The Methods of Defining Terms Found in Theses of the EFL Students

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Abstract: The study is intended to describe the methods of defining terms found in the theses of the English Foreign Language (EFL) students of IAIN Palangka Raya. The method to be used is a mixed method, qualitative and quantitative. Quantitative approach was used to identify, describe the frequencies, and classify the methods of defining terms. In interpreting and explaining the types of method to be used, the writer used qualitative approach. In qualitative approach, data were described in the form of words and explanation. The findings show that there were two methods of defining terms, dictionary approach and authoritative reference.

Keywords: *method, defining, concepts or terms, thesis*

Writers do not talk for themselves when making research. They have to talk to others, namely, readers about their research. Readers can be students, lecturers, researchers and so forth. These readers will read writers' key concepts or terms. In addition, readers will affect writer decision's what to write and how to write. In this context, Brown (2001:342) points out that writers need to be able to predict audiences' general knowledge, cultural and literacy schemata, specific subject matter, knowledge and very important, how their choice of language will be interpreted. Based on this perspective, language becomes one of the very important considerations that writers should have.

In terms of language, there are some concepts or terms that need to be defined because common terms or concepts may have different meanings to different readers. Creswell (1994:106) states that terms are defined so that readers can

understand the context in which the words are being used or their unusual or restricted meanings. In that way, the writer can define precisely what they mean or intend through the words or phrases they emphasize in research. If readers can understand some terms that are used by writers, this means that writers are successful in communicating their concepts or terms to readers. If readers cannot understand some terms that are used by writers, this means that writers are unsuccessful in communicating their concepts or terms to readers.

Commonly, defining terms is an important part of scholar work for university students. Even defining terms is included in handbooks for writing theses in some universities and colleges. Considering the importance of defining terms in theses, the writer is interested in highlighting "The methods of defining terms."

Different experts classify methods of defining terms differently. Mc.Crimon (1984:183-186) states that definitions may be classified as three types: short, stipulative, or extended. A *short* definition, like the definitions of *carcinoma*, *vintage*, and *prompter* above, explains a word by a brief identification of its meaning. This is the kind of definition that dictionaries provide.

Stipulates definitions, according to Mc.Crimon (1984:184), identify the particular meaning to be intended to use in writing. Because words may have several meanings, it is sometimes important to specify which meaning is being used in a particular passage. For example, in some parts of the United States the word *liberal* often has unfavorable connotations when applied to politician. So a candidate for political office, on being called a liberal, is likely to reply, "I am not a liberal," or maybe, "Yes, I am liberal, but only in the true sense of that word. I believe in the freedom of the individuals to think, speak, and act according to their consciences. That is what the word *liberal* originally meant – freedom and what it still means in reputable dictionaries." Here the candidate is making a stipulative definition by emphasizing one meaning to the exclusion of others. Provide that stipulative definitions are used to clarify an issue, not to obscure it; they are legitimate and useful means of defining. When the Supreme Court rules on how "due process of law" is to be interpreted, it is making a stipulative definition. It is saying in effect, "This is what process due process must mean in a court of law."

Mc.Crimon (1984:184) explains that *extended* definitions may include both *short*

and *stipulative* definitions, but they go far beyond both. They are essentially essays that seek to explain the writer's view of subject, something that cannot be done effectively in a short definition. An *extended* definition may begin with a dictionary definition, but it goes on to add to, modify, and illustrate that definition. In so doing, it may use any of the patterns of development discussed earlier in this chapter it may compare or contrast one meaning with another; it may classify the subject by showing to what class it belongs and what its subclasses are; it may provide illustrative examples; it may treat the subject as a process.

According to Fraenkel & Wallen (2006:30), there are essentially three ways to clarify important terms in a research question. The first is to use a *constitutive definition*, that is, to use what is often referred to as the *dictionary approach*. Researchers simply use other words to say more clearly what is meant. Thus, the term *humanistic classroom* might be defined as:

A classroom in which: (1) the needs and interest of students have the highest priority; (2) students work on their own for a considerable amount of time in each class period; and (3) the teacher acts as a guide and a resource person rather than an informant.

