

Fourth Grade Students' Difficulties in Understanding Javanese Language Text

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Abstract: Javanese language is a mandatory local subject in Central Java Province, Indonesia. Javanese language is also a mother tongue that should be well understood by students. However, all the students involved in the study stated that the Indonesian language (national language) is easier than the Javanese language. One of their difficulties is understanding Javanese language texts. This study is a qualitative descriptive study that aims to describe: (1) difficulties faced by students in understanding the Javanese language texts, (2) factors causing the difficulties, and (3) efforts that have been done by the teacher to overcome the difficulties. Ninety-three students and three teachers from three primary schools involved in the study. Observations, tests, questionnaires, and interviews were used as data collection techniques. The data obtained were analyzed with interactive technique where the data is collected, reduced, verified, and presented. Results of the study showed that: (1) students have difficulties in: recalling and understanding new vocabularies, making predictions of reading content based on reading contexts, determining key ideas, theme, conclusion, and moral values from the text, (2) factors causing the difficulties are the differences in the application of Javanese language at school and at their daily life, as well as the lack of Javanese language lesson hours, and (3) there still haven't been specific strategies used by teachers to improve reading comprehension of Javanese language texts.

1 INTRODUCTION

A mother tongue can be defined as a language learnt before any other languages have been learnt (Indriyani, Ngatman and Joharman, 2014). From this definition it can be said that Javanese is the mother tongue for almost all students in Central Java, Indonesia. Javanese is a language used by Javanese ethnic that spreads almost in all parts of Indonesia. The current estimated number of speakers of Javanese is 84.3 million (Cohn and Ravindranath, 2014). However, even a language with over 80 million speakers can be at risk (Cohn and Ravindranath, 2014). Javanese language speaker continue to decline. In 1980, 40.44% of the Indonesian population speak Javanese and declined to 34.70% in 2000. In the other side, Indonesian speaker increased rapidly from 11.93% in 1980 to 34.00% in 2000 (Montolalu and Suyadinata, 2007).

Minister of National Education in the opening of the Fourth Javanese Language Congress in 2006 in Semarang revealed that currently, Javanese language is threatened with extinction due to abandoned

speakers as the result of globalization and technological developments (Utari, 2013). Javanese is only used in informal situations and rarely or even never used in formal situations. Prior to 1990, Javanese was used as medium of instruction in the first three grades of primary school in Javanese-speaking areas. Since 1990, government has made a policy that Indonesian should be used as the formal language from kindergarten to university. However, another government's policy was promulgated in various forms. Between 1989 and 1993 Javanese had been allowed to reappear at schools, but as a taught subject rather than as the medium of instruction (Musgrave, 2014).

Since children were born, they are accustomed to see and hear Indonesian in every media, such as television, radio, or internet. Parents are also used to using Javanese as well as Indonesian language in daily life. Trias Yusuf, an expert in culture of Diponegoro University said that parents tend to educate their children in Indonesian or other foreign languages instead of Javanese (Kitnan, 2009). It means that Indonesian is acquired by children at

almost the same time as their mother tongue (Maryanto, 2008).

The current language policy promotes Indonesian as the most important medium of instruction, even in the territories where the ethnic language is more appropriate (Alwasilah, 2013). The rarely use of Javanese language makes students' ability in Javanese is also very low. It is also stated that a language will be gradually "deprived" if it is less used in educational, political, and other public situations (Purwoko, 2011). Efforts to preserve local languages can be done through the education sector. Previous studies about Javanese language emphasized more on the use of Javanese language in certain communities and ignored the importance of teaching and learning at an elementary school level in order to preserve Javanese language. Indeed, preserving and introducing linguistic diversity and cultural pluralism to pupils, is vital (Harwati, et. al., 2016). Previous work by Setiawan (2012) and Nurmasari (2017) also shown that student's proficiency in Indonesian language (national language) is better than Javanese language (as their mother tongue).

The language of instruction used in school is Indonesian. The time allocation for Javanese lessons in elementary school is only two hours per week. Students complain about the difficulty of Javanese because what they learn in class is very different with the Javanese they used every day. Vocabularies in the Javanese language textbooks are also unfamiliar for them. One of the main difficulty that prevented them from learning Javanese was a low comprehension of Javanese language texts.

