

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of Study

This research investigates descriptive texts – written by Indonesian students enrolling a bilingual program education– from the perspective of ideational metafunction of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). It portrays some pedagogical implications to be made from the analysis result. SFL theory is employed as an approach to analyze the student's work.

The present study uses SFL as a measure tool to analyze the quality of the descriptive texts written by six students of the 8th grade enrolled in the bilingual program in SMP Labschool Cibiru. The school was assigned because the researcher is familiar with the school due to the Teacher Training Program (TTP) that was conducted there. During that training program provided by UIN Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, the author had an opportunity to explore teaching-learning activity in the bilingual programmed school. I found out that bilingual students in this school have great knowledge about words, vocabularies, and diction. In one writing task that was given, they answered with good elaboration and they arranged words better than any students in the same grade who attend regular class. In other words, the bilingual students in this school have great vocabulary knowledge. The students indeed have it. Yet, writing is another different level. There are some certain language features in which we should pay attention to. Are they aware of this? Due to these circumstances, some questions appear and those are to be investigated more by conducting research about this topic. Furthermore, six texts were chosen as representative data of high level, medium level, and low level. These data were collected from the teacher in accordance to the recorded

writing score during the semester. Two students of each categorized level were taken and then the descriptive texts were also collected to be analyzed.

Writing is a partial representation of units of language expression. In an academic context, students are often expected to demonstrate things using definitions and keywords to ensure their teacher/audience that they share a congruence of thought. When important words are not clearly understood, misinterpretation may result (Lado, 1964). For that expectation, writing a text can be challenging especially for young learners because writing is one of the most difficult things to master. Furthermore, it requires the student to understand the terms and put the words in grammatical order to create an understandable discourse.

There are three variables involved in conducting this research; they are students of bilingual program, descriptive text, and ideational metafunction.

Bilingual education refers to the use of a second or foreign language in school for the purpose of content teaching" (Richards et. al., 1992). Bilingual education aims to make schooling meaningful and comprehensible. Bilingual education uses the second language not only as a subject but also as a medium of communication to convey meaning (Garcia, 2009). In the cite of research, this bilingual education is adapted into a program or so-called bilingual program. For the purpose of this research, the term bilingual program is used hereafter.

Descriptive text is chosen as part of this research because of its social function and language features. Descriptive text, socially functioning to describe a thing, a place, or a phenomenon to create an idea or meaning as if the audience/the reader see it with their own eyes (Gerot & Wignel, 1994). Hence, it is not questionable why descriptive text has become the most used text in daily life. For its language features, related to the three metafunction of the SFL, descriptive text is used to state facts about a thing. It makes descriptive text using simple present tense in the making. Since the simplest

tense is used, it can be used as the bare minimum standard of students' writing and grammar ability and that concept is the core reason why descriptive texts are involved in this research. Aside from that reason, descriptive text has become one of the topics in the curriculums for Junior High School (JHS) students in 8th grade (Kemendikbud, 2013).

SFL is a part of functional grammar that often carries a role to review a text in connection with its context. Functional grammar attempts to describe language in actual use. The quality of the texts is measured with their accordance to how a descriptive text should be written in the perspective of SFL. Meaning in the SFL can be realized through three metafunctions naming ideational, interpersonal, and textual. These three metafunctions represent each meaning of a text by breaking it down into sentences. In particular, the use of the mood, the finite, and the text function forms the meaning. Investigating those three meanings of the text allows us to understand the transformation between the meanings the writer wants to convey, the grammatical structures used, and the context of situations involved in the text such as ideologies, periods, and movements of the writers..

Several studies were conducted regarding this research and its purposes. The studies were conducted during the period of 2015-2020. Those studies inspire this research to explore deeper about the phenomenon of students' writing product reviewed from the perspective of the SFL. Those studies are elaborated below as the guiding resources, giving general description about what to be studied in this research.

The result of the first study showed that the major problem of the student's descriptive text lies on three issues namely the inability in adjusting the social function of the text, difficulty in writing the descriptive text with a chronological schematic structures and the difficulty in filling the text with appropriate language features such as the use of inappropriate specific participant and inappropriate tense.

The second work highlighted the features of descriptive text in SFL and it found out that the student faced many problems in the inability in adjusting the social function of the text, difficulty in writing the descriptive text with a chronological schematic structure, and the difficulty in filling the text with appropriate language features.

