



Grammatical Interference Patterns in the English Departments Students' Writing: Indonesian to English Grammar

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ABSTRACT

The interference of the first language (Indonesian) in the use of English as a foreign language is a phenomenon of one's failure in acquiring the language. There may be caused by many factors, of which are linguistic differences of the two languages as well as the mastery of English. This paper discusses the phenomena of grammatical interference shown in the English students' writings of the two universities in Padang (Indonesia). Syntactical, lexical, and morphological elements of the language are the focus of the study. As a whole, the finding shows that there are grammatical interferences found in the students' writing. Of the three elements observed, syntactical interference is prominent. Word order as one of the three indicators of syntactical interference appeared in the sentences are likely the most problematic. In the datum *If we competent in EFL....*, for example, no verb was used. Based on the investigation, it is as the result of the Indonesian way of thinking on the concept being expressed in English. Unlike the concept of V as predicate in English, predicate in Indonesian can be noun, adjective or adverb in addition to verb. As a consequence, the sentence is anomalous. Moreover, the case of lexicon on choice of word in sentences also shows more interference. The word *emotion* in *... share their emotion ...* for example, should be posited by *problem*. Besides, the utterance also deals with collocation problem, in which *share* is more commonly collocated with *problem*. This interference is suspected as the lack of vocabulary mastery. In other words, intertwined factors emerged in the writing. Basically, grammatical interference of the English language faced in students' writing resulted from the effect of lack competence on English rules and cultural internalization.

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Introduction

Global era for the Indonesian government requires its people to be able to communicate in a global language. Since English has been legitimately accepted as a global language, it is set as the legal international language used in Indonesia. Hence, the national curriculum of secondary and tertiary education offers English as one of the compulsory subjects. That is to indicate that communicating in English has been put a special concern by the Indonesian government.

As a matter of fact, English as used by the bi/multilingual people is commonly influenced by many factors, one of them is the first language (L1). It may be either in form of positive and negative transfer (see Lekova, 2010: 320). The use of correct grammatical patterns of the language is the result of positive transfer. This transfer fortunately leads people to understand and catch the meaning of the interaction occurred. On the other hand, whenever the misuse of rules happens in the implementation of using the language, the problems arise as a result of negative transfer. The most fundamental problem deals with the interference of mother tongue into the use of English. The serious problem occurs when mother tongue interferes English in such a way that gives a serious impact to the language produced. It is seemingly worse when people interact through written communication. Whenever the writer makes a mistake dealing with the linguistic patterns, it leads to misconception of his/her purposes. The result is that the readers hardly catch the idea or even turn to wrong conclusion. Thus, people need to know the rules of English to express their ideas in correct grammatical and linguistic patterns.

The problem of the interference of mother tongue (Indonesian) to English also occurs on the English department students' writings in two universities in Padang, namely State University of Padang (UNP) and Bung Hatta University (UBH). Some indications showed that the students still face the problems dealing with linguistics aspects, especially in written communication, in which their writing showed the interference of their Indonesian into English. As an example is that student's statement in her writing, *He collect the task last week* shows intertwined interference (viewed from morphological and syntactical factor). The absence of past form of verb with bound morpheme *-ed* to become '*collected*' in relation to the time expression *last week* might occur because of the tenseless case in Indonesian; besides the choice of word *collect* is not appropriate since this word does not really collocate with *the task*. The problem seems as the result of translating Indonesian *mengumpulkan* into English *collect*. The statement should be cured to become *He submitted the task last week*.

Such datum is a picture of the possible other grammatical interferences that can be found in students' writing. And it leads me to investigate and analyse problems dealing with English Department students' writing at two universities in Padang, namely Universitas Negeri Padang (UNP) and Universitas Bung Hatta (UBH) related to grammatical interference from Indonesian into English. The analysis is on categorizing the patterns of the grammatical interference.

In the review of language interference, Harmer (1990: 215) is in the opinion that the first language acquisition commonly influences the students' ability in acquiring their second language. The way it influences in the process of acquiring the

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second or foreign language may be indirect, in which the learners cannot differ the patterns and rules of those languages (Troike, 2006:35). Its process is commonly called as language interference of mother tongue to the second or foreign language use.

Language interference can be seen from different points of view. From the language itself (linguistics), Sankoff (2001: 641) defines language interference as the influence of mother tongue structure into the use of second language. It deals with the components the language interfered. From psycholinguistics point of view, in the process of learning the second or foreign language, the language interference exists as a negative transfer from the first language to the second language acquisition (Lekova, 2010: 320). However, both of them show the effect of the influence of the first language during using second/ foreign language.

The categorization of language interference dealing with the linguistics elements can be seen in the use of lexicon, phonology, morphology, syntax, and discourse (Troike: 2006: 32-33). Lexicon is commonly related to knowledge about word meaning, spelling in written form, and idioms. The next is morphological elements which cover the use of morpheme, inflection and affixation. Moreover, syntax includes some aspects, such as interaction between word arrangements (word order), concordance in sentence structures, and the formulation of statements and questions. The last element is discourse that commonly discusses about the way to formulate sentences in coherence and cohesive patterns. All those linguistics elements, according to Troike (2006: 32-33), can be interfered by first language during the use of second language.

