

A STUDY ON  
SMA STUDENTS' PROBLEMS IN RECOGNIZING AND COMPREHENDING  
COMPLEX NOUN PHRASES WITH SINGLE PREMODIFICATION  
IN FOUR SENIOR HIGHSCHOOLS IN YOGYAKARTA

by

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ABSTRACT

Good reading skills, generally agreed, refer to the students' ability to read accurately and effectively so as to get the maximum amount of information from a text with minimum misunderstanding (Swan, 1976). This level of competence, however, does not seem to be an easy target, especially when the language is a foreign one, as in the case with teaching English to highschool (SMA) students in Indonesia.

Teachers have the responsibility to help their students develop the necessary skills for reading through what Widdowson (1979) calls 'gradual approximation'. This is supported by Rivers (1968) who proposes his idea of developing students' reading competence through 'progressive stages'. He suggests that reading be taught in progressive stages, and practiced regularly with carefully graded materials.

This study focusses its target on finding out whether or not complex noun phrases with single premodification are already mastered by SMA students. If the students have not mastered the forms, it means that they are forced to skip over one stage of structural complexity in developing their reading skills. As a result, their 'progressive stages' or 'gradual approximation' in building up the skills is disrupted since they also have to deal with complex noun phrases with more complex (multiple) premodification in their textbooks.

The population referred to in this research are 274 third-year SMA students of four different highschools, two private and two state-owned, in Yogyakarta. Two of the schools are located in the city and the two others in rural areas. They were in their final year at semester 6, thus representing the total process of English teaching in SMA. The instruments employed to investigate the subjects' difficulty in recognizing and understanding complex noun phrases with single premodification are a recognition test and a comprehension test; both were constructed by the researcher. Of the total responses, 100 students' responses (100 answer sheets for each type of test; 200 responses altogether) were taken at random for the analysis.

The researcher analyzed the students' performance with each option in the tests (four options with one

correct answer and three distractors for each number) to find out the percentage of the students choosing the right answer and not choosing the correct option. Responses for options of the same type of premodification were put together and the researcher then figured out the students' performance with each type of premodification, both with the recognition and comprehension tests, and compared the results with the hypotheses to find out the relevant conclusions of the study.

The study arrives at the following conclusions:

1. The students are familiar with complex noun phrases with an adjective as the premodifier but have much difficulty with the comprehension.
2. The students are not familiar with complex noun phrases with a noun as the premodifier, and have severe difficulty with the comprehension.
3. The students are quite familiar with complex noun phrases formed with a present participle verb, but face a major difficulty with the comprehension.
4. The students are not at all familiar with complex noun phrases formed with a past participle verb, and have much difficulty with the comprehension.
5. The students are not familiar with complex noun phrases with genitive 's and have a major problem with the comprehension.
6. The students are not at all familiar with complex noun phrases with an adverb and encounter a major difficulty with the comprehension.
7. The students are not at all familiar with complex noun phrases with a phrase as the premodifier, but experience little difficulty with the comprehension.
8. In general, the students are not familiar with complex noun phrases with single premodification, and have a serious difficulty with the comprehension.

In the discussion of the research findings, the researcher rationalizes the subjects' correct and wrong answers to find out the relevant pedagogical conclusions. The students' errors are found to be the results of L1 interference, overgeneralization, direct translation, poor mastery of English parts of speech, and several interlingual problems which include syntactical, morphological, lexical and sentential aspects of the target language. The researcher suspects several factors contributing to the subjects' success in choosing the correct answers, namely: 1. the existence of favorable language learning environment, 2. the subjects' success in acquiring extra-linguistic input, and 3. the teachers' presentation of the structures in question outside of the standard curriculum. The study also finds out that recognition of the forms is necessary for comprehension.

Finally, the researcher suggests that the inclusion of complex noun phrases with single premodification into the present curriculum is necessary. Teachers should take into consideration the significance of L1 interference and the level of difficulty of each type of premodification in

the teaching process. Teachers also need to consider all potential factors (syntactical, morphological, lexical, and sentential aspects of English and English parts of speech) that cause the students' problems in recognizing and comprehending complex noun phrases with single premodification. The significance of the students' ability to master the forms through self-acquisition should be exploited further in the teaching learning process.