The following study examined errors in the text written by first-year French university students studying non-linguistic disciplines. The purpose of this study is to answer three questions, one of them is to find out what an SFL can contribute to error analysis. The study found out that there are six main error categories in the texts. Furthermore, reviewed from the experiential metafunction, there was an overall decrease of approximately 20% at the rank of the process and participant groups and an unexpected 40% increase in the circumstance errors.

Another paper basically aims to review the literature on the concept of SFL, and to investigate previous studies, and to study future trends in which the SFL can be applied in Thailand. The author reviewed 10 journals in the range of 2006-2013. This descriptive research shows that there are development and evolution of the SFL studies in the Thai context. This study also stated that SFL theory will be widening in the Thai academic society and envisaged to be increased in the next few years.

Last, it is about a study that applied a qualitative investigation of the transitivity structure, language use and mood structure of narrative texts. The findings showed that six transitivity processes were applied in the students' writing. The processes were the material process, mental process, verbal process, behavioral process, relational process and existential process.

However, this study is different from any study that has been conducted before, because this study involves bilingual program students as the participants, those who are believed to demonstrate better language ability than monolingual students as what was studied by Shani et al., (2024) in their

study regarding cognitive development through language learning. Another difference is that this study collected more than one text to be analyzed, in order to get broader and stronger analysis about the phenomenon being discussed.

B. Research Questions

This study is conducted to answer two research questions:

1. How is the transitivity analysis of the descriptive texts written by bilingual program students?
2. How is the bilingual program students' ability in writing descriptive text reviewed from the transitivity perspective?

C. Research Purposes

According to the research questions that are mentioned above, this study is expected to obtain these two purposes:

1. To figure out the transitivity analysis of the descriptive texts written by bilingual program students.
2. To find out bilingual program students' ability in writing descriptive text from the transitivity perspective.

D. Research Significances

This study is expected to provide a better understanding and to enhance information about the theory of Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) and its implementation in examining the quality of a descriptive text. Practically, this research gives significance to teachers and students. For teachers, this study can be impactful to improve and evolve their teaching skills, particularly in teaching and assessing student's writing skill.

Furthermore, for students' perspective, the result of this study provides information for students from any range of education about creating a good descriptive text in accordance with its language features and SFL perspective.

E. Theoretical Framework

1. Bilingual Program

Bilingual education or also known as bilingual program when it is applied in school, is the use of more than one language in the context of teaching. Bilingual education refers to the use of a second or foreign language in school for the purpose of content teaching" (Richards et. al., 1992). Bilingual education aims to make schooling meaningful and comprehensible. Bilingual education uses the second language as a medium of communication to convey meaning, not only as a subject (Garcia, 2009). In addition, Genesee (2004, p. 548) defined bilingual education as 'education that aims to promote bilingual (or multilingual) competence by using both (or all) languages as media of instruction for significant portions of the academic curriculum'. Rossell and Baker (1996, p. 7) defined bilingual education as 'teaching non-English-speaking students to read and write in their native tongue, teaching them content in their native tongue, and gradually transitioning them to English over a period of several years'. On top of all of that definition, despite the goal's differences of bilingual education, it can be summed up that a bilingual program is a system of education that employs the use of second language for the content teaching so that students can improve their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills throughout the learning process.

Typology of bilingual education helps in visualizing variety and different aims of ‘bilingual education’. In the “Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism” by Baker, C., & Wright, W. E., it is mentioned that there are ten types of bilingualism in bilingual education and there are contrasting differences between the ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ forms of bilingualism.

In addition, bilingual education aims to make schooling meaningful and comprehensible. Bilingual education uses the second language as a media of communication to convey meaning, not only as a subject (Garcia, 2009).

2. Ideational Metafunction of Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL)

Systemic Functional Linguistic concern in how language creates meaning among the speakers. The meaning is brought out by language metafunction which means that it sees language as a whole function which works in clauses. The linguists provide three types of meaning known as ideational or experiential, textual, and interpersonal (see Butt et al., 2000; Gerot & Wignel, 1994; Thompson, 2014). Meanwhile, according to the descriptive text features proposed by Gerot (1994), ideational metafunction holds an important role in carrying their meaning. Hence, this research adopted the ideational metafunction in creating the framework to examine students’ descriptive text writing.

a. Ideational metafunction

Ideational metafunction recognizes language as a set of resources of units that relate and connect to each other (Thompson, 2014). In other words, ideational metafunction deals with transitivity, the process of actions that contain the meaning of the role participants. Transitivity carries the meaning of each clause of both the “doers” and the “done to”. From ideational

perspectives, a clause is not seen from its constituent function but from the process which acts and relates to each other.

