

Teaching Grammar within Supervisory Acts on Students' Academic Writing Works

Ana Widiyanti¹, Abdur Rofik², Latifah Dwi Ariyani³

^{1,2,3}Universitas Sains Alqur'an

²abdur.rofik32@yahoo.com

Abstract: *The debate over prescriptive and descriptive grammar remains great among linguists. The distinct perception of if grammar should be taught embedded with writing activities or not are always interesting in English as Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. The present study therefore is aimed at revealing (1) the students' first grammar construction in their writing, (2) how teaching grammar in the integrated manner with writing perceived by the student writers, and (3) factors to construct various structures of grammar in writing. The study involved 3 participants of English literature study program in a private university. Their first writing works were analyzed to find the structures of grammar that they wrote. They then were required to expand their grammar in writing after getting grammar teaching. Furthermore, they proposed their perception of grammar teaching embedded with writing. The findings revealed that the grammatical structures written by the students after they got grammar teaching were more various than those before they were taught. The study also uncovered that the action research led the students to develop their linguistics knowledge, and enhance their writing competency. Furthermore, the study unveiled that grammar rule understanding was prominent to writing practices, and to support grammatical expansion, vocabulary took an essential role to enhance the students' writing practices.*

Keywords: *grammar teaching; writing; grammatical expansion; writing skill*

A. Introduction

The study of grammar has been the focus of many researchers in L2/EFL specific contexts, such as writing (Rofik, 2018), translation (Rofik, 2020, and classroom action research (Zuhriyah, 2017). The first reveals that students have surface structure problems to construct English correct sentences. The second uncovers that EFL students seem to face grammatical problem to transfer source language that is written in Indonesia into English as target language. The student translators argue that they need to improve particular competence, namely grammar, to be good translators. Then the last unveils that the students of EFL classroom understand grammar more easily with specific learning methods, namely problem-based learning. However, the study of linguistic perspectives that are related to academic writing is merely few if not neglected. Therefore, the present study takes this part.

The present study investigates students' academic writing texts especially that are related to grammatical expansion. This is important because students of university are new comers in conducting academic writing even though they are educated to be involved as writer and researcher community during their first study in a university. As new writers, students often make sentences simply. Therefore, the English writing they convey looks unnatural. Moreover, studies of students' writing competency show that writing development takes advantage from grammar feedback in academic supervisory process (for example, Feeris, 1999; Saeb 2014). Feeris, to confront Truscott (1996), stated that students develop their English writing from teachers' grammatical feedback. The argument is also strengthened by Jones, Myhill, & Bailey's study (2013). Expanding grammar in students writing adopts grammar descriptive view, in which connection between linguistics choices and the meaning they shape are constructed.

The objective of the present study is to describe a supervisory process of a supervisor and three supervised students on integrating grammar teaching through supervision and writing in the undergraduate thesis writing in an Indonesian university. Effective writing is important to deliver the intention of writers to the readers. Writing is also tailored to make meaning and representing the meaning. Therefore, the research is hoped contributing the role of grammar, especially noun phrase structures, as meaning-making resources within a text and writing. Moreover Hudson (2004) declared that grammar-writing connection (contextualized grammar teaching in writing process) has been the focused on educational linguists.

The study is reflection of the supervisors that while their students have achieved minimally grade B/very good for their writing and grammar lectures in the class, these students seem struggle with grammar uses during their first writing thesis. The supervisors, therefore, recognizes the gaps between what was performed in their class actually and what should have happened ideally. The research involves the supervisors and students in the supervisory process to develop students' writing related to grammar as meaning-making resources. The present study therefore aims at answering the following research questions: (1) what types of noun phrase structures do the student writers construct in their writing? (2) How is the student writers' perception on grammar teaching and writing in an integrated manner in the supervisory process? (3) what factors do the student writers perceive important to construct various structures of grammar in writing?

