand paragraph structure and place sentences correctly. Students are prompted to achieve sentence coherence,



improve paragraph cohesion, and convey intended meaning through information structuring. Teacher divides paragraph into single sentences for students to reorder and form a coherent paragraph without altering sentence elements. However, Cook noted multiple ways sentences are combined in discourse, influenced by sender's perception of reader's knowledge, interest, discourse function, and topic.

Another strategy is approximation. Widowson (1978) cited in Cook (1989), another useful writing teaching activity is approximation, focusing on developing discourse organization at different levels. Teachers break down a piece of text into single sentences, asking students to combine these isolated sentences into a coherent whole. Students are tasked with connecting separate sentences using their own words or adding information for coherence. Emphasizing cohesion and coherence helps ensure clear communication. Recombination involves arranging sentences into a coherent paragraph without adding extra information or language elements like conjunctions or linking verbs.

METHODS

Taking into consideration the importance of discourse analysis approach, the present study sets out to assess whether recommendation and approximation are suited to beginners as well as intermediate and advance students. There was a large body of research that provided insight into teaching writing strategies using discourse analysis approach; however, the present study focuses on assessing the students understanding on descriptive text in each level by using recombination and approximation strategies. The following research questions guided the study: are recommendation and approximation suited to beginners as well as intermediate and advance students?

The present study draws on data collected from a private English course in Yogyakarta. Two students of each level were taken randomly. So, the total numbers of participants are 6 students. The data collection followed a quantitative method by using basic statistic. Data collection techniques included writing test and interview. The researcher provided two passages for recommendation and approximation, asking students to complete a written test that assessed them through recombination and approximation. The students' works were analyzed by using analytical scoring rubric adapted from Weigle (in Fajriyani (2011)). The researcher compared the results to find whether recommendation and approximation are suited to beginners as well as intermediate and advance students. In order to get enough data, the researcher interviewed the participants by using semi-structured interview guideline adapted from Alkhatib (2015). The final step was drawing a conclusion and recommendation.

The data collected were analyzed by using analytical scoring rubric adapted from Weigle (in Fajriyani (2011)). It embraced several important components such as content, organization, vocabulary, and grammar. In order to get the scores, the researcher applied basic statistic calculation. The result of the statistic presentation were compared to each students' level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After administering the test, the researcher found the result of the test as presented on the table and diagram below.

a. Result of recombination test

Recombination							
COMPONENT	Categories	Students' level					
		Beginner		Intermediate		Advance	
		1	2	3	4	5	6
Content	Relevant to the topic and easy to		4	4	4	4	4



	understand						
	Rather relevant to the topic and easy to understand	3					
	Relevant to the topic but is not quite easy to understand						
	Quite relevant to the topic but is not quite easy to understand						
Sub Total		3	4	4	4	4	4
Organization	Most of the sentences are related to the main idea			4	4	4	4
	Some sentences are related to the main idea	3	3				
	Few sentences related to the main idea						
	The sentences are unrelated to each other						
Sub Total		3	3	4	4	4	4
Vocabulary & Mechanic	A few errors in choice of words, spelling and punctuation	4		4	4	4	4
	Some errors in choice of words, spelling and punctuation		3				
	Occasional errors in choice of words, spelling and punctuation						
	Frequent errors in choice of words, spelling and punctuation						
Sub Total		4	3	4	4	4	4
Grammar	A few grammatical inaccuracies	4	4	4	4	4	4
	Some grammatical inaccuracies						
	Numerous grammatical inaccuracies						
	Frequent grammatical inaccuracies						
Sub Total		4	4	4	4	4	4
Total Score		14	14	16	16	16	16
Total Percentage		21		24		24	
Mx (mean of students' writing score)		7	7	8	8	8	8
P (class percentage)		10,5		12		12	

From the basic statistic presentation, the result revealed that all participants (beginner, intermediate, and advance students) could past the test. It can be known by looking at the total scores achieved by every students when the test by using recombination strategy was applied. Each of the beginner student got 7 (10, 5 for class percentage) and each of intermediate and advance student got 8 (12 for class percentage). Based on the interview conducted after the test, it can be understood that the beginner students possess lack of vocabulary store and they admitted that they were new students who learn English. Beside that they had little understand on main idea and supporting sentences. This can be



seen that they put main idea of the paragraph as one of supporting idea. This impact on the paragraph coherence. In relation to grammatical accuracy, they may put appropriate grammar since recommendation requires them to reorder the sentences to be an understandable paragraph. But, in approximation strategy, they were apparently to use appropriate grammar.

