

Mother Tongue Interference in EFL Students' Writing

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Abstract

Understanding the similarities and differences between English, as the target language, and Indonesian, as the native language, is an essential thing for students to know if they want to master English. One problem as the most challenging thing for students is to express themselves in English appropriately, orally or written. The student's original language, Indonesian, interferes with their ability to compose English sentences correctly, especially in writing. It is essential to find and identify errors made by students of English, in this case, the interference of Indonesian in writing. Therefore, this study was conducted to analyze the interference of Indonesian in students English writing. This study provides an analysis of the interference of Indonesian on English writing made by EFL students. The data for the study is collected from essay writing on a descriptive text by 32 university students in the fourth semester majoring in English and whose native language is Indonesian. Those 32 students were purposively chosen as samples since they sit in one class and had the Essay writing Course. The students then asked to write about two pages of descriptive essays on specific exciting topics for them. It is found that there are a total of 359 Indonesian interferences on the students' English writing. The findings suggest valuable strategies to aid students in developing their writing skills, such as viewing English-language movies, reading English books or articles, and listening to English news and music.

Keywords: Indonesian; interference; English writing

Introduction

Speaking, reading, listening, and writing are the four skills that are always the center of language study. Writing, however, is regarded as the most challenging of those four language learning skills because it encompasses and combines the other three. Foreign students, including Indonesian students who study English as a foreign language, frequently have writing challenges in English, one of which being Indonesian's interference.

Mother tongue interference poses significant challenges in the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language (EFL) in this case in Indonesia site. The notion of studying the learners' native language and standard English while choosing linguistic things should be used to combat the stark reality of mother tongue intrusion.

The present study, however, try to analyze the interference of Indonesian as the native language or mother tongue of students when they write in English as their target language. This study aims at identifying the types of interference of Indonesian on students' English writing and recommending practical ways to improve students' English writing.

Literature Review

1) Mother Tongue

Mother tongue, also known as a person native tongue, or L1, is the first language of a person that he/she was

exposed to from birth. [1]. Mother tongue is one's native language which is learned by children and passed from one generation to another [2]. The phenomenon known as mother-tongue interference refers to how the learner's first language influences how quickly they pick up the target language. The target language is the language that the learner aspires to learn (L2) [3].

In learning English as the target language, students usually use their Indonesian rule as their mother tongue [4]. Therefore, this study tries to identify the interference of students' Indonesian as their mother tongue by using comparative analysis. Comparative analysis focuses on comparing two languages in order to identify their structural similarities and differences. Contrastive Analysis is a technique that was frequently employed to clarify why some aspects of a target language were more challenging to acquire than others. [3]. Furthermore, it is founded on the notion that the greater the disparity between the target language and the learner's mother tongue, the greater the difficulties the learner will experience in picking up these structures or things.

2) MT Interference on Writing

The level of students' writing in the target language is greatly influenced by their prior writing experience in their mother tongue. Even yet, there may be some additional elements that influence it in addition to the previous knowledge.

Most EFL students tend to consider writing as the most difficult skill since it requires the formulation of a design concept, the recording of mental representations of information and experience with subjects [5].

Previous studies have been conducted on the mother tongue interference on English writing. According to research, English grammar and vocabulary were the linguistic fields that saw the most L1 interference [6]. Moreover, another study found that factors like spelling mistakes, grammar mistakes, and word order were brought on by the L1's negative interference in students [7].

Method

This study used descriptive quantitative design. A descriptive essay was gathered from 32 university students of the fourth semester that majoring in English and whose native language is Indonesian. Those 32 students were purposively chosen since they sit in one class and had the Essay writing Course. To get the data, the students were asked to write about a-one to two-page descriptive essay on certain and interesting topics for them. They were divided into six groups then every group decided certain interesting place to be visited and described it on their descriptive essay writing. Every member of the groups described the same object or place in different ways.

Results and Discussion

After analyzing the data, it shows that there are some types of interference error on students' English writing. The 359 interference errors made by the students are number and noun (E1), verb (E2), relative pronoun (E3), preposition (E4), article (E5), adjective (E6), to be (E7), punctuation (E8), demonstrative (E9), passive voice (E10), negation (E11), and word order (E12). Those 12 interference errors are categorized into 3 types based on Swan (2010), they are form, pattern and structure. Those interference errors are taken from the students' writing when they were asked to write descriptive essay on certain interesting place they have visited.

The interference errors on students' writing can be seen in the following Figure.