Processes are the core of transitivity. Gerot (1994) categorized the processes into two main categories, naming non-relational processes and relational processes. Halliday (1996) categorized the process into seven different processes (Halliday). Those processes are material, behavioral, mental, verbal, relational, existential, and metrological.

b. Material process

Material processes are processes of material doing. They express the action that is physically done and resulting in some other thing. Clauses with material processes are prevalently have a doing (process) and a doer (participant). The entity which did the action is called the *actor*. Meanwhile, if there is any entity being extended or affected by the action, they are called the *goal*. Material process is also noticeable by the effect it causes to the goal. It could be the change from non-existent to an existent like the phrase "to make a cake", or the change from an existent to a non-existent like the phrase "to destroy the building".

Semantically speaking, material process is an act of doing, and usually involves concrete and tangible actions. Material process is that some entity does something, undertakes some actions (Eggins, 2005).

c. Behavioral process

Behavioral processes are processes of physiological and psychological behavior. Halliday describes behavioral process as a process that is in between mental and material process. That is an action that has to be experienced by a conscious being. In clauses with behavioral processes, there is one obligatory participant, the

behave. Furthermore, the act of behaving is called *behavioral*, and the rest of the clause can be circumstances or range.

d. Mental process

Mental processes are the process of sensing, including feeling, perceiving, and thinking. There are three types of sensing: reactive (feeling), perceptive (perceiving through the five senses), and cognitive (thinking). The participant roles in mental processes are *senser* and *phenomenon*. The senser, by its definition, is a living and conscious entity who can feel, think, or see.

e. Verbal process

Verbal processes are processes of saying, or in other words, symbolically signaling. A *sayer* may be or not be a living entity. This means that a signal, a sign, or a picture can have a verbal process. “The sign says we must stop”. The example verbs carrying the verbal process are; to tell, to say, to ask, to answer.

f. Relational process

Relational processes are known as processes of being and behaving. In the relational process, things are stated to exist by its relation to other things (quality and or attribute) (Eggins, 2005). They can be classified by the use of them in a clause, whether to identify something (He is the CEO of the company) or to assign a quality to something (He is a good leader).

Processes that identify something called *identifying process* and processes that assign quality are called *attributive processes*. Each of the processes has its own characteristic of participant roles. In the identifying process, there are *token* and *value*, meanwhile in the attributive process, there are *carrier* and *attribute*.

g. Existential process

Existential processes are processes of existence. It is realized in a clause by verbs of existing such as be, exist, arise. Furthermore, the *existent* can be a phenomenon of any kind. By existential process, a thing or an entity is just simply stated to exist. It is realized in a clause by 'there is/are something'.

h. Meteorological process

Meteorological processes are those processes that happen in nature. It is realized in a clause by adverbial clause. For example, the clause "It's hot", "It's windy", "It's nine o'clock", etc.

3. Descriptive Text

Descriptive text socially used to describe a particular place, person, or thing. (Gerot & Wignel, 1994). The process of narrating/describing the phenomenon is done through generating the name, identifying the details such as parts, qualities, and the characteristics. The writer needs to spell out this text so that the audience can understand what the writer is talking about, as if they see it with their own eyes. Descriptive text is formed by its own structure. The elements of the text are identification and description. Identification part has a function to introduce and to identify specific participants such as a person, a thing, an animal, a place, or an event. Description part is created to narrate that one particular thing that is being discussed about. The description includes the characteristics, appearances, personality, qualities, and habits (Butt et al., 2000; Derewianka, 1990; Gerot & Wignel, 1994; Knapp & Watkins, 2005).

In the educational domain, Rose (2012) classified descriptive text as a report discourse functioned to inform only one type of a thing, written in a form of reports, and is not sequenced in time. In other words, it may classify an entity and then describe its features. Enhancing its function with the science of applied linguistics, Rose (2012) assumed that in

writing a descriptive text, the stages start with classifying the object followed by the detailed description. Yet, the way it is written varies within the type of the text being written and the object being described. To expand it in a broader way, it shall be different when we describe a living thing (animal or a person) and a static thing (a country or a thing).

