
The Students' Learning of English Sonnets' Structures and Sounds

Ariya Jati*, Retno Wulandari

Diponegoro University, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the English sonnets' structures and sounds discussed in lectures. The scarcity of a practical reference for the study of this distinctive poetic expression in English literature underlies the need for this research. The long-term objective of this research is the availability of a study plan regarding the structures and sounds, with a specific one in the form of teaching material about the English sonnets' elements. The method used in this study is a classroom action research, with the data collecting using classroom observation, and the data processing using qualitative data analysis. The research activities include direct observation of the learning; questionnaire distribution; and data processing. The analysis produces the stages in discussing the sonnets' structures and sounds. These stages can be developed into a teaching material, which will be useful for the learning of English literature, especially English poetry.

ARTICLE INFO

Paper type:

Research Article

Article history:

Received: 26 February 2020

Revised: 10 April 2020

Accepted: 12 April 2020

Keywords:

- English sonnets
 - Poetic structures
 - Poetic sounds
 - Classroom action research
-

1. Introduction

The learning of the English sonnets' structures and sounds requires a reference in order to achieve the expected learning competence. The reference to the learning of the sonnets' elements is needed because studying the sonnets' elements is as important as studying other elements of the sonnets. A sonnet is structured of a number of stanzas, and each stanza is structured of a number of lines. When "(w)e write a line and then try to compose another to match it. However, we compose a whole stanza and see how many such stanzas we can devise in order to complete the poem" (Fenton, 2002: 23). The lines and stanzas become part of the structure; the structure becomes inseparable from the sonnet. Therefore, learning the structure is important for learning the sonnet, and references for the learning of the structure are needed for learning the sonnet.

Reference for the learning of sounds in the sonnet in English literature is also needed. The reference is naturally implanted individually. It is worth mentioning here that "(t)he hearing-knowledge we bring to a line of poetry is a knowledge of patterns in speech we have known to hear since we were infants" (Pinsky, 1998: 5). Learning the sounds in the sonnet is learning speech patterns. The speech patterns have been learned since childhood, so the sound elements can be learned according to the learning of the speech pattern. This is what makes the sound element feel attached to the learning of the sonnet. Because of that, the reference to the learning of the sound element is needed for the learning of the sonnet.

The inadequate reference for the learning of the sonnet became the research background in this study. The practical reference for learning is considered not enough. This inadequacy seems to be shared by many English teachers, including English for Specific Purpose (ESP) teachers. In one of her plenary speeches, she affirmed that, "I will argue that the literature on the topic of teachers and teaching in the ESP literature is limited. The vast majority of published studies in the ESP literature concern linguistic description" (Basturkmen, 2019: 319). Referring to the affirmation, the authors think that it is necessary to provide a reference for the students' learning.

E-mail Address: ariya.jati@live.undip.ac.id (Ariya Jati) rwulandari2004@yahoo.com (Retno Wulandari)

To this extent, the reference for learning the structures and the sounds in English sonnets has not yet been practically provided. Owing to the situation, the learning competence cannot be mentioned, so that the ability of students to identify the structures and the sounds in the sonnet cannot be properly demonstrated. On the one hand, the lecturer cannot teach materials about the structures and the sounds within coherent stages; on the other hand, students cannot study the materials in a directed manner. This situation is not ideal for a learning activity, including the learning of the structures and the sounds.

The unidyllic situation as described above is a problem for the learning of the structures and the sounds in English sonnets. The problem can be grouped into two, namely the problem concerning the structures, and that concerning the sounds in English sonnets. Furthermore, the problem concerning the structure includes poetic lines and poetic stanzas; and that which concerns the sounds includes rhythm, meter, and rhyme in the sonnets. These five problems are the problems that will be examined in this study. Specifically, this research is intended to describe the characteristics of the structures and the sounds in the English sonnets.

The eminence of this research lies in the practice of identifying the characteristics of the structures and the sounds in the English sonnets. The practice is designed to measure the ability of students to identify the characteristics mentioned above. The students' ability to measure is then used as a description of the learning reference. After the learning reference is described, the learning materials themselves can be prepared. In this case, the learning materials include poetic lines, poetic stanzas, poetic rhythm, poetic meter, and poetic rhyme in the English sonnets.