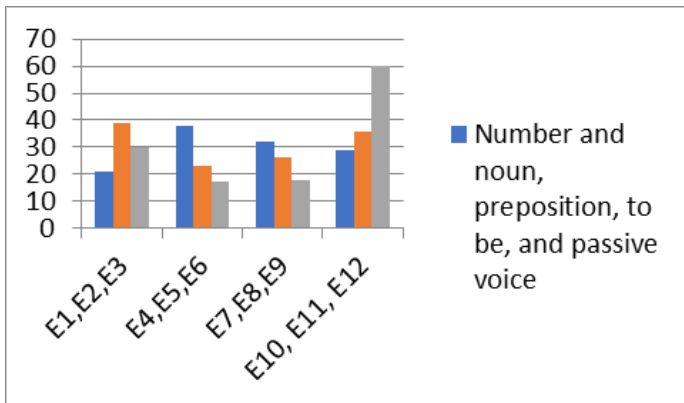


Figure 1. Number of Students' interference errors

Figure 1. shows that the mother tongue interference errors on students' English writing are 21 errors of E1, number and noun; 39 errors of E2, verb; 30 errors of E3, relative pronoun, 38 errors of E4, Preposition; 23 errors of E5, article; 17 errors of E6, adjective (adjective pronoun); 32 errors of E7, to be, 26 errors of E8, punctuation; 18 errors of E9, demonstrative; 29 errors of E10, passive voice; 36 errors of E11, negation, and 60 errors of E12, word order. E1, E2, and E6 are form interference, E3, E4, and E5 are pattern interference, while E7-E12 are structure interference. Totally, they made 359 errors in their writing.

Those examples containing interference errors are italicized, and followed by the correct forms and the explanations for the interference that illustrated by Indonesian sentence whose word, form and structure influence students' English as their target language. The examples are as follows:

1. Number and noun

Some examples of students' errors in number and noun are:

a – On the right side there are also two window.

– On the right side there are also two windows.

b – Indomode is one of supermarket in Makassar.

– Indomode is one of supermarkets in Makassar.

c – The teacher puts some flower pot in front of the classroom.

– The teacher puts some flower pots in front of the classroom.

In Indonesian, the plural maker does not apply to the noun but only to the number. For example; *I have seven cats* (saya memiliki tujuh ekor kucing).

2. Verb

Students made some errors when using the verb. Some of them are:

a. The school have students and qualified teachers.

The school has students and qualified teachers.

b. The market exist there since 1950.

The market has existed there since 1950.

- c. Living room and computer room are limited by a cupboard which is made by glass.
-Living room and computer room are separated by a cupboard which is made by glass.
- d. This classroom chocolate ceiling.
-This classroom has brown ceiling.
- e. Many Students here use a trouser.
-Many Students here wear a pair of
- f. The classroom cleanness must be on guard.
-The classroom cleanness must be kept.

The Indonesian verb “guard” means “keep.”

There are some Indonesian words that cannot be transferred into English, for instance: *Perasaanku tidak enak*. *My feeling is not delicious* (should be: I am not well or I feel unwell).

3. Relative pronouns

Some errors are made by EFL students in using relative pronoun, they are:

- a. Parallel with the whiteboard there is a cupboard with brown color and has two doors and cabinets.
– Parallel with the whiteboard, there is a cupboard with brown color which has two doors and cabinets.
- b. In the library, there is a short table has two drawers.
– In the library, there is a short table which has two drawers.
- c. The teacher which spoke English to me was very nice.
– The teacher who spoke English to me was very nice.

No distinction is made between personal and non-personal relative pronouns in Indonesian, for instance: “*Wanita yang berbaju merah itu cantik sekali*” and in “*Buku yang ada di atas meja itu sangat tebal*” *Yang* is the most frequent relative pronoun and may be used in the majority of cases to translate the English relative pronouns ‘who’, ‘whom’, ‘which’ or ‘that’.

4. Preposition

Some students got difficulty using prepositions, such as:

- a. – Students talk with their teachers through the phone.
-Students talk to their teachers on the phone.
- b. – Many customers watch the market advertisement by television.
– Many customers watch the market advertisement on television.
- c. – You can find some tables for eat after walk around the market.
– You can find some tables for eating after walking around the market.

There is no equivalent for “gerund” in Indonesian.

5. Article

The students made errors when using articles; they are:

- a. – There is photograph of President JokoWidodo
-There is a photograph of President Joko Widodo.
- b. – The Headmaster is kind person.
-The Headmaster is a kind person.
- c. – A school has 350 students.