Grammar Views

Towsey (1952) stated that view of grammar can be seen based on two perspectives, namely prescriptive and descriptive. Furthermore, Towsey explained that in general prescriptive grammar is important to ultimate success in teaching languages. It is because prescriptive grammar focuses on grammatical rules, therefore it also orders how language should be applied. Different from prescriptive grammar, descriptive grammar focuses on how grammatical choices construct meaning in text (Hinkel, 2018). Furthermore, Hinkel stated that descriptive grammar does not intent to justify bad and good grammar, or correct and incorrect structures, or standard and non-standard language.

Academic writing and grammar feedback

A different perspective of grammar feedback in writing process has risen over the years. The difference between two perspectives of grammar feedback is essential to the debate on whether grammar feedback helps students to develop their writing or not. The distinction of these two views is critical to the role of grammar feedback in writing. Therefore, the debate also effects the way supervisors supervise their supervised student writers.

Noun Phrases

English nominal constituents consist of following orders; predeterminers, determiners, then adjectives, head (noun), and closed by post modifiers, Lees (1961). To simplify, Alsagoff (2009) stated that noun phrase is ordered based on specific patterns, namely initialed by pre-modifiers to modify nouns as heads and post-modifiers put after noun heads to modify the noun heads (pre-modifiers + heads/nouns + post-modifiers). Furthermore, the structure of noun is also formed as following “determiner + pre-modifier + head + post-modifier (Leech and Svartvik, 1975: 231). In addition, Leech, Deuchar & Hoogenraad (1982: 57) explained that noun phrase must involve a head however modifiers can be one or more.

Premodifiers

Premodifier of noun phrase (NPs) structures as referred to Leech, Deuchar & Hoogenraad (1982: 61) may be determiners, enumerators, adjectives, nouns, and genitive phrases. In addition, Swan (2002: 147) declared that determiners are put at the beginning of NPs, however they aren’t adjectives.

Furthermore, Swan (2002, 148) stated that determiners are divided into two. Those are (1) determiner A covering articles, possessives, and demonstratives, and (2) determiner B that covers most of quantifiers. The position of determiner A is put in front of determiner B. Therefore, determiner B is not allowed to be put in front of determiner A.

Enumerators are terms to define numbers. They include cardinal numbers, ordinal numbers, and few of general number, such as last, next, further, etc. Leech, Deuchar & Hoogenraad (1982: 52). Furthermore, they gave ordinal and cardinal numbers as following sample two, third, etc.

As Leech, Deuchar & Hoogenraad (1982: 47) explained, adjectives are formed commonly gradable. Furthermore, it typically denotes quality to nouns. Furthermore, they (1982: 48) described that gradable means that adjective describes a quality that may vary along continuous scale, such as age, size, etc. However, not all adjectives are gradable, Leech, Deuchar & Hoogenraad (1982:48) explained that non-gradable adjectives are those refer to all-or-none qualities, for example nationality (Australian, Indonesian, etc.). To make clear, Swan (2002: 8) explained that adjectives that come before nouns commonly follow a particular order.

Furthermore, he illustrated that a phrase “a small shiny black leather handbag” is a correct order, but not “a leather black shiny small handbag”. Swan, therefore, declared that the adjective orders of NPs structures are color, origin, material, purpose, and noun as head.

Nouns that are used to modify nouns are common to construct NPs structures. Swan (2002: 376) declared that noun modifier is usual in the position of attributives (in front of other nouns). He illustrated as following sample; they need some **garden** chairs. To explain noun phrase “**garden** chairs”, **garden** is noun that is used to modify *chairs* as head of NPs.

Genitive Phrases (GPs) are genitive makers that are added in the end of GP (Leech, Deuchar & Hoogenraad, 1982: 57). Swan (2002: 376) specifically explained the structure of GPs as nouns in groups. He formulated GPs structures as “noun + ‘s + noun”. Furthermore, Swan illustrated the GPs samples as follows; *cow’s milk*.