The targeted findings of this research will be the levels of the students' ability to identify the structures and the sounds in the English sonnets. The ability will cover the levels of poor, good enough, good, and very good in the identification of the structures and the sounds. The targeted output is the reference for the learning of the structures and the sounds. This reference includes the description; competence standards; and stages of the learning. These findings are expected to contribute to the amplification of the teaching of English language and literature, particularly in the course of Introduction to English Literature. The findings mentioned above are planned to be achieved in six stages. The six stages are preparation of research proposal; questionnaire writing; observation of classroom activities; research data processing; report writing; and seminars and publications. The description of the students' identification became the main objective in this study on why the writers chose the topic about the students' learning of the structures and the sounds in English sonnets.

2. Research Methods

The research in this study is designed with a triangulation, which is about "combining both qualitative and quantitative research" (Dawson, 2002:20). The research is concerned with the student learning, so it is appropriate to apply qualitative research. Likewise, the research is concerned with the number of correct answers from the students. The instrument which is used in the research is a questionnaire, and the data is collected from the students' answers, taking the students hereby as the subject in the research. The data is collected using a random purposive sampling technique, in which the students to be sampled come from four academic years (2015-2018) representing the study period for them. The data analysis technique involves numeric scoring and grade interpretation. The questionnaires are scored for the number of the correct answers before the number is interpreted according to each grade (poor, good enough, good, very good).

Sonnets have been studied mainly because of what they are concerned with. To begin with, the sonnets are more about the language rather than the country in which they are written. As a case of point of this is the Baugmaree sonnet, which "ascribes a transformative agency to the declaration of inherent generic Nunanal hybridity" (Chapman, 2014: 605). Although the sonnet was originally written by an Indian poet, it was elucidated that the sonnet resembles any of Italian sonnets. Then, the sonnets are written to express the poets' awe, but also their creeds. For example, John Donne is well known for his metaphysic poems. For him, "belief posits bodily consequences" (Coles, 2015: 905). It is no wonder that the sonnets he wrote are not only about the here world, but also about the thereafter.

Furthermore, the sonnets may concern the ruler's reign. The reign may concern customs which are authorized by the ruler. In this case,

the Victorian marriage functions as an image that holds together precisely the notions of dominance, erasure, and silencing that have been understood to inform the experience of female (and other disenfranchised groups') subjectivity (or, indeed, subjection) (Williams, 2009: 86)

Also in the era, poetic metrics were customized. With regards to the literary customs, “in the *Sonnets* Barrett Browning continued her use of odd rhymes, which had been raising critical eyebrows since earlier poems” (Morlier, 1999). The marriage designates an extrinsic aspect; whereas the metrics designate an intrinsic aspect of the customs which were under the reign of Queen Victoria. Last but not least, the sonnets may concern the future. For instance, “Berrigan’s *The Sonnets* was a significant and substantial achievement that opened up possibilities for a whole generation of writers” (Lopez, 2002: 281). The poet seems to have taught and prepared younger poets after him. The aforementioned matters with which the sonnets are concerned to have made the sonnets worth studying and this study of the structures and the sounds in English sonnets will only amplify the illustration of the sonnets’ value.

In the study, the students’ learning of the structure and sound elements in the sonnets must need help from course conveyers or lecturers. At this phase, the lecturers are expected to be committed to the teaching and learning of the sonnets.

To what extent can teacher commitment predict student learning outcomes given a small, medium, and large bias towards students whose teachers have a higher affective commitment than their colleagues? (Moodie and Meerhoff, 2019:1).

English is the language in which the sonnets were written. Since English is a foreign language for Indonesian students, helping the students learn the sonnets can be a tough challenge. One lecturer comments on the English proficiency of his Indonesian university students.

My students at the teachers’ college in Indonesia had very a limited command of English, and as I was writing for them, I had to make sure that difficult language did not get in the way of the ideas I was trying to describe (Nation, 2018:140).