Notice, however, that this definition is still somewhat unclear, since the words being used to explain the term *humanistic* are themselves ambiguous. What does it mean to say that the "needs and interests of students have highest priority" or that "students work on their own"? What is a "considerable amount" of each class period? What does a teacher do when

acting as a “guide” or a “resource person”? Further clarification is needed.

Students of communication have demonstrated just how difficult it is to be sure that the message sent is the message received. It is probably true that no one ever completely understand meaning of terms that are used to communicate. That is, we can never be certain that the message we receive is the one the sender intended. Some years ago, one of the leaders in our field was said to have become so depressed by this idea that more constructive approach is simply to do the best we can. We must try to explain our terms to others. While most researchers try to be clear, there is no question that some do a much better job than others.

Fraenkel & Wallen (2006:30) point out that often it is a compound term or phrase that needs to be defined rather than only a single word. For example, the term *nondirective therapy* will surely not be clarified by precise definitions of *nondirective* and *therapy*, since it has a more specific meaning than the two words defined separately would convey. Similarly, such terms as *learning disability*, *bilingual education*, *interactive video*, and *home-centered health care* need to be defined as linguistic wholes.

Here are three definitions of the term *motivated to learn*. Which do you think is the clearest? (1) Work hard, (2) Is eager and enthusiastic, and (3) Sustains attention to a task.

As can be seen in the above example, the dictionary approach to clarifying terms has its limitations. A second possibility is to clarify by *example*. Researchers might think of a few humanistic classrooms with which they

are familiar and then try to describe as fully as possible what happens in these classrooms. Usually we suggest that people observe such classrooms to see for themselves how they differ from other classrooms. This approach also has its problems, however, since our descriptions may still not be as clear to others as they would like.

A third method of clarification, according to Fraenkel & Wallen (2006:30), is to define important terms operationally. Operational definitions require that researchers specify the actions or operations necessary to measure or identify the term. For example, here are two possible operational definitions of the term *humanistic classroom*. (1). Any classroom *identified* by specified expert as constituting an example of a humanistic classroom, (2). Any classroom *judged* (by an observer spending at least one day per week for four to five weeks) to possess all the following characteristics:

- a. No more than three children working with the same materials at the same time
- b. The teacher never spending more than 20 minutes per day addressing the class as a group
- c. At least half of every class period opens for students to work on projects of their own choosing at their own pace.
- d. Several (more than three) sets of different sets of different kinds of educational materials available for every student in the class use.
- e. Nontraditional seating – students sit in circles small grouping of seats, or even on the floor to work on their projects.

Frequent (at least two per week) discussion in which students are encouraged to give their opinions and ideas on topics being read about in their textbooks

- Terms that individuals outside the field of study may not understand
- Term that have multiple meanings
- Term that are essential to understanding what the study is about
- Terms to provide precision in specifications for instruments to be developed or located

The above listing of characteristics and behaviors may be a quite unsatisfactory definition of a humanistic classroom to many people. But it is considerably more specific (and thus clearer) than the definition with which we began.* Armed with this definition (and the necessary facilities), researchers could decide quickly whether or not a particular classroom qualified as an example of humanistic classroom.

Defining terms operationally is a helpful way to clarify their meaning. Operational definitions are useful tools and should be mastered by all students of research. Remember that the operations or activities necessary to measure or identify the term must be specified. Which of the following possible definitions of the term *motivated to learn mathematics* do you think are operational?

Ary, et al. (2006:38-39), classify the terms into: *constitutive definition* and *operational definition*. A *constitutive definition* is a formal definition in which a term is defined by using other terms. It is the dictionary type of definition. For example, *intelligence* may be defined as the ability to think abstractly or the capacity

to acquire knowledge. This type of definition helps convey the general meaning of a construct, but it is not precise enough for research purposes. The researcher needs to define constructs so that readers know exactly what is meant by the term and so that other investigators can replicate the research. An operational definition serves this purpose. An *operational definition* ascribes meaning to a construct by specifying operations that researchers must perform to measure or manipulate the construct. *Operational* definitions may not be as rich as *constitutive* definitions but are essential in research because investigators must collect data in terms of observable events. Scientist may deal on a theoretical level with such construct as learning, motivation, anxiety, or achievement, but before studying them empirically scientists must specify observable events to represent these constructs and the operations that will supply relevant data. An operational definitions serve this purpose.