Postmodifiers

Swan (2002: xxvi) stated that postmodifier is a word that comes after a head that it modifies. In addition, Leech, Deuchar & Hoogenraad, (1982: 62) stated that postmodifier is various. It may be prepositional phrase/PP, adjective clause/AC, other types of clauses, appositive, adverb, and adjective. Again, Leech & Svartvik (1975: 248) declared that postmodifier comes after the head in NPs. Therefore, the position of modifier in this pattern is modifier that is put after the noun/head. Furthermore, they explained that postmodifiers include relative clause, prepositional phrase, non-finite clause equal to relative clause, appositive clause, clause of manner, time, reason, and place, adverb, and adjective.

According to Leech & Svartvik (1975: 248) prepositional phrase/PP is the most common type of postmodifier. They illustrated PP in NP structures as following; all passengers *on board the ship* had to pass a medical checkup. PP “*on board the ship*” is postmodifier to modify head “*passengers*”. Preposition “*on*” is the head of PP that is modified by “*board the ship*”.

Beside PP, postmodifier is also made from adjective clause/relative clause. As illustrated by Swan (2002: 487) clauses that begin with question words often work to modify some pronouns and nouns. Relative clauses are used to classify or identify nouns/pronouns. They tell readers/listeners which thing or person is meant, Swan (2002: 489). Then Swan gave sample as a following sentence; People **who take physical exercise** live longer.

Leech & Svartvik (1975: 249) stated that non-finite clause equal to relative clauses include three types of non-finite clauses. Those three are present participle/ing form, past participle/ed form, and to-infinitive. Present participle is constructed from ellipsis of adjective clause and adverbial clause. The sample as referred to Leech & Svartvik is as following; the people **working in the company** asked for a pay increase. Past participle/ed form compare to meaning to passive relative clauses, Leech & Svartvik (1975: 249). Furthermore, they declared that to infinitive clauses resemble other non-finite clauses. To infinitive time references alter based on the context.

Leech & Svartvik (1975: 250) stated that appositive clause is a nominal clause that has a relation to the noun head. Appositive clauses may be *that* clauses or *to infinitive* clauses. Furthermore, they explained that the head noun in appositive clauses must be abstract noun. Again, Leech & Svartvik (1975: 250-251) stated that other postmodifiers are clauses of place, time, manner, and reason. Clauses of time, place and reason are introduced by (1) *wh*-question, such as when,

where, and why, (2) introduced by *that* or zero, and (3) *to infinitive* clauses. Leech & Svartvik (1975: 183) stated that some adverbs referring place or time postmodify head-nouns. Then Leech & Svartvik (1975: 251) stated that adjective or adjectival construction commonly pre-modifies noun however some cases show that adjectives follow the noun.

B. Methodology

Participants

Three student writers who are writing their undergraduate thesis were involved in this study. These three students were selected because they were interested to participate in the research. They were students of English literature study program of a private university in Indonesia whose researches took English literature and linguistics disciplines.

Data collection

Academic writing texts from 3 student writers on the discipline of English literature and linguistics were first gathered. Those writing texts were gathered every 2 weeks during 4 months, August until November, 2022. Then, the supervisors reviewed many aspects of academic writing. However, to focus on the study, grammar feedback was given by the supervisors. The given grammar feedback then was researched. The grammar feedback that was studied in this research was focused on noun phrase structures. The writing feedback was done in face-to-face supervisory acts. Furthermore, the data collected focused on chapter one of the students' works. Participants collected data were anonymized to save their privacy. Then the data were coded based on noun phrase structures (word orders) written by the student writers. The principal focus of the study was to understand participants' particular noun phrase (NP) structures in the content and meaning expression.