The situation needs discussion so as to enable effectiveness in the lecturers’ teaching and the students’ learning of the sonnets. Because this study is focused on the students, it needs to carry out research on their learning of the sonnets.

In the field of research, classroom action research has a number of characteristics, namely the presence of classroom practitioners; collaboration; and change. Educational action research, according to Nunan and Bailey, “(1) is carried out by classroom practitioners; (2) is collaborative in nature; and (3) is aimed at bringing about change” (2009: 228). The research which the writers conducted has also similar characteristics. First, the writers engage themselves as researchers in the classrooms. Second, the writers collaborate with their colleagues in conducting this research. Third, this research is carried out to bring about change, namely to describe the reference for the learning so that there will be an increase in the quality of learning and teaching activities, especially regarding the structure and sound elements in English sonnets.

The sonnets are to be used in the classroom action research to be studied as learning materials. This study aims to determine how learning by using the sonnets as the learning materials is in accordance with the syllabus or learners’ needs. With regard to the use of the sonnets, Lazar pinpoints that

How does the use of a poem in class mesh with the requirements of the syllabus and the students’ perceptions of their own needs? Can the poem be exploited in such a way that both of these demands are met? (1993:128)

In this study, the sonnets as the learning materials are used to make a description of the reference for the students’ learning being carried out. Therefore, the use of sonnets in the learning is assessed agreeable with the semester study plan, specifically the reference for the learning.

The steps to describe the structure and the sound elements in this study can be described as in Figure 1 below. It can be seen that this study is designed to illustrate the ability of the students to identify the structures and the sounds in English sonnets. The identification starts with poetic lines, then poetic stanzas; both of which make up the identification of the structures. Then identification is continued with poetic rhythm, poetic meter, and poetic rhyme; all three make up the identification of the sounds. The five components complement each other to get a description of the students’ ability to identify the structures and the sounds in English sonnets.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Collecting the data

The population of this research is the students of the Department of English, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University. The students of the department study genres in English literature, namely essays, prose,

poetry, drama, and film. Including what they learn are elements of each genre of literary work. Therefore the elements of sonnets, which are one of the poetic forms in English literature, are also learnt.

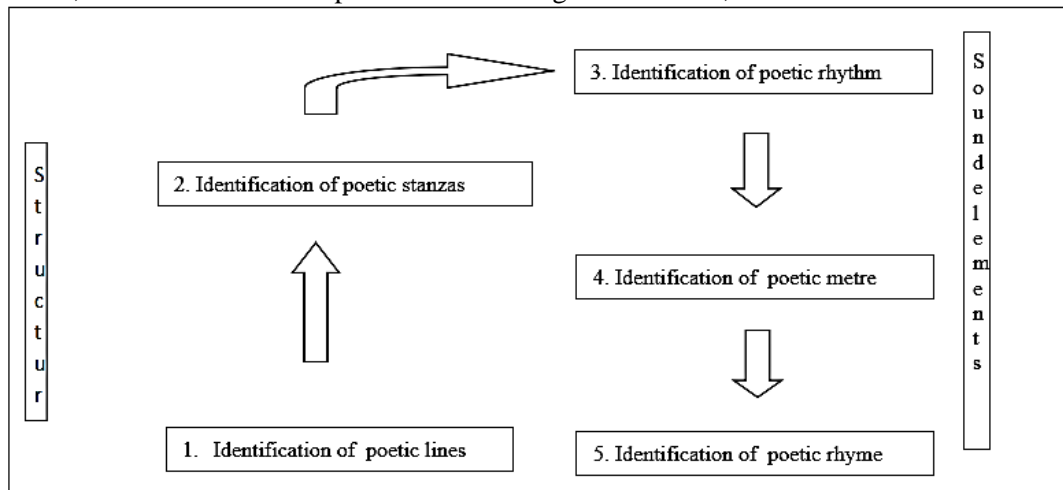


Figure 1. Steps for Learning the Structures and the Sound Elements in English Sonnets

The samples of this research are the students who are studying in semesters three, five, seven, and nine. The research was conducted in the odd semester so that the students could be used as research subjects. The number of students who were used as examples was one hundred. This amount is taken to symbolize a percentage. The technique used in sampling was purposive random sampling with questionnaire media. The students who were modeled were randomly selected; they were chosen to illustrate the purpose of this study, that is their learning of the structures and the sounds in English sonnets.