-The school has 350 students.

Indefinite article is not used in Indonesian.

6. Adjective (Possessive adjective)

Using adjectives in writing is still confusing for some students. The examples are:

- a. – Students have to use a black shoes.
-Students have to wear a pair of black shoes.
- b. – The three cupboards big enough with color blue light.
-The three cupboards are big enough with light blue color.
- c. – Many people are interesting to buy things in this market.
-Many people are interested to buy things in this market.
- d. – Pa’baeng-baeng traditional market is more large than Kalimbu, but Butung is the most large one.
– Pa’baeng-baeng as a traditional market is larger than Kalimbu, but Butung is the largest one.

Comparative and superlative forms of Indonesian adjectives are consistently constructed with “lebih ” and “paling,” which are the equivalents of “more” and “most”.

7. To be

There is no *to be* in Indonesia; therefore, most students make errors in writing, some examples are:

- a. Junior high school 26 Makassar location at Komp. PU Mallengkeri.
Junior high school 26 Makassar is located at Komp. PU Mallengkeri.
- b. Junior high school 26 Makassar taken within three years of studying.
Junior high school 26 Makassar is taken within three years of studying.
- c. SD Rappocini very simple but has friendly environment.
SD Rappocini is very simple but has friendly environment.

8. Punctuation

There are some errors made by students when using punctuations, some of them are:

- a. On the left side there is room principal
On the left side, there is a principal room (there is a principal room on the left side).
- b. Above the cabinet there are three the information boards.
Above the cabinet, there are three information boards.
- c. In front of the field There is a library.
In front of the field, there is a library (There is a library in front of the field).

9. Demonstrative

Some errors made by students in the use of the demonstrative are:

- a. This classrooms are big enough.
These classrooms are big enough.
- b. That vegetables look very fresh.
Those vegetables look very fresh.
- c. This students in class IX.2 are very active.
Those students in class IX.2 are very active.

In Indonesian, there is no singular and plural demonstrative as in English.

The singular and plural form is shown by the number NOT the demonstrative (this, these, those) or the noun (book, pen, car, friend, etc), for example: Those two books are red (in Indonesian: *2 buku itu berwarna merah*) or This is a new school (*Sekolah ini baru*).

10. Passive voice

Students made some errors in the use o the passive voice. Some of them are:

- a. – Those new rooms are still building so that’s why it’s not use for at this time
– Those new rooms are still building so that’s why it’s not used for at this time
- b. – This school includes a large school and clean
– This school is considered as a large and clean school
- c. – This market is open every day from 7 AM until 8 AM.
– This market is opened every day from 7 AM until 8 AM.

Indonesian speakers are not accustomed to use *to be* in passive such as *the pictures put above the board*. In Indonesia, *gambar itu terletak di atas papan tulis*. It should be *the pictures are put above the board*

11. Negation

The use of negation in sentences is hard for most EFL Indonesian students. It is shown by the errors they made in using it, such as:

- a. – The market not very far from the main road
The market is not very far from the main road
- b. – Many sellers not obey the rules
Many sellers do not obey the rules
- c. – Many students not use the library to read
Many students do not come to the library to read

There are no Indonesian equivalents for “is not,” “are not,” “do not,” “does not,” and “did not” which express a verb in the negative form. In Indonesian, the negative particle “not” is put in front of the verb phrase, regardless of tenses or persons.

12. Word order

Students tend to make errors in the word order, the example such as:

- a. -*Many students bring to school their breakfast box.*
Many students bring their breakfast box to school.

In Indonesian, a preposition phrase is regularly put in front of a direct object: *Banyak diantara siswa membawa ke sekolah bekal sarapan mereka*

b. – This market is open every day from 7 AM until 8 AM.
This market is opened from 7 AM until 8 AM every day.

c.- The office of headmaster of the school is very easy to find.
it is very easy to find the (school) headmaster office.

In Indonesian, head nouns are typically “post-modified,” in opposition to English: *Kantor dari kepala sekolah sangat mudah ditemukan.*

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that students’ use of Indonesian, their native tongue when writing English descriptive essays. Most of the time, foreign language learners try to translate their target language into their own tongue using what they already know. Thus, their English is influenced by their Indonesian. They try to fill up the linguistic gaps in their knowledge of both Indonesian and English before retrieving their Indonesian knowledge in English. The results show that students should read as many English-language books or articles as they can, watch English-language movies, or listen to English-language news or songs to comprehend the language better and have more examples of constructing English sentences.

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