Comprehension is a process in which readers make meaning by interacting with text through the combination of prior knowledge and previous experience, information in the text, and the views of readers related to the text (Gilakjani and Sabouri, 2016). Subject matter in the Javanese text in the fourth grade, like geguritan (Javanese poetry), puppet story of Yudhistira, and nonsastra texts about tradition are rarely they hear in everyday life, so that it is difficult to get an understanding of what they read. Good reading ability is very important to be mastered by students so that they are able to gain a deeper understanding of Javanese lesson subject matter.

This study aims to describe: (1) difficulties faced by students in understanding the Javanese text, (2) factors causing the difficulties, and (3) efforts that have been done by the teachers to overcome the difficulties.

2 METHODS

This research is a descriptive qualitative study. Ninety-three fourth graders and three teachers from three primary schools were involved in the study. This research was conducted in Central Java, Indonesia in the first semester of 2017/2018 academic year. Researchers working with teachers to determine the text used in the learning activities for eight meetings in each school (eight weeks). In order to gain a deeper understanding of students' difficulties in understanding Javanese language text, researchers also act as teacher.

Observation, test, questionnaire, and interview were used as data collection techniques. Participatory observation was used during the learning process and interesting things were recorded. Essay tests was used to check students' understanding of the text content and specified the difficulties. Interview with students were used to determine their views of Javanese texts and the causes of their difficulties in understanding Javanese texts. Respondents were chosen purposively according to the need. Interviews with teachers were conducted to determine the efforts that teachers have made to improve students' reading comprehension skills. The data collected then reduced, verified, and presented.

3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Many difficulties faced by students in understanding the Javanese language texts. Before it is discussed one by one it is necessary to know that the text learning material in this research is in accordance with the curriculum, there are Javanese poetry, puppet stories about Yudhistira, and the nonsastra text about tradition. The study was conducted for eight meetings. At each meeting there is one short text taught. Learning materials or texts during research activities are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Title of Javanese text used.

| Subject Matter | Text Title | Source of Text | Number of Words | Note |
|---|---|--------------------|-----------------|--|
| Javanese poetry with the theme of <i>Budi Pekerti</i> (character) | <i>Kentir ing Ombyak Majuning Jaman</i> (Drifted in the Waves of The Age Progress) | Student's Textbook | 134 | All texts have been consulted with Javanese linguists and then edited or summarized according to their suggestions, except for the poetry. |
| | <i>Wutah Gethku</i> ("My Blood Spilled", in Indonesia it is mean "My Country") | Internet | 88 | |
| | <i>Nalika Aku Pamit</i> (When I Asked Permission) | Student's Textbook | 72 | |
| Puppet Stories about Yudhistira | <i>Yudhistira, Ratu sing Ora Gelem Perang</i> (Yudhistira, the King Who Do Not Want to War) | Student's Textbook | 220 | |
| | <i>Ratu Amarta, Prabu Yudhistira</i> (King of Amarta, Prabu Yudhistira) | Student's Textbook | 251 | |
| Nonsastra Text about Tradition | <i>Tradhisi Resik Sendhang</i> (Cleaning Springs Tradition) | Student's Textbook | 244 | |
| | <i>Tradhisi Nyadran</i> (Nyadran Tradition) | Internet | 192 | |
| | <i>Tradhisi Ruwatan</i> (Ruwatan Tradition) | Internet | 263 | |

3.1 Difficulties Faced by Students in Understanding Javanese Texts

Students have many difficulties in understanding Javanese texts. First, the difficulties in recalling and understanding new vocabularies. Percentage of new vocabularies of the text presented in Figure 1. Number of vocabularies that no student has ever heard or that no student can answer the meaning are calculated and then compared to the total number of words. Apart from new vocabularies contained in this table, there are still many vocabularies that are considered difficult by most students.

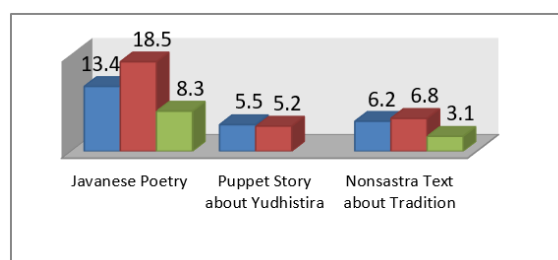


Figure 1: Percentage of difficult words.