In the classroom practice, there are four stages in which this research was carried out. The research commenced when one hundred questionnaires were prepared for the study of the students' learning. Performing as the researchers, the writers were assisted by two other students than the hundred students. Then, the questionnaires were distributed to the students; that is, each student received one questionnaire. Soon after the instruction was read by the researches intermittently, the students were given sixty minutes to fill in the questionnaires. When the allocated time was through, the questionnaires were collected to be evaluated.

The questionnaires were composed of a list of questions about the structures and the sounds in English sonnets. The question items were set from general to specific aspects of the English sonnets, ranging from the most to the least noticeable features of the sonnets. The questions started with how the students should be able to differentiate the common structure of a poem from that of the other literary works (a novel or a play). The questions continued with how the students should be able to differentiate the common structure of a sonnet from that of any other poetic structures (a couplet, a triplet, or a quatrain). In addition, the questions inquired how the students should be able to classify whether a sonnet belonged to a Petrarchan or Shakespearean sonnet. In this regard, the students were asked to notice how the Petrarchan and the Shakespearean sonnet are structured; and, they were asked to notice how the line-ending words in each of the sonnets rhymed. Finally, the questions inquired how the students should also be able to notice features of other sonnet types than the aforementioned ones.

There are twenty questions describing the students' ability to answer correctly. The total correct answer of a student will classify their learning of the structures and the sounds in English sonnets into four levels denoting how well they have learned the structures and the sounds. The fewest correct answers will be classified as "Poor"; whereas the most correct answers will be classified as "Very good", with "Good" and "Good enough" ranges in between the two contradictory levels in descending order.

The questions in each of the questionnaires were set to inquire in a particularizing order. The questions were grouped into seven topics, and each topic contains three to four questions. For each topic, the students are instructed to identify the structures and the sounds in English sonnets, ranging from the most identifiable to the least identifiable feature in the sonnets. In the first topic group, the students were inquired about the structuring of a sonnet, asking into which literary genre a text structure should be classified; into which poetic structure the text should be classified; and into which sonnet type the text should be classified. In the second topic group, the students were inquired about the distinctive features in Petrarchan sonnets, asking the poetic structure and rhyme

scheme in the Petrarchan sonnets. In the third topic group, the students were inquired about the distinctive features in Howardian sonnets, asking the poetic structure and rhyme scheme in the Howardian sonnets. In the fourth topic group, the students were inquired about the distinctive features in Shakespearean sonnets, asking the poetic structure, the rhyme scheme, and the rhythm pattern in the Shakespearean sonnets.

In the fifth topic group, moreover, the students were inquired about the distinctive features in Spenserian sonnets, asking the poetic structure, and the rhyme scheme in the Spenserian sonnets. In the sixth topic group, the students were inquired about the distinctive features in English sonnets in general, asking the rhyme scheme and stanza form in the sonnets. In the last topic group, the students were inquired to identify types of poetic lines in a stanza, ranging from a couplet; triplet; quatrain; sestet; and octave.

3.2 Interpreting the data

The order of the topic groups is not essentially related to the quality of the students' learning of the structures and the sounds in English sonnets. The order does not describe the students' ability to identify the features of the structures and the sounds. The ability is designated by the number of correct answers in each of the questionnaires. The number correlates learning competence. In other words, the competence of each student who made the least correct answers would be qualified as "Poor"; whereas that of the student who made the most correct answers would be qualified as "Very good", putting the remaining two other students' levels of competence into "Good enough" and "Good" subsequently.

