

An Analysis Of The Most Difficult Part In Structure And Written Expression Section In Toefl Test

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to describe materials existing in structure and written expression in ITP TOEFL test and parts which are difficult for students when they answer the questions and it explains why they make some errors in answering the questions too. TOEFL books, questionnaire, and interview became the data source of this research. This research randomly took 30 students who had finished their TOEFL preparation class as the subject. The results of this research are that there are nine materials that must be mastered by students in mastering structure and written section; 1) sentence 2) Subject and verb agreement, 3) noun, 4) verb form, 5) dependent clauses, 6) coordinate conjunction, 7) inversion, 8) comparison degree, 9) word order, and the three most difficult parts are subject verb agreement, dependent clauses, and inversion. The common mistake done in answering questions is that they are not careful enough with the sentence's structure and they have not known some uncommon structure yet, especially in inversion and dependent clauses (reducing, omitting, and abridgment)

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INTRODUCTION

English becomes the most widely used in the world now and it has great effect on our life both in education in work. Lately, having the English ability either spoken or written has become one of the requirements in enrolling universities and job placement. In measuring the English ability, a proficiency test is highly needed. Proficiency tests are done to show overall ability in the language, they show us on how capable a person in specific area (Madsen, 1983). There are some common proficiency tests that are easily found in Indonesia; IELTS (International English Language Testing System), TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication, and

TOEFL (Test of English as a foreign Language). In fact, TOEFL is probably the most often used in the admission process of foreign students to college and university in the United States (Pyle and Munoz, 1985) and the purpose of TOEFL is indicating the English proficiency of a person to universities (U.S. and Canada) and to government and other agencies for placement of students in universities (Madison, 1983). TOEFL has lately commonly used in work as one of the employer requirements in our country.

To reach the passing grade that is needed, students must have the preparation before having the test. One of the preparations is knowing the materials that are commonly

found in questions of TOEFL. There are three sections in TOEFL test; listening, structure and written expression, and reading. This research will focus on structure section only. In accordance with the background, the problems of the research were stated as follow:

1. What are the materials in structure and written expression section in TOEFL?
2. What is the most difficult material in structure section faced by the students?

Brown (2004) said that a test was a method to measure a students' ability, knowledge, or performance in a given domain while Heaton (1991) said that teaching and learning were so closely interrelated that is impossible to work in either field without being constantly concerned with other. It can be said that a test might be made as the way to reinforce learning and motivate students or primarily as a means of assessing the students' ability in a language. There are four test based on types of information; proficiency test, achievement test, diagnostic test, and placement test.

TOEFL becomes the most often used examination in the admission process of foreign students in college and universities in the United States. It is known that there are three kinds of TOEFL. They are paper – based test (PBT), computer-based test (PBT), and internet-based test (IBT). PBT is commonly used in Indonesia in admission process in both universities and works. There are three sections in paper – based test (PBT) model. They are listening comprehension, structure and written expression, and reading comprehension, whose question model is multiple choices (Longman, 1996).

There are 140 questions found in PBT of TOEFL. 50 questions are in listening section divided into 3 parts, and 40 questions are in structure and written section divided into two parts, while 50 questions are found in

reading section. Structure and written section becomes the most difficult part because there are many materials that must be mastered by the students to answer questions correctly.

METHOD

This research has the descriptive design. This design tried to describe the phenomenon. Borg (1983) stated that the descriptive is primarily concerned with finding out “what is”. The subject of this research is 30 students who have joined TOEFL preparation class.

The data was gotten from the library research and questionnaire. The questionnaire was given to the subject to know what the most difficult material that they faced in TOEFL test was. In addition, interview was done to find some reason why they chose that material to become the most difficult one.

RESEARCH FINDING

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

- a. Materials found in structure and written section
Based on the library research that was done from some books about TOEFL preparation, the materials that always exist in structure and written section are:

1. Sentence

Based on the Wikipedia, sentence is a set of words that is complete in itself, typically containing a subject and a predicate. Subject can be formed by these kinds of formation. They are:

- a. Noun

A word (other than a pronoun) used to identify any of a class of people, places, or things (common noun), or to name a particular, for example: book, laptop, happiness, fear, reformation, growth.

- b. Pronoun

A word that can function by itself as a noun phrase and that refers either to the participants in the discourse or to someone or something mentioned

elsewhere in the discourse, for example: I, you, he, she, we, they, it.

- c. Noun phrase
Noun phrase is a phrase whose head is noun, for example: your great father, the amazing sky, a stolen car, our high TOEFL score.
- d. Gerund
Gerund is a verb whose function is as a noun by adding an-ing ending. For example: playing, dancing, traveling, going, indicating.
- e. To infinitive
To infinitive is a verb that is added *to* in front of that verb. For example: to play, to dance, to travel, to go, to indicate.
- f. Noun clause
Noun clause is a dependent clause that acts as a noun. Noun clauses begin with words such as *how, that, what, whatever, when, where, whether, which, whichever, who, whoever, whom, whomever, and why.*

Something that must be remembered here is that there will be no double subject or double verb in a sentence without conjunction.