Although investigators are guided by their own experience and knowledge and the reports of other investigators, the operational definition of a concept is to some extent arbitrary. In terms of sentence definitions, it provides some strategies which consist of strategy A, strategy B, strategy C, strategy D, strategy E, strategy F, strategy H, strategy I, strategy I, strategy J, strategy K, strategy L, strategy M, strategy N, and strategy O. They are explained as follows.

Strategy A: *means*

Homo habilis means handyman.

Strategy B: *which means that*

These patterns are *ritualized*, which means that the behavior which is stereotyped, exaggerated, and rigid is always performed in the same way so that its social significance is clear.

Strategy C: *is/are*

An environmental factor that increases the chances of a mutation is a *mutagen*.

Somatic mutations are mutations that affect the individual's body cells.

Strategy D: *called/ termed*

At the time of ejaculation sperm leaves the penis in a fluid called *seminal fluid*.

Strategy E: *refers to*

Morphogenesis refers to the shaping of the embryo and the first evident when certain cells are seen to move, or migrate, in relation to other cells.

Strategy F: *or*

In humans the *gestation period*, or length of pregnancy, is approximately nine months.

Strategy G: *insert with parentheses* (Either the definition or the word to be defined can be inserted.)

Viral infections can spread from the nasal cavities to the sinuses (sinusitis), to the middle ears

(*otitis media*), to the larynx (*laryngitis*), and to the bronchi (*bronchitis*).

Thus an ecosystem contains both a *biotic* (*living*) and *abiotic* (*nonliving*) environment.

Strategy H: *insert with dashes*

The human blastula, termed the blastocyst, consists of a hollow ball with a mass of cell--the inner cell mass--at one end.

Strategy I: *which/that/where*

Fraternal twins, which originate when two different eggs are fertilized by two different sperm, do not have identical chromosomes.

The grasslands of all continents support populations of *grazers* that feed on grasses and *browsers* that feed on shrubs and trees.

The region of the inguinal *canal*, where the spermatic cord passes into the abdomen, remains a weak point in the abdominal wall.

Strategy J: *because*

Hemophilia is called the bleeders disease because the afflicted person's blood is unable to clot.

Strategy K: *when*

When a mutagen leads to an increase in the incidence of cancer it is called a carcinogen.

Strategy L: *if*

If the thyroid fails to develop properly, a condition cretinism results.

Strategy M: *appositive*

Sperm are produce in the testes, but they mature in the epididymus, a tightly coiled tubule about twenty feet in length that lies just outside each testis.

Breathing consists of taking air in, inspiration, and forcing air out, expiration.

Certain specific phrases can also be used to point out words to be defined and thus indirectly introduce definitions.

Strategy N: *in the case of*

In the case of hyperthyroidism (too much thyroxin), the thyroid gland is enlarged and overactive, causing a goiter to form and the eyes to curiously produce.

Strategy O: *according to*

According to the Malthusian view, the depletion curve tells us that there are limits to growth and that we are rapidly approaching those limits

Sometimes a writer can assume that readers will be familiar with the Latin, Greek, or other root of a word. In this case the writer may just point to these definitions.

Strategy P: *as the name implies*

As their name implies monosaccharides are simple sugars with only one unit.

Finally, in a comparative definition, two or more terms are defined in part by comparison or contrast with each other. For these multiple definitions, writers rely on a great variety syntactic and stylistic strategies including the two illustrated below: (1) a series of phrases following either the main verb or a colon and (2) contrasting clauses beginning with words or phrases like *even though, in spite of, or whereas*. The various parts of the comparison are always grammatically parallel, that is, similar in form.

Strategy Q: *comparative*

The special senses include the chemoreceptors for taste and smell, the light receptors for sight, and the mechanoreceptors for hearing and balance.