On the other hand, they had great motivation to learn English. Since they have insufficient vocabulary bank store, they may did not understand several words or phrase that lead them to get difficult to understand the whole meaning of sentences. Furthermore, they said that sometimes they tend to be nerves or anxious to do the test because they afraid they maybe get low scores. It seems that the interview result support the result of the test. They also have a great curiosity that lead them to keep learn and practice.

Meanwhile, the intermediate and the advance students, they have learned English for a quite long time before compared to the beginner students, so they possess sufficient vocabulary bank stores so they can understand the sentences. They can recombine the sentence easily.

b. Result of approximation test

Recombination							
COMPONENT	Categories	Students' level					
		Beginner		Intermediate		Advance	
		1	2	3	4	5	6
Content	Relevant to the topic and easy to understand			4		4	
	Rather relevant to the topic and easy to understand	3			3		3
	Relevant to the topic but is not quite easy to understand		2				
	Quite relevant to the topic but is not quite easy to understand						
Sub Total		3	2	4	3	4	3
Organization	Most of the sentences are related to the main idea						4
	Some sentences are related to the main idea		3	3	3	3	
	Few sentences related to the main idea	2					
	The sentences are unrelated to each other						
Sub Total		2	3	3	3	4	4
Vocabulary & Mechanic	A few errors in choice of words, spelling and punctuation					4	
	Some errors in choice of words, spelling and punctuation			3	3		3
	Occasional errors in choice of words, spelling and punctuation	2	2				
	Frequent errors in choice of words, spelling and punctuation						



Sub Total		2	2	3	3	4	3
Grammar	A few grammatical inaccuracies					4	4
	Some grammatical inaccuracies			3	3		
	Numerous grammatical inaccuracies	2	2				
	Frequent grammatical inaccuracies						
Sub Total		2	2	3	3	4	4
Total Score		9	9	13	12	16	14
Total Percentage		13,5		19		23	
Mx (mean of students' writing score)		4,5	4,5	6,5	6	8	7
P (class percentage)		6,75		9,5		11,5	

Based on the result of the test as it is presented on the table above, it can be seen that the beginner students (student 1 and student 2) achieve low scores (9). In order to get the reason of why they fail the test, interview was administered. From the interview, the researcher found that they get problem with their linguistic aspects such as they possess lack of vocabulary, so they feel difficult to accomplish the test. Approximation need sufficient vocabulary in which the students need to add words, phrases or even sentences to complete the paragraph. Approximation is different with recombination in which recombination only facilitate the students to rearrange jumble sentence and put them in a logic order to make the paragraph to be coherence and cohesion Widowson (1978) cited in Cook (1989). Vocabulary plays its crucial role to enable students to construct a good sentences or paragraph. Beside that, they also got insufficient practice of constructing paragraph by using approximation strategy. Furthermore, the beginner students were also having lack of grammatical accuracy. Tenses and its aspects are part of grammatical accuracy (McCarthy, 1991). They were apparently using inappropriate tenses. They were difficult to organize sentences so the paragraph seems to be incoherence.

Beside that, based on the interview, the students explained that they usually follow several tests before so they tend to feel comfortable to do the test. On the other hand, sometimes they tend to be over thinking about the test and they do not consider about the time allocated. This make them fail to do the test. The result of the test proved that they tend to be over looking and pay much attention to the item test so they may left several items of the test. In relation to vocabulary choice, the intermediate and advance students, they possess a good deal of vocabulary, but some vocabulary were chosen inappropriately. The advance students were able to use appropriate grammar such as they were able to consider about tenses and other grammatical aspects.

CONCLUSION

The recombination and approximation strategies seem to be important strategies to assess the students' understanding about text in teaching writing. Based on the result of the test, it could be inferred that recombination is apparently suitable to assess the beginner students since through the recombination strategy, students are triggered to understand on how to rearrange the sentences without changing vocabulary, sentences structures, and tenses. This is known as the basic level of understanding. The beginner students with lack of vocabulary brain store and lack of grammatical understanding could be triggered to understand the paragraph coherence and cohesion through recombination.



Students who are included in intermediate and advance learners are apparently able to do the test by using both recombination and approximation. They possess sufficient vocabulary and grammatical understanding so they were able to do the test easily. Some grammatical errors found because they probably tend to be reckless.

The researcher realizes that the study was conducted in a limited time so it still far from its perfect. So, further investigation is needed to make it better and enrich readers with valuable and appropriate information dealing with the issue of recombination and approximation in language teaching and learning.

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