

CREATIVE WRITING FOR NON-NATIVE ENGLISH STUDENTS: a Challenge

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ABSTRACT

Creative writing is a challenge for non-native-English-students. It is such an onerous task when they start writing. To generate ideas and develop them is one thing. To elaborate the ideas into a good English composition, is the other. The writing process itself involves a series of back and forth process, between developing ideas and revising the way to express them. This study will use descriptive qualitative research. The data are taken from the assignment given in Creative Writing Class, 3rd semester English Department students, Universitas Jenderal Soedirman. There are 31 students in the Creative Writing Class. Certain rubrics are given before the creative writing process. From all of the population, in this paper, the researcher will present three samples which fulfill the rubrics of the assignment. In conclusion, past tense is still considered the best in fictional stories. Eventhough past tense is applied in most of stories, the inconsistencies on it still happens from time to time. The tone used by the students are absurd: mysterious and illogical; student 2 is pragmatic: realistic and plausible; and sentimental: thinking about feelings, especially when remembering the past. The results show that non-native-English-students still need a lot of improvement in elaborating ideas and the way to express them in writing.

Keywords : creative writing, non-native English students, challenge

ABSTRAK

Creative Writing, atau Menulis Kreatif dalam Bahasa Inggris adalah sebuah tantangan bagi mahasiswa yang bukan native speaker. Menulai menulis memerlukan upaya keras bagi mereka. Menelurkan ide dan mengembangkannya merupakan suatu tantangan, dan mengembangkan ide menjadi karangan Bahasa Inggris yang baik adalah masalah yang berbeda. Proses menulis itu sendiri meliputi serangkaian proses bolak-balik, antara mengembangkan gagasan dan merevisi cara untuk mengungkapkan gagasan. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode dekriptif kualitatif. Data diambil dari tugas kelas Creative Writing dengan 31 orang mahasiswa. Instruksi

tertentu diberikan sebelum proses menulis kreatif. Dari seluruh populasi, dalam makalah ini, tiga sampel yang memenuhi ketentuan tugas akan dipaparkan. Simpulan yang dihasilkan adalah, *past tense* masih dianggap yang terbaik untuk diaplikasikan di dalam cerita fiksi. Meskipun demikian, beberapa kasus inkonsistensi masih ditemukan di dalamnya. Tone yang digunakan cenderung absurd: misterius dan tidak logis; pragmatis: realistis dan masuk akal; dan sentimental: mengungkap perasaan, terutama ketika mengenang masa lalu. Masih banyak yang harus diperbaiki dalam tulisan mahasiswa non-native untuk dapat menghasilkan cerita pendek berbahasa Inggris dengan baik, baik dari sisi grammar maupun cara mengungkapkan gagasan mereka dalam tulisan.

Kata Kunci: creative writing, non-native English students, challenge

INTRODUCTION

Creative Writing is one of the subjects that is given to students in higher education, mostly those who study in faculty of letters (or faculty of humanities), major in the language knowledge, such as Indonesian Literature, English Literature, Japanese Literature, and Mandarin Literature.

Creative Writing, among others, is a branch of its main subject, writing, focuses on the creativity of its students' to explore ideas and to deliver the ideas into a composition. To write in native language is still a hard task for some students. Some reasons are the lack of interest in the subject, lack of reading sources, and incompetency in writing itself. While writing in native language (Bahasa Indonesia) is found difficult for some students', writing in English for non-native English students is obviously harder. It is not only a matter of interest and reading sources, it is also a matter of language competence.

The problems start when the students' have to explore their ideas. For some who do not have interest in writing, to start writing is an onerous task. Those who do not read much, especially, tend to find difficulties in writing. Reading habit is closely related to writing competence. What one reads influence how one writes. When students have no interest in reading, or they do not have much of reading habit, they will find more obstacles to pour out their ideas into a composition. Vice versa, those who fond of reading will find writing easier. They have certain instincts in choice of words, in sentence building, and in the flow of ideas. On the other hand, the language competence takes its biggest part in the problem. The students have to go back and forth revising their way to express their ideas. This study will analyze grammatical aspect and the tone of emotion that non-native English students used in their composition.

METHODOLOGY

According to Oxford Dictionary, *creative* is “relating to or involving the use of imagination or original ideas in order to create something” (Stevenson, 2010: 408). Meanwhile *writing* is “the activity or skill of writing” (Stevenson, 2010: 2049). Therefore, creative writing can be defined as the activity which involves the use of imagination or original ideas in order to create a writing piece or a composition. Furthermore, Adèle Ramet defines the term ‘creative writing’ as having the power to create an imaginative, original literary production or composition and can be applied to every broad spectrum of writing genres (2007: xi).

Creative Writing is closely related to creating imaginative stories. The purpose of creative writing is both to entertain and share human experience. Short story and novel are imaginative stories. But, there are also the other forms of creative writing such plays, film or movie scripts, memoirs, essay, and also poetry.