Whereas a miscarriage is the unexpected loss of an embryo or fetus, an abortion is the purposeful removal of an embryo or ftus from womb.

The second type of defining terms is using *extended definitions*. Why this type is needed, according to Axelrod and Cooper

(1988: 469), rather than a brief sentence definition, a writer may need to go further and provide readers with a fuller definition extending over several sentences. Here, for example, is how Mark Twain defines a word he learned on a trip to New Orleans.

We picked up one excellent word – a word worth traveling to New Orleans to get; a nice limber, expressive, handy word – “lagniappe.” They pronounce it lanny-yap. It is Spanish – so they said. We discovered it at the head of a column of odds and ends in the Picayune, the first day; heard twenty people use it the second; inquired what it mean the third; adopted it and got facility in swinging it the fourth. It has a restricted meaning, but I think the people spread it out a little when they choose. It is the equivalent of the thirteenth roll in a “baker’s dozen.” It is something thrown in, gratis, for the good measure. The custom originated in the Spanish quarter of the city. When a child or a servant buys something in a shop – or even the mayor or governor, for aught I know – he finishes the operation by saying – “Give me something for lagniappe.”

The shopman always responds; gives the child a bit of licorice root, gives the servant a cheap cigar or a spool of thread; gives the governor – I don’t know what he gives the governor; support likely.

When you are invited to drink – and this does occur now and then

in New Orleans – and you say, “What, again? – no, I’ve had enough”; the other party says, “But just this one more time – this is for lagniappe.” When the beau perceives that he is stacking his compliments a trifle too high, and sees by the young lady’s countenance that the edifice would have been better with the top compliment left off, he puts his “I beg pardon – no harm intended, “into the briefer form of “Oh, that’s for lagniappe.” If the waiter in the restaurant stumbles and spills a gill of coffee down the back of your neck, he says, “For lagniappe, sah,” and gets you another cup without extra charge.

Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*

This extended definition relies on a variety of strategies – word history, personal experience, many examples, and even dialogue. In addition to explanation above, Cresswell (1994) adds a method of defining terms that can be used as well, namely, authoritative reference method. This means that the writers should sources which means that the sources should be reliable and credible (including author, publisher and content). In the context of defining terms method, the writers should use experts’ opinions or statements. Therefore, the current study was going to describe the methods of defining terms found in the theses of the English Foreign Language (EFL) students of IAIN Palangka Raya.

METHOD

There are two approaches to be used in the study, namely, quantitative and qualitative approaches. Creswell (2003:17)

called the approach “a mixed-methods approach.” Quantitative approach was used to identify, to describe the frequencies and to classify the methods of defining terms. In interpreting and explaining the types of method to be used, writer used qualitative approach. In qualitative approach, data were described in the form of words and and explanation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In analysing the methods of defining terms, there were several steps to be undertaken. First, the theses that were accomplished in 2015 were collected. Second, the writer classified methods of defining terms that were used by the writers of the theses. Third, methods of defining terms are connected to the theories of defining terms proposed by

some experts as mentioned in review of related section.

After collecting the data, there are 23 (thirty- three) theses to be found out. Based on the analysis of the methods of defining terms in the theses, there were two methods to be found out, namely, dictionary approach and authoritative reference method. The following are the descriptions of both dictionary approach and authoritative reference methods.

Dictionary Method

The complete description of dictionary method is presented in the form of table which contains the years of the accomplishment of the theses and the frequency of the use of the theses of methods of defining terms.

Table 1. The Proportion of the Use of Dictionary Method

The Year of the Accomplishment of the Theses	Frequency
2015	5

Table 1 clearly shows that there were 5 (five) theses of which the concepts or the terms are defined based on dictionary method. The following are the examples of defining terms based on Dictionary method.

Al Qarni (2015:8) used Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English to define vocabulary as the total numbers of the words in language known by individual. The words are used as vehicle of the language to express one’ idea. In other words, it is a number of words possessed by learners.