- 2. Subject and verb agreement
Subject-verb agreement includes matching the subject with the correct form of a verb. In this case, there are theories that are commonly found.
 - a. Subject and verb separated by adverbial phrase
Some keys on the table are mine.
The corruption level of some countries is high.
 - b. Subject and verb separated by appositive comma
My father, along with his friends, is entering the hall.
Phenomena, happened in some cities, are because of human being.
 - c. Inversion case
Among students are the girls who come from Canada.
- 3. Noun form

In TOEFL test, there are some types of questions about noun. They are:

- a. Singular and plural
A singular noun names one person, place, thing, or idea, while a plural noun names more than one person, place, thing, or idea. There are a few basic rules to remember when it comes to turning a singular noun into a plural noun.
When noun phrase begun with *a, an, every, or each*, the following noun should be in singular form. On the other hand, when noun phrase begun with *several, many, some, various, or both*, the following noun should be in plural form.
- b. Countable and countable form
Countable nouns (or count nouns) are those that refer to something that can be counted. They have both singular and plural forms, for example *cat-cats, book-books, teacher-teachers* while some uncountable nouns do not have singular or plural noun, for example: *water, growth, sugar, knowledge.*
- c. Irregular noun
Irregular noun is a noun that becomes plural by changing its spelling in other ways than adding an “s” or “es” to the end of the word. This change can happen in a variety of ways, for example: *mouse – mice, child – children, phenomenon – phenomena.*

- 4. Verb form
There are some verb forms found in English grammar. They are simple form, past form, present participle, and past participle.

- a. After *be* and *have/has/had*

	Followed by
Be (is, am , are, was, were, been)	Present participle (active sentence)
	Past participle (passive)

	sentence)
	To infinitive (modal auxiliary)
Have/has/had	Past participle (perfect tense)
	To infinitive (modal auxiliary)
Being / having	Past participle

b. Tenses

We sometimes find words underlined in verb form. We can know if that is correct or not by checking the tenses known from the time signal.

Time signal	Tenses
By (followed by adverb of time)	Past perfect
In (followed by year) ago Last Yesterday	Simple past
Lately Recently	Present perfect
For Since	Present perfect / past perfect

The problem rises when there is no time signal in the question. When it happens, we should check if it is scientific or history. When it is scientific, use simple present and when it is history, use simple past.

5. Dependent clauses

There are three dependent clauses in English grammar. They are:

a. Adjective clause

This clause is used to modify noun put before the conjunction.

b. Noun clause

This clause has a function as a noun. It can be placed as subject, object, or after preposition.

c. Adverbial clause

This clause has a function as an adverb. It can be placed in the beginning of sentence using comma, after intransitive verb, after adjective, adverb, or noun.

6. Coordinative conjunction or parallelism

This conjunction is to make the sentences parallel. For, and, nor, but, or, yet, so are used in parallel structure. Besides those conjunctions, both... and..., not only... but also, neither nor ..., either ... or are often used too.

7. Inversion

Inversion is the changing arrangement of subject verb into verb subject. There two kinds of inversion; partial inversion and full inversion.

8. Comparison degree

It is used to compare two things or more. There are three types of comparison degree; positive degree, comparative degree, and superlative degree.

9. Word order

It explains how words are put or arranged correctly. It consists of two parts; modifier and head.

b. The most difficult material in structure and written expression in TOEFL test

This data was gotten from questionnaire distributed randomly to 30 students who had joined TOEFL preparation class. They were asked to tick the most difficult one for them when they faced the test. Then, here is the result:

- 12 students chose inversion as the most difficult one.
- 8 students decided to choose dependent clause as the most difficult.
- 10 students stated that subject verb agreement was the most difficult for them.

Casual interview was done to know some problems faced by students in

understanding those difficult materials. Here is the result of the interview:

1. Inversion

Students stated that this material was difficult because it has an unfamiliar sentence form. Common sentence consists of subject and verb and inversion will place verb before its subject. Since students are not familiar with this kind of form, they tend to make some mistakes in answering the questions related to the topic.

2. Dependent clause

Students said that it was quite difficult to answer the questions related to the topic because there are so many conjunctions in dependent clauses and each clause has its

own rules in writing and form. Some students know the simple form of those clauses and they do not know the form of reducing, omitting, or abridgment form of those clauses.

3. Subject Verb Agreement

Students said that they made some errors in answering question related to this topic because they were not careful. They knew the material but they did not apply it well on the questions.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

on the research finding and discussion explained in the previous part, it can be concluded that, at least, there are nine materials which must be mastered by students in structure and written expression section. They are 1) sentence 2) Subject and verb agreement, 3) noun, 4) verb form, 5) dependent clauses, 6) coordinate conjunction, 7) inversion, 8) comparison degree, 9) word order. For the students, there are three most difficult materials when they try to answer questions of TOEFL test. Those are inversion, dependent clauses, and subject verb agreement. They are difficult for students because they have unique form which is uncommon for the students. In addition, students still get confused to answer questions based on the theories they have got.

With the conclusion given, some suggestions can be drawn as followed. Since this research only focused on structure and

written expression, other researchers may be able to make a research of TOEFL test in complete sections discussed or a research can be done using a different TOEFL type (IBT or CBT). Students should learn more about the materials existing in TOEFL test so that they can apply what they have learnt on the questions. Besides materials given, students need to have an extra practice to make them accustomed to answering TOEFL test, especially in structure and written expression section.

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