F. Research Scope

This research aims to figure out how bilingual program students' writing ability is in writing descriptive text under the theory of transitivity. Students of the bilingual program were asked to write descriptive texts, and then six texts were chosen based on the category of class achievement recorded during the semester. This study is limited on the theory of bilingual education, transitivity, and descriptive text. The study was conducted in SMP Labschool Cibiru, and was done in a year starting from designing the instrument, collecting the data, running an analysis, and providing description and summary of the research.

G. Previous Studies

A number of studies have been conducted that explore themes closely related to the present research topic. These previous works, carried out during the period of 2017 to 2020, provide valuable insights and serve as a foundational reference for understanding how similar investigations have approached the analysis of descriptive texts and transitivity features. The review of these studies not only highlights the methodologies and findings of earlier research but also helps to identify existing gaps that the current study aims to address. Summarized below are annotated descriptions and critical explanations of the most relevant studies, which collectively contribute to framing the theoretical and contextual background of this research.

Noprianto (2017) conducted a qualitative study that aimed to analyze and elaborate on the construction of a descriptive text using the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The study employed a detailed textual analysis approach, selecting a single student-written descriptive text as the primary sample for in-depth examination. Through this analysis, several critical issues emerged that hindered the effectiveness of the text. The findings showed that the student experienced three major challenges. First, the student showed an inability to appropriately align the text with its intended social function, which in the context of descriptive writing is to provide clear, specific, and vivid information about a person, place, or object. This misalignment resulted in a lack of purpose and clarity in the communication of the text. Second, the student encountered difficulties in organizing the content according to the expected schematic structure of a descriptive text, which typically begins with an identification followed by a detailed description. The absence of a coherent chronological or logical sequence made it difficult for readers to follow the flow of information. Third, the analysis revealed issues related to the use of appropriate language features. These included errors such as the misuse of specific participants—where general or vague nouns were used instead of precise ones—and the incorrect application of tenses, particularly the frequent use of present tense in contexts that required a different temporal reference. These problems highlight the student's limited understanding of both the grammatical and functional demands of descriptive writing, underscoring the importance of integrating SFL-based instruction to improve students' awareness of genre-specific language use.

As for Noprianto (2017), Latopo (2018) conducted a similar study that also applied a systemic functional linguistics (SFL) perspective in analyzing students' descriptive text writing. In this study, Latopo selected a single student text as the primary sample and performed a detailed, in-depth analysis to examine both the grammatical and functional aspects of the writing. The

findings revealed that the student encountered various grammatical issues, including errors in subject-verb agreement, omission of necessary articles, and confusion regarding the use of singular and plural forms. Beyond these surface-level grammatical challenges, the analysis also uncovered deeper difficulties related to the ideational and textual components of writing. Specifically, from the SFL viewpoint, the student struggled to align the text with its intended social purpose, demonstrating a limited ability to maintain the communicative function expected in a descriptive genre. Furthermore, the text lacked a clear and coherent schematic structure—typically consisting of identification followed by description—making it harder for the reader to follow the progression of ideas. Lastly, the student appeared to have difficulty selecting and applying appropriate language features that would typically characterize a descriptive text, such as the consistent use of relational processes and relevant descriptive adjectives. These combined issues suggest that the student lacked both grammatical proficiency and genre awareness, which are essential in producing effective descriptive texts.

Jelimun et al. (2020) conducted research that applied a qualitative investigation of the transitivity structure, language use and mood structure of narrative texts. Although this study used narrative text as the sample population, the writer found that this study was really helpful and impactful in adding background knowledge of the research. Miles and Huberman's interactive model was used to investigate the dominant transitivity process and to analyse the mood. The findings showed that six transitivity processes were applied in the students' writing. The processes were the material process, mental process, verbal process, behavioral process, relational process and existential process. The dominant process used was the material process, meanwhile the inferior process used were the behavioral process and the existential process.

The current research aims to offer a distinct perspective by analyzing students' descriptive writing through the lens of three categorized levels of English proficiency, namely: low, medium, and high. This categorization allows for a more nuanced understanding of how students at varying levels of language competence construct meaning in their written texts. To carry out this analysis, six descriptive texts produced by students enrolled in a bilingual education program were purposefully selected as the primary data sources. These texts serve as representations of each proficiency level and provide concrete examples of how linguistic features manifest differently across students' language abilities. In addition, this study employs the concept of ideational meaning, a key component of Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), as the analytical framework. By applying this metafunction, the study focuses on examining how students express experiences, ideas, and relationships through their linguistic choices, particularly in terms of process types. This approach not only deepens the analysis but also enables the researcher to interpret the students' writing from both a structural and functional perspective.