From Figure 1 it appears that there are still many vocabularies that have not been known by the students. The most difficult text is Javanese poetry. According to the students, the language used in *geguritan* is an unusual language they hear. Many interesting things happen during the learning process. Based on the observations, in table II presented some examples of new vocabularies and students' predictions about the meaning after they read the text.

Table 2: Words meaning prediction by students.

| No. | Difficult Vocabularies | Student's Prediction | The Correct Meaning |
|-----|------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1 | <i>kentir</i> | Coquettish | Drifted |
| 2 | <i>kencana</i> | horse-drawn carriage | Gold |
| 3 | <i>kawentar</i> | advanced, free | Famous |
| 4 | <i>nyenyet</i> | Icy | Quiet |
| 5 | <i>labet</i> | labet bird | Serve |
| 6 | <i>bebaya</i> | Crocodile | Danger |

The data from Table 2 showed that students' prediction is very different with the real meaning. They have not been able to connect between words with the reading context. And it is their second difficulty to make predictions of reading content based on the reading context. For example, when students read *geguritan* entitled *Wutah Gethku* and then students were asked to write the meaning of *wutah getihku*, 68.8% of them answered "vomiting blood", 20% answered "war", while the rest answered "spilled blood". No one answers precisely that the meaning of *wutah getihku* is "my country" or "my homeland".

Many interesting things happen when teachers invite students to discuss content of the text. One teacher reveals that students often think differently with the teacher thinks, so it is often happening that students' answers make the class rowdy because the answer sounds like "humor". The teacher's expression is reinforced by an interesting

conversation between teacher and students, as shown in the following conversation.

- Teacher : *Aswatama iku anake Begawan ...?*
: *Aswatama is the child of Begawan ...?*
- Students : Solo
: Solo

In the above dialogue, the teacher asked open ended question about Aswatama who the son of Begawan Durna is. But some students answered Solo, while Solo is the name of the city and Bengawan Solo is the name of the famous river in that city. Some students answer spontaneously because they think that begawan (ascetic/noble) is tantamount to bengawan (river) and this shows that they have not been able to understand what they read. Students' mistaken also shown in the dialogue below.

Teacher : *Kembang iku bisa kanggo talirasa dukhita utawa sungkawa, contone nak ana pralaya, ana wong menehi kembang tulisane turut berduka cita utawa turut "berbela...."?*

: *Flowers can be a sign of grieving or condolence, for example if there is death, there are people who give flowers that say sorrow or "berbela"?*

- Students : bangsa
: nation

The dialogue shows that students also do not understand what they have read. In the text there is already a sentence that flowers can use for a sign of grief or condolence (*berbela sungkawa*). Some students, however, spontaneously answer about the nation's defense (*berbela bangsa*) because it is a phrase they often hear.

Teacher : *Punden iku panggonan sing dianggep kramat dening "para ..."?*

: *Punden is a place that is considered sacred by "para ..."?*

- Students : gapit
: gapit

In the above conversation the teacher actually meant is *para warga* (community). But a student responded with *para gapit* (division), while other students just silent. This indicates that the student only reveals what he thinks spontaneously without being able to relate with the content of the text.

Other students also do not understand the question of teachers because they just silent to hear the answer from his friend.

The next difficulty faced by students is the difficulty in determining the main ideas, themes, conclusions, and moral values of the reading. Students have difficulty determining the underlying idea because students do not understand the contents of the reading, so that students only write one sentence contained in the text without thinking whether it is the main idea or just explanation. Furthermore, when asked to determine the theme, students tend to write the theme according to the title of reading. For example, when students read the text entitled *Tradhisi Nyadran*, most students replied that the reading theme is "*tradhisi nyadran*", not "*tradition*" or "*culture*". Students are also less able to make inferences from the content of the reading. When asked to make a conclusion student tend to write down what they understand from the text or what they remember, and not the essence of the passage. And only few students that have been able to determine the moral values of reading such as honesty, love of the homeland, and so forth.

3.2 Factors Causing the Difficulties

There are several factors causing the lack of students' understanding to the Javanese text. First, Javanese language used by students every day is different from what they find in textbooks. Javanese lessons is much more complex with the subject matter that they rarely hear.