Prayitno (2015:10) used Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English to define vocabulary as the total number in a language: all the words

known to person or used in particular book, subject, etc. Vocabulary a list of words with their meaning, especially one that accompanies a text.

Ratnasari (2015:7) used Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English to define writing as” the activity or occupation of writing e.g books, stories or articles.”

Using dictionary is the most practical, easiest and familiar method of defining terms or concept because several reasons. First, dictionary tells us almost everything about words (the meaning, the prononunctiona, the contextualisation, the function, the origin and so forth). Second, Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English which is used is available

and accessible. Third, Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English is standard reference for students of English as foreign language. What is meant by standard is that the dictionary is already recognised by almost the students of English as foreign language all over the world. Fourth, the words such as "vocabulary" and "writing" are the very common words that can be effectively interpreted by using dictionary (in short definition) and these common words can be easily understood by the readers. In other words, what the writers' intend to is in line with what readers understand. However, Dictionary method has its

limitation when the writers (researchers) using more than single word such phrases or phrases. In overcoming this problem, the writers of the theses should add, modify and develop the explanations about the terms and using a variety of methods.

Authoritative Reference Method (Quoting Experts' Opinions Method)

The complete description of dictionary method is presented in the form of table which contains the years of the accomplishment of the theses and the frequency the theses of methods of defining terms are applied.

Table 2. The Proportion of the Authoritative Reference Method

The Years of the Accomplishment of the Theses	Frequency
2015	18

Table 2 clearly shows that there are 18 (eighteen) theses of which the concepts or the terms are defined based on authoritative reference method. The following are the examples of defining terms based on authoritative reference method.

Ulum (2015:7) used authoritative reference (Daniel T Willingham's opinions) to define critical thinking consists of seeing both sides of an issue, being open to new evidence that disconfirms your ideas, reasoning dispassionately, demanding that claims be backed by evidence, deducing and inferring conclusions from available facts, solving problems, and so forth. Then, too, there are specific types of critical thinking that are of different subject matter. That's what we refer to "thinking like a scientist" or "thinking like a historian."

Fitri (2015:8) used authoritative reference (Ms Zakia Djebbari's definition to define "self confidence," as the amount of reliance one's knowledge has about himself such as one's knowledge and one's abilities.

Lidyawati (2015:8) used authoritative reference (E.D Gould, Yanni R and Smith W) to define recount paragraph as "piece of text that retells past events, usually in the order in which they happened." Daniel T Willingham's is an author who wrote about "Critical Thinking." Ms Zakia Djebbari a person who wrote dissertation of doctorate "Self Confidence and Pronunciation Training to Enhance the EFL Speaking Competence." These people have the authority to talk about things related to their fields.

It seems that the writers of the theses do not speculate in defining terms that they use in their theses. They refers to the

experts' definitions. The experts in this context are those who have expertise in their fields. Their methods of defining terms are academically or scientifically acceptable in the perspective of the academic or scholar principles. In that way, the methods of defining terms to be undertaken by the writers of the theses can gain trust from the readers.

The terms "vocabulary, writing, critical thinking, self confidence and recount paragraph are familiar terms (for the writers and the readers) in which they can be easily found out through dictionary and authoritative reference (quoting experts' opinions) methods. However, they cannot be used all the times and all situations because of three reasons. First, the concepts are specific. Second, they are not commonly found in ordinary usage. Third, they are not a part of every language. When writers are confronted with specific and complicated words or phrases, the writers should not be dependent upon one or two methods only. They should be able to use a wide

variety of methods as far the methods based on the scientific principles including defining concepts or terms.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of data analysis, there are some conclusion to be drawn. First, there are two methods of defining terms, dictionary approach and authoritative reference. Second, the writers of the theses do not apply other kinds of methods in defining concepts or terms because the concepts or terms are familiar for the readers. Following the conclusion, some suggestions are drawn. It is important for the writers of the theses to use a wide variety of methods. For the language instructors (lecturers), the important thing is to introduce and to teach use a wide variety of methods. For the advisors, it is important to encourage the students to use a wide variety of methods in defining concepts of terms. Finally, it is suggested for future researchers to discuss the same topics with different perspectives.

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