Writing for a second language learner is certainly different from a native language learner. Other than generating ideas, they have to pay attention more to the way to express the idea. It involves a series of back and forth process in writing. The first problem they encounter is grammar. The different language system between bahasa Indonesia and English often make them doubtful of which tenses they should use when writing.

The fact is, there are pros and cons about what tense one should use when he/she writes a fictional story. Jauss (2011: 86) claims that in 1987, Robie Macauley and George Lanning dubbed present tense as “the most frequent cliché of technique in the new fiction,” and since then, it’s appeared with even greater frequency. Although there are signs that its use is diminishing among established writers, it’s becoming the default choice for many younger writers.

To write using past tense because the past tense is invisible and more flexible to the writers (www.novel-writing-help.com/past-tense.html). While using present or past tense is optional, there are some disadvantages of using present tense, as stated by Jauss (2011: 104) 1) it restricts our ability to manipulate time, especially two of its most important elements, order and duration; 2) It is more difficult to create complex characters using present tense; 3) The present tense can diminish suspense and 4) The use of present tense encourages us to include trivial events that serve no plot function simply because such events would actually happen in the naturalistic sequence of time.

Tone, in written composition, is an attitude of a writer towards a subject or an audience. Tone is generally conveyed through the choice of words, or the viewpoint of a writer on a particular subject (<https://literarydevices.net/tone>). Inermanson states, “to show a character acting right now, you use a *point of view*, or POV—a lens through which you show your character’s world (and the story) to the reader” (2010: 121). Imagery is one of the ways to convey the tone of the story. On the other hand, DiYanni states that imagery is the heart of literature, which allows the reader to become immersed in the story, the poem, or the play. It provides all of the “details

of sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch” (2007: 779). Choice of words, viewpoint and imagery creates the tone that will influence the sense of a text in a whole.

This study will use descriptive qualitative research. The data are taken from the assignment given in Creative Writing Class, 3rd semester English Department students, Universitas Jenderal Soedirman. There are 31 students in Creative Writing Class. The rubrics are given before the creative writing process. They are 1) the genre of the story is romance, 2) The story consists of 1000 until 1500 words, 3) use description of character or situation. From all of the population, in this paper, the researcher will present three samples which fulfill the rubrics of the assignment. The analysis will be to identify qualitatively on the grammatical aspect and the tone reflected in the stories. Then the result will be presented descriptively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the analysis, here are the results of the study.

1. Grammatical Aspect (Tenses)

When students write using English as their second language, sometimes they find difficulties in using the appropriate tenses. Writing fiction stories may use present tense as well as past tense. But it is recommended that when we write novel, we use past tense. Present tense can be used in a shorter piece of writing. Basically, writing stories fiction will need to go forth and back the time. So the best tense to use is past tense. Because of the confusion, sometimes there are some inconsistencies in tenses. Sometimes they write in past tense, but in the same sentence, in the same course of time, they change the tense into present, or vice versa. Here are the results of analysis towards the grammatical aspect within the students' writing.

Dream (Student 1)

In the beginning of the story, Student 1 uses past tense to start with. However, still in the same paragraph, and the same course of time, the tenses change into present, and the back again to past tense. For example: "*Come on!*" *I said as I shake him a bit.* The words "said" and "shake" are still in one sentence, and in the same course of time. The other example: *I turned around and saw nothing. Where is he? Where is my husband? Did he go somewhere? I'm too sleepy to think about that, so I went back to sleep.* The change of tenses may be made without she realized.

Not Meant to Be (Student2)

Student 2 uses past tense in most of her story. She only uses present tense when she describes character's appearance. It is shown in the first paragraph when she describes a character in the exposition. For example:

His name **is** Jafar; a very tall boy with a fair skin and blue eyes with dark-brown hair. He **is** fierce, unpredictable, and curious about everything, **needs** facts to understand things and **isn't** easily duped. Despite all of his personalities, his hobby **is** eating. He **can** eat 2 burgers in a row and still got hungry. Also, he **loves** to drink milk and coffee. His favorite flavor of milk **is** chocolate and his favorite flavor of coffee **is** Americano. He **can be** the most annoying person sometimes but that's what **makes** me love him even more.

However, she intentionally changes present to past when she delivers her story, even though there are some inconsistency in the tenses.

The sun **filtered** through the clouds, signaling the end of the rain. He **took** me on a walk but **don't** know where we **will** be going. I **followed** him from behind while I **take** a deep breath and **bow** my head. I'm not in a very good mood today but he **forced** me to go out.

White Summer (Student 3)

Student 3 uses past tense consistently in his story. It begins on the first paragraph.

I **kept** walking without any hesitation through the rustling trees in this quiet street. The clouds **were** high and white as if they **were** shining together with the sun.

He keeps using past tense in the narration, alternately with past perfect tense and only use present tense in the dialogues..

She **had turned** my world and captivated me. Once I **was** just a useless kid who always being chased by its classmate. Now, she **gave** me a meaning to my life. That I **had** something else to make me face tomorrow with a smile. I **fell** for her so deep that I **dared** no to think the end of our time together in this place. I just **wanted** to keep this moment forever. Like the vast sky that **would** never fade.