The process of grammatical coding made the supervisor understand how student writers constructed noun phrases in their writing. Based on this further understanding of how student writers constructed noun phrases, the supervisor then might go far to develop student writers' writing. The supervisor then taught the students NP structures. Furthermore, the students were asked to revise NPs in their manuscripts. The revision was conducted based on inquiries of the supervisor on students' writing.

To deepen the analysis, the researcher also proposed interviewed section to the student writers. The interview question was designed to uncover the participants' perception to embedded teaching grammar, especially NPs, to writing process. Furthermore, the interview was also designed to reveal the factors that helped the students to construct various appropriate orders of noun phrases in writing. In this phase of collecting the data, the interview section was recorded.

Data analysis

The written data of the students' first writing works that had been coded then were analyzed based on the noun phrase uses (pre and post modifiers to modify nouns as heads. Therefore, the researchers understood the types of noun phrases that were written by the student writers. The students' NP constructions then were highlighted to be revised. Before the NPs were revised, the supervisors taught the students various types of NP structures. Then, the students revised those NP constructions to make the NPs be more complex orders. The more complex orders were

intended to explore grammar as meaning-making choices in writing practices. After having actual experiences of embedded NPs taught during writing thesis, the students were asked to reveal their perception toward this kind of teaching process. The data of this interview then were highlighted to be collected based on the similar themes. Furthermore, the interview responses of the participants that had also asked to uncover their perception toward the factors that helped the students to construct various appropriate orders of noun phrases in writing were also grouped to the similar themes.

C. Results and Discussion

Students' Noun Phrase Structures

Students conduct NP structures variously. Typically, those structures are premodifier-head, head-postmodifier and premodifier-head-postmodifier. However, the study revealed that students foremost construct premodifier-head structures. Premodifiers of the NPs include one and more modifiers (e.g. the research, a deaf person). The noun phrase of the research can be explained that the is premodifier. Furthermore, the is classified as determiner, particularly article to modify research as head. To explain research, it is countable noun modified by modifier the. The study also found that students are lack of constructing head postmodifiers to develop their NPs. Head postmodifier construction revealed in this research are NPs that are developed from adjective/relative clauses (e.g. someone who hears). Postmodifier like who hears would give a more nuance about the NP head someone.

Students' Perception on grammar teaching within supervisory process

Table 1. NPs before expanded

| Premodifiers | Head | Postmodifiers |
|---|--------------------|--|
| Determiners, Enumerators, Adjectives, Nouns, Genitive Phrases | Noun | Prepositional Phrase/PP, Adjective Clause, Other Types of Clauses, Appositive, Adverb, Adjective |
| Determiner | Noun | Postmodifier |
| A | commentator | - |

Referred to table 1 of NPs, supervised students then expanded their NPs to make meaning their grammatical structures. Trough supervisory process, the supervisors taught the students how to construct various possible structures of NPs. Students then are taught what premodifiers and postmodifiers are, how to construct premodifiers and postmodifiers in NPs, and why premodifiers and postmodifiers in NPs are important. With applicative teaching of various NPs then the students are able to make an expansion of their NP structures.

Table 2. NPs after expanded

| Premodifiers | Head | Postmodifiers |
|---|------|--|
| Determiners, Enumerators, Adjectives, Nouns, Genitive Phrases | Noun | Prepositional Phrase/PP, Adjective Clause, Other Types of Clauses, Appositive, Adverb, Adjective |

| determiner | adjective | adjective | Noun | Noun | PP |
|------------|--------------|---------------------|-----------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| A | great | professional | football | commentator | in this era |

As NP expansion of the above example, the student can create more meaningful NP structure. The expansion can be illustrated as following.

(1) **a** commentator



(2) **a great professional football** commentator



(3) **a great professional football** commentator **in this era**

Based on the mentioned example, the student success to make meaning his/her NPs from NPs 1 as the first student's structure to NPs 2 with more than one premodifier to NPs 3 with premodifiers and postmodifiers. Therefore, the student can provide more meaningful information in his/her NPs.