Resulting from the evaluation of the questionnaires, the learning of the structures and the sounds come as follows:

Poor	: 1 students
Good enough	: 22 students
Good	: 66 students
Very good	: 10 students

The questions seem to illustrate how the structures and the sounds become valuable in the study of English sonnets. The structures and the sounds designate the subject matters which the sonnets are concerned with, namely language, style, and pattern. To begin with, this study is centered around the language in which the sonnets were written, regardless of the nationality of the poets. In this matter, Francesco Petrarch was an Italian poet; however, the questionnaire includes the Italian poet because he wrote his sonnet in English. Besides that, this study is about the particular way in which each of the poets wrote his sonnet in the questionnaire. In this matter, Petrarch structured his sonnet with an octave and a sestet; whereas Howard structured his sonnet in twelve lines plus two lines. With regard to the poetic structures, Shakespeare composed his sonnets with three quatrains and a couplet, and so did Spenser. By the same token, Petrarch structured his sonnet in abba abba cde cde; Spenser structured his sonnet in abab bcbc cdcd ee. With regard to the poetic rhyme, Shakespeare structured his sonnet in abab cdcd efef gg, and so did Howard. It is noticeable from the questionnaire that Shakespeare and Spenser structured their poetic lines similarly; in addition, Shakespeare and Howard structured their poetic rhyme similarly, too.

Furthermore, this study is centered around the style in which the sonnets were written. The poetic structure of each of the sonnets may easily designate the writing style of each poet. The Petrarchan sonnet was structured of an octave and a sestet, but the Howardian sonnet was structured of twelve and two lines. Conversely, the Shakespearean and the Spenserian sonnet were structured of three quatrains and a couplet. Even so, the Shakespearean and the Spenserian did not rhyme similarly; the Shakespearean sonnet rhymed similarly to the Howardian sonnet. Whereas the rhyme scheme of the Petrarchan sonnet was akin to none of the aforementioned. In other words, each poet might have slight similarity in his manner of writing the sonnet; yet, he wrote the sonnet exclusively so that his sonnet writing would assign his individual literary work. Thus, the sonnet depicts the poet's writing style.

Last but not least, this study is centered around the pattern in which the sonnets were written with regard to the structures and the sounds in them. It can be observed that the Petrarchan sonnet has the most distinctive pattern in the questionnaire: the sonnet was structured and structured exclusively, rhyming abba abba cde cde in an octave and a sestet solely. The other three sonnets are patterned partially on common ground. Structured similarly to the Spenserian sonnet, the Shakespearean sonnet, however, rhymed similarly to the Howardian sonnet. In this sense, the Spenserian sonnet and the Howardian sonnet were structured and structured differently from each other.

Help would become a pivotal word in the students' learning of the structures and the sounds in the English sonnets. Indeed, the students are naturally in need of help to identify the peculiarities of the structures and the sounds. Referring to the situations which the students had, their learning needs help in the form of commitment and encouragement. Owing to the situations which are mentioned earlier in this chapter, the students initially need the commitment of the course conveyor or the lecturer to help them with the identification of the sonnets, from the outset to the inside of the structures and the sounds. Then, the students need the lecturer's encouragement to dwell further in the English language to study the English work of literature.

The classroom action research, within which the students' learning was described in this study, was conducted in accordance with Nunan and Bailey's concept of the characteristics of classroom action research, namely the presence of researchers, collaboration, and change. Firstly, both of the writers as the researchers were present in the classroom where they conducted their research. The writers involved themselves from the beginning to the ending stage of the research, starting from preparing the questionnaires, distributing them, observing the students responding to the questionnaires, and collecting the questionnaires. Secondly, both of the writers worked jointly on the research. The joint work also involved the two students as the research assistants and the hundred students as the research participants. Together they performed the classroom action research. Lastly, the research was intended to bring about change in the students' ability to identify the structures and the sounds in English sonnets. The ability would describe the students' learning of the sonnets, and their learning would designate the significance of teaching the elements in English sonnets to the students of the Department of English, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University.