2. The Tone of the Stories

The tone of the stories is the way the writer uses his/her attitude through the writing. Tone is expressed by using point of view, choice of words and imagery. Here are some examples from the students writing. The part of text which are taken are those which use description, for the tone often appear strongly.

Dream (Student 1):

The chirping of the birds awoke me, the sunshine hit my face through the window glasses. it was another day in summer. The breeze was so refreshing. I turned my body to see my husband. He was sleeping in front of me. His face was so peaceful. His eyelashes are pretty, touching his cheek. I love this guy. We met at an amusement park 5 years ago in a valentine special edition events, and he has been my husband since christmas that year.

From the excerpt, it is shown that Student 1 uses 1st person POV. Student 1 describes the situation around character "I". She uses the words "chirping of birds", "the sunshine hit my face" and "the breeze was so refreshing". Then she describes The Husband, about his eyelashes and his cheek. She uses visual, tactile, and audio imagery. She also uses figurative language such as "*the sunshine hit my face*" and "*his eyelashes are pretty, touching his cheek*". Student 1 uses narration and description in her story. In some of the part she narrates the events, in some others she give description of situation and character. The choice of words make this story romantic but a little bit absurd. She writes about a delusional woman who always dreams of having a husband in her life. In fact, it is shown in almost the end of the story by character "Mom" that it is just her imagination.

"It has started again, isn't it?"

"What?! What is it?"

"Your delusion, I thought we made it stop years ago,"

"Delusion? No! Are you kidding me? It is not funny mom"

"You had it since you were just a kid"

Student 1 gives the impressive, mysterious ending by giving a cliff hanger ending—an ending which still leaves a question to the readers. The imaginative Husband reappears and says, ""Wake up, honey. What do you think about sausage as our breakfast?"

Not Meant to Be (Student 2):

Student 2 uses 1st person POV. She uses narration and description alternately in her story.

His name is Jafar; a very tall boy with a fair skin and blue eyes with dark-brown hair. He is fierce, unpredictable, and curious about everything, need facts to understand things and isn't easily duped. Despite all of his personalities, his hobby is eating. He can eat 2 burgers in a row and still got hungry. Also, he loves to drink milk and coffee. His favorite flavor of milk is

chocolate and his favorite flavor of coffee is Americano. He can be the most annoying person sometimes but that's what makes me love him even more.

She tends to use simple words, and only use few of figurative language. In some occasions, she uses personification to give emotional tone of her story, such as, "The sun filtered through the clouds, signaling the end of the rain". The tone she uses in her story tends to be pragmatic and logic.

White Summer (Student 3):

Student 3 uses also the 1st person POV in his story. He often uses figurative language on his description, and it creates the sentimental tone on his writing. His writing is about the recollection of his late girlfriend. Here is the excerpt of his writing.

Breeze blew her gown softly but she seemed to not notice it. Her eyes were full of amaze and hope that I would never think I could have those on my eyes. Somehow this difference only made me want to get closer to her and knew everything about her.

The description is simple but has deep meaning. He chooses the words carefully. Here is the other excerpt.

A mug, an apple, and a mountain. The one over there, higher than other cloud, was cirrus. Its feather shaped was so soft and beautiful. She said it was like the wing of a swan. And I said it was the feather of dove.

Student 3 also uses visual and tactile imagery to create more vivid description of the situation.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis, it is shown that non-native-English-students often found choosing tenses in their writing, confusing. Since a story has a course of time which can go back and forth, this problem seems to be more complicated. However, most of the students choose past tense to start their writing. It changes alternately depends on the context of situation. Past tense is still considered the best to be used in fictional stories. Eventhough past tense is applied in most of stories, the inconsistencies on it still happens time to time in the writing. From all population, 31 (100 %) students use past tense as the general tense in their stories, but 2 (6,45 %) are found consistence and 29 (93 %) are incosistence.

From all population, 31 students (100 %) choose to use 1st person POV. Their reasons are mostly the same: they are able to convey their emotional feelings through 1st person POV. From the aspect of diction (choice of words), 28 students (90,32 %) use figurative language and 3 students (9,68 %) do not use figurative language. From the imagery aspect, 23 (74,2 %) students use visual imagery, 3 students use audio and visual magery (9,68 %), 3 students (9,68 %) use tactile and visual imagery, 2 students (6,45 %) use tactile, visual and auditory imagery. From the

whole aspects, it can be concluded that the tone of emotions are absurd: mysterious and illogical (2 students or 6,45 %); pragmatic: realistic and plausible 25 students or 80, 65%); and ssentimental: thinking about feelings, especially when remembering the past (3 students or 9,68 %).

The results show that non-native-English-students still need a lot of improvement in elaborating ideas and the way to express them in writing. In order to make the improvement, researcher suggests the teachers/lecturers of Creative Writing class to enhance their students' grammar competence, encourage them to read as much as possible, and prompt them to keep practicing.

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