Linguistics knowledge development

After the supervisors taught grammar within supervisory acts of students' writing thesis completion. The students perceived that their linguistics (grammar) knowledge develop. They urged that grammar teaching is important part in supervisory activities because grammar knowledge is needed in their field of study (English literature).

Student 1 stated that *grammar* especially NPs teaching during writing thesis makes me be able to *develop* my NP structure. My NPs are conducted variously after my supervisors showed me how to construct NPs with pre and postmodifiers. As a student of English literature, I preferred to have grammar teaching during my thesis writing because I needed to enhance writing skill through correct and various construction of phrase structures.

Student 2 stated that I *developed* to be more skilled in constructing NPs in writing sentences. I was to be more *aware of what I should do to my NPs* when my supervisor highlighted my NPs. However, linguistics awareness also happed when I was alone and I did my work sitting in front of computer to complete my undergraduate thesis.

The study therefore strengthened the research of Myhill et al. (2012) stating that Linguistics Subject Knowledge (LSK) became a crucial intervention factor in students' success of writing and metalinguistics understanding. In addition, Keen (1997) found that grammar most effectively was used as resources for students to build and recognize achievement within general framework for writing development.

Enhanced writing competency

The students argued that supervisors teaching of grammar (especially NPs) embedded with supervisory acts that is applicated in writing works consecutively enhanced their ability in writing. Furthermore, the students perceived that the supervisors' teaching of grammar based on students' actual grammar problems within writing thesis helped develop their use of grammar.

Student 3 revealed that learning grammar embedded with writing thesis enhanced my competency in writing. I knew exactly what to write, how to write and why to write. The supervisors' grammar teaching developed my writing skill.

Like student 3, student 1 argued that the supervisor teaching of grammar guided me to construct various types of grammar (NP) structures. Teaching grammar embedded with writing process was very essential for me because I could apply grammatical materials in writing as soon as the materials had been explained. Therefore, I tailored my sentences with more informative argument with grammatical, especially NP, expansion.

Prominent factors to construct various appropriate orders of NPs in writing

Grammar rule understandings

The study revealed that the students constructed three types of NP structures, namely premodifiers-head, postmodifiers-head, and premodifiers-heads-postmodifiers. However, the present study showed that the most common type of NP construction was premodifier-heads. Moreover, premodifiers of NPs that the students wrote involved one modifier. The findings posed a lack of various NP uses. The students urged that lack of grammar rule understandings effected on their writing. They did not encourage to make NP variation therefore the grammar construction looked monotone with only few variations.

Student 2 stated that I was often doubt whether my grammatical construction (NPs) was correct or not. Therefore, I took the safest way by using a simple NP. A simple NP, I meant here was NPs that involved only one premodifier.

Vocabulary mastery

After the students urged that grammar rule understanding was important, the students strengthened their argument that the understanding of grammar rules was not enough. To tailor various structures, they believed that vocabulary took an essential part to construct writing works. Furthermore, the students believed that vocabulary mastery enable them to decide distinct options of vocabulary use that they wanted to convey. The finding, therefore, strengthened Coxhead's study (2012) revealing that teaching writing and vocabulary was considered possible implication for academic purposes.

Student 3 declared that understanding grammar of English was important. However, it could not take other imperative things in writing, such as vocabulary mastery. With vocabulary that I had I could choose the appropriate one to write in my manuscript.

Like student 3, student 1 stated that when I began writing of course I taught grammar because grammar helped me deliver my thoughts in correct structures. However, with few vocabularies mastery I wrote unsatisfactory various types of NPs (grammar).