4. Conclusions

The adjective 'Poor' designates that the students have been able to distinguish poetic forms from other English literary forms, such as fiction and drama. This research shows that the ability to differentiate the poetic forms from the other literary forms belongs to only a few students. Besides, the adjective 'Good enough' designates that, in addition to the aforementioned ability, the students have been able to differentiate sonnets from other poetic forms. This research shows that the ability to differentiate the sonnets from the other poetic forms belongs with quite many students

The adjective 'Good' designates that the students have been able to differentiate the structure and the sound elements in Shakespearean sonnets from those in Petrarchan sonnets. This study shows that the ability to differentiate the structure and the sound elements in between the sonnets belongs to the highest number of students. Last but not least, the adjective 'Very Good' shows that the students have been able to differentiate the structures and the sound elements in Shakespearean and Petrarchan sonnets from other forms of sonnets. This study shows that the ability to differentiate the structure and the sound elements in Shakespearean and Petrarchan sonnets from other forms belongs to a small number of students.

This study clearly shows that the adjective 'Good' dominates the questionnaires about the learning of the structures and the sounds in English Sonnets. This adjective may indicate that the learning, which has so far taken place, can be said to be good. The students have been able to differentiate the structures and the sounds in Shakespearean sonnets from those in Petrarchan sonnets.

The classroom action research is deemed useful for the students of how their learning of the structures and the sounds in the English sonnets could be valuable for their study, especially on English literature. The students should notice by then that the English sonnets contain the distinctive features of language, style, and pattern. Needless to say, the research on the students' learning is worth this study because there were researchers, collaboration, and change present in its practice.

This study, in all, would like to suggest that English sonnets should be taught to the students of the Department of English, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University since the first semester. The teaching may be given in the course of Introduction to English Literature, specifically in topics that discuss the basic structure of sonnets which differentiates it from other poetic structures in English literature. In addition, the structures and the sounds in English sonnets need to be taught to the students of the Department of English, Faculty of Humanities, Diponegoro University in the third and fifth semester, namely in the courses of English Poetry and Contemporary English Poetry. The teaching given includes the structures and the sounds in Shakespearean sonnets, Petrarchan sonnets, and other forms of sonnets.

References

- Basturkmen, H. (2019). ESP teacher education needs. *Language Teaching*, 52(3) 318–330. Doi:10.1017/S0261444817000398.
- Chapman, A. (2014). Internationalizing the sonnet: Toru Dutt's "Sonnet—Baugmaree. *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 42(3), 595-608. Doi: 10. 1017/S1060150314000163.
- Coles, K. A. (2015). The matter of belief in John Donne's holy sonnets. *Renaissance Quarterly*, 68, 899-931. Retrieved from <https://www.cambridge.org/core>. Universitas Diponegoro, on 7 Feb 2020.
- Dawson, C. (2002). *Practical research methods*. Oxford: How To Books Ltd.
- Fenton, J. (2002). *An introduction to English poetry*. London: Viking.
- Lazar, G. (1993). *Literature and language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lopez, T. (2002). "Powder on a Little Table": Ted Berrigan's sonnets and 1960s poems. *Journal of American Studies*, 36(2), 281–292. Doi: 10.1017/S0021875802006849.
- Moodie, I., & Meerhoff, L. A. (2019). Using mock data to explore the relationship between commitment to English language teaching and student learning. *Language Teaching*, 53(1), 121–123. Doi:10.1017/S0261444819000399.
- Morlier, M. M. (1999). *Sonnets from the Portuguese and the politics of rhyme*. *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 27(1), 97–112. Retrieved from <https://www.cambridge.org/core>. Universitas Diponegoro, on 7 Feb 2020.
- Nation P. (2018). Keeping it practical and keeping it simple. *Lang. Teach*, 51(1), 138–146. Doi:10.1017/S0261444817000349.
- Nunan D, & Kathleen, M. B. (2009). *Exploring second language classroom research*. Boston: Heinle.
- Pinsky R. (1998). *The sounds of poetry*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.
- Willias, R. (2009). "Our Deep, Dear Silence": Marriage and lyricism in the *sonnets from the Portuguese*. *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 37(1), 85–102. Doi:10.1017/S1060150309090068.