Second, students are accustomed to reading Indonesian texts and rarely read Javanese texts. There are many differences in the writing and pronunciation of Indonesian with Javanese. Students often read Javanese with pronunciation as in Indonesian, for example *kencana* is read *kencana* (a read like u in word "subject"), when it should be read "*kencono*" (o read like o in the word "wrong"). These difficulties in reading technique has a bad effect on their reading comprehension.

Another factor is the existence of speech level in Javanese, namely *ngoko* 'low' and *krama* 'high' which enable its speakers to show intimacy, deference, and hierarchy among the society members (Laksana, Suarsa, and Budiarsa, 2013). Four from eight Javanese language texts used in this study contain Javanese *krama*. Although in those text *krama* does not dominate but this still makes the students feel frustrated. *Krama* is usually used to speak with older people or talk to respected people. *Krama* is also used in certain traditional ceremonies,

such as Javanese traditional marriage. However, Javanese krama is now very rarely used, especially by children. All the students in this study were asked to fill out a questionnaire about the language they use every day at home and the data are presented in Figure 2.

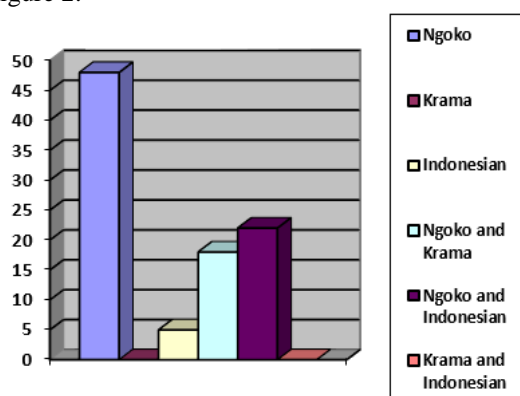


Figure 2: Language used by students at home.

From the data, it is clear that most students use Javanese variety of *ngoko* at home and no students speak only krama to their parents. There are even children who do not speak Javanese but Indonesian at home. Children who use *ngoko* and *krama* are interviewed and they reveal that *krama* language they used at home is very limited, for example *nggih* (yes) and *mboten* (no). Therefore, when they found text that contains Javanese krama they feel that it is very difficult.

3.3 Teachers Efforts to Overcome the Difficulties

Javanese language lesson is only two hours per week, while the subject matter of Javanese language is very complex. Skills that must be mastered by students not only reading, but also speaking, listening, and writing. This makes pressure for teachers. Teachers are more emphasis on the delivery of the subject matter rather than teaching specific reading skills. So far there has been no specific strategy used by teachers to help the students having good reading technique.

4 DISCUSSIONS

Many difficulties faced by students in understanding Javanese texts. A specific strategy is needed to improve students' ability in understanding the text. Blanch, et. al., (2012) suggest some strategies such

as scaffolding, modeling, thinking aloud, direct instruction or guided participation to encourage pupils to achieve better reading comprehension and the processes of self-regulation. Furthermore, Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) also suggested several strategies to improve reading comprehension, such as activating and using background knowledge, generating and questioning, inferencing, predicting, summarizing, visualizing, and comprehension monitoring.

There are many other strategies that can be used. However, the allocation of Javanese lesson time which is only two hours per week will be an obstacle for teachers because of the amount of material they have to convey besides teaching the reading skill. Based on his research, Fauzi (2012) stated that the government have to provide the javanese language subject not only two hours in one week but more than it.

Student's difficulties of reading in their own mother tongue become a concern. Indonesian is a nationalist symbol while local languages are cultural symbols (Alwasilah, 2017). So, it's important to keep students understand their own language and culture. One important factor for the revitalization of regional languages is either local pride or ethnic identity (Purwoko, 2011). Parents should instil pride in the identity of the child as the son of the region and the son of the nation. While in school, language education should provide students with ability to write in ethnic, national and foreign language (Alwasilah, 2017).

5 CONCLUSIONS

A specific strategy is needed to improve students' ability to understand Javanese language text. Parents at home have to introduce Javanese culture and grow their children's pride to local culture so that when they read the textbook they already have prior knowledge which is very important to understand the text. Teachers should be very keen in choosing a reading strategy because of the limited time they have. The government needs to review time allocation for Javanese language lesson. Finally, further study of appropriate strategies in improving students' understanding of Javanese texts is required.

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