D. Conclusion

The present study showed that supervisors' intervention of grammar teaching within the students wring process during thesis completion went correctly. The students' writing competency rises significantly. The research shows that even the students deliver three structures of NPs/grammar in their writing. However, the initial evidence indicates that the students write monotone structures of NPs in their manuscripts. They foremost construct one premodifier to modify its head/noun of their NP/grammar constructions. The supervisors' intervention makes their grammar more various. Furthermore, the present study indicates that

teaching grammar that integrates writing process is believed raising students' linguistics knowledge and enhance their writing competency. Moreover, the study reveals that to construct appropriate various structures of grammar a writer needs to understand grammar rules and to master much vocabulary. The study implicates that teaching grammar in writing process is an important part to develop students writing. Furthermore, to develop writing construction in correct grammar, teachers should be sure that their students understand grammar rules and have much vocabulary. Therefore, students can create a meaning making writing construction based on their linguistics and vocabulary choices.

References

- Alsagoff, L. (2009). *A visual grammar of English*. Singapore: Pearson Education.
- Conhead, A. (2012). Academic vocabulary, writing, and English for academic purposes: Perspective from second language learners. 43(1). 137-145. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688212439323>
- Feeris, 1999. The case for grammar correction in L2 writing classes: A response to Truscott (1996). *Journal of Second Language Teaching*. 8(1). pp. 1-11. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1060-3743\(99\)80110-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1060-3743(99)80110-6)
- Hinkel, E. (2018). Descriptive versus prescriptive grammar. *The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118784235.eelt0053>
- Hudson, R. (2004). Why education needs linguistics? *Journal of Linguistics*, 40(1), 105-130. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4176859>
- Jones, S., Myhill, D. & Bailey, T. (2013). Grammar for writing? An investigation of the effects of contextualised grammar teaching on students' writing. *Read Writ* 26, 1241–1263. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11145-012-9416-1>
- Keen, J. (1994). Grammar, metalanguage, and writing development. *Teacher Development: An international Journal of Teachers' Professional Development*. 1(3). <https://doi.org/10.1080/13664539700200029>
- Leech, G. & Svartvik, J. (1975). *A communicative grammar of English*. Singapore. Longman.
- Leech, G. Deuchar, M. & Hoogenraad, R. (1982). *English grammar for today: A new introduction*. London. The Macmillan Press Ltd.
- Lees, R. B. (1961). The constituent structure of noun phrases. *American Speech*. 36(3). 159-168. <https://doi.org/10.2307/453514>
- Myhill, D. A., et al. (2012). Re-thinking grammar: the impact of embedded grammar teaching on students' writing and students' linguistics understanding. *Research Papers in Education*. 27(2). <https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2011.637640>
- Rofik, A. (2018). Grammatical errors made by secondary students in writing: from interlingual to intralingual. *JELLT (Journal of English Language and Language Teaching)*. Vol. 2(2), pp. 19-28. <https://doi.org/10.36597/jellt.v2i2.3270>
- Rofik, A. (2020). Grammatical accuracy of Indonesian-English translation. *Journal of Applied Studies in Language*. 4(2). pp. 321-330. <http://dx.doi.org/10.31940/jasl.v4i2.2173>
- Saeb, F. (2014). The effects of focused and unfocused written corrective feedback on the grammatical accuracy of beginner EFL learners. *International Journal of applied Linguistics & English Literature*, 3(2). pp. 22-26. <http://www.journals.aiac.org.au/index.php/IJALEL/article/view/1075>
- Swan, M. (2002). *Practical English usage* 2nd edition. Oxford. Oxford University Press.
- Towsey, A. (1952). Descriptive and prescriptive grammar in language study. *ELT Journal*. 6(4). pp. 133-137. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/vi.4.133>
- Truscott, J. (1996). The case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes. *Language and Learning: A Journal of Research in Language Studies*. 46(2). 327-368. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1996.tb01238.x>
- Zuhriyah, M. (2017). Problem-based learning to improve students' grammar competence. *REGISTER Journal, Language and Language Teaching Journal*. Vol. 10(1), pp. 1-13. <https://journalregister.iainsalatiga.ac.id/index.php/register/article/view/875/689>