The existence of the second, and/or foreign language influences the interaction among people very much. Thus, it is a challenge for the speakers using that language to learn its culture. Schuman (1978) in Steinberg (2001) states that the level of one's conformation to learn the new culture shows his/her maturity in using the language. When the users of the new language have great chance to be in the new community, they may have more opportunity to contact with its native speakers, and simultaneously, they use the language and its culture. On the contrary, they will be interfered by their own language whenever they just stay in their first language culture, or could not adapt themselves to the new culture while using the new language.

Furthermore, language socialization, according to Duff in Hornberger, et al. (2010: 428) that concerns with the ways someone enter the new culture is a very important element to consider. Learning the norms of the language, as an example, should be put into a serious consideration as the basis of using the language through the interactional process. Nevertheless, negative attitude toward the language learned (L2) or its speakers in classroom setting, affects comprehension and concentration in having language activities; even it can damage the function of memory. Brown (2007) claims that this negative attitude usually arises from cultural knowledge of the language got from unexpected programs of television, film, and from printed media. It turns to decrease motivation to learn and use the language.

In relation to language learning, Gardner and Lambert (1972) in Steinberg (2001) proposed two kinds of motivation involved. Integrative motivation is the one aiming at integrating oneself to native speakers in order to recognize the self. The next is instrumental motivation that refers to the motivation of learning in order to get a job or learning a language is the terminated purpose. Somehow, sort of motivation someone has in learning a foreign language is reflected on the way he/she

uses the language. Thus, motivation has the probability to emerge the interference.

Related to the data analysed, identifying and categorizing the language interference of students' 500 word expository writing is based on the indicators and sub-indicators of linguistic elements, that is lexicon, morphology, and syntax. The data from the questionnaire were tabulated in forms of quantitative analysis. It was aimed to confirm how much linguistic elements influence the language interference. Thus, those data can lead to a conclusion of how the Indonesian language interferes English in students' writing in UNP and UBH.

Result and discussion

The data from students' expository writing showed there were language interferences occurred from Indonesian into English. Indeed, the language interference occurred on pre-determined linguistic elements, namely syntax, morphology, and lexicon. Of the three elements observed, syntactical interference is mostly seen.

Based on the data analysis, there were some sub-indicators in the element of syntax that showed a high degree in language interference. The first sub-indicator in syntax is about *word order*. From the three sub-indicators stated, there were 185 cases of word order appeared in 20 students' writing. The second place was in concordance of sentences, that is 165 cases and the last was in constructing statements and questions, namely 64 cases found. In short, word order was categorized as the most serious problem in syntax features.

For the case of morphological interference, the misuse of tense marking is in the first place, especially the verb inflection. There were 65 cases of misuse of inflection, followed by the inaccurate use of morphemes. And the lexicon case appeared in the spelling problem, with 48 cases, 15 cases on word meaning, and 11 cases of word combination.

An example that shows the problem of syntax, the concordance between subject and predicate of the sentence is seen in this sentence *If we competent in EFL...* This part of sentence can neither be categorized as a clause nor phrase. It is clause-like since it does not contain *predicate*. In order not to be anomalous, it should be cured by writing *If we are competent in EFL...* The sentence might be caused by the Indonesian interference in English use since two languages have different patterns. The difference can be seen in the following table.

Word Order	
Indonesian	English
S P(verb, noun, adjective, adverb)	S P(Verb)

The table shows that Indonesian distincts the pattern for predicate into several types (Lapoliwa, 1990), such as SP →SV, SN, SAdj., and SAdv.; while English only contains verb as a predicate that is usually patterned by SV (Berk, 1999). It is clear that the possibility of first language interference in the case of sentence sample can be proved that the rules of the Indonesian language is applied in producing the English sentence.

Beside word order, concordance as another syntactical element is also problematic. Most of the students were not able to link their idea into a grammatically correct sentence because they were interfered by the Indonesian rules. Unlike English, Indonesian does not have such rules. One of the examples was *People has already mastered in...* The sentence contains a mistake since the use of word *has* does not suit the subject *people* (plural). The interference was related to the subject-verb agreement. Indonesian does not contain any rule that differentiates the use of verb for singular or plural subject. This

rule was internalized by the students into English. As a result, the sentence produced contained grammatical interference on the concordance element.

The following datum shows morphological interference. Eventhough the frequency of the interference is not as much as in syntactical case, the misuse of morphological rules tends to affect the English language use. The following sample is one of the data obtained.

It is believe that the learning a foreign languages

The sentence above shows the incorrect use of verb *believe*. In relation to the verb group in passive voice (Be + V Past Participle), the inflected form of *-ed* in *believe* was absent. The absence of morpheme *-ed* in the sentence may confuse the readers. This root of problem may be assumed coming from the interference of the first language (Indonesian) because the rules of inflected form of verbs in Indonesian never exists.

In the element of lexicon, the choice of word in sentences also shows more interference. The word *emotion* in *share their emotion* for example, should be posited by *problem*. Besides, the utterance also deals with collocation problem, in which *share* is more commonly collocated with *problem*. The inappropriate use of the word makes the understanding on the writing blurred. This interference is suspected as the lack of vocabulary mastery. The finding is in line with Syarif (2010) investigation on the students writing of discussion part of the thesis, showing that lack knowledge of linguistic components (one of them is vocabulary) leads to broken ideas.

From the whole analysis, many of the data show intertwined problems, in which more than one case emerged in a single sentence or writing. Basically, grammatical interference of the English language faced in students' writing resulted from the effect of lack competence on English rules and cultural internalization. Such lack competence showed as the one of top sources of the language interference in their writings. It is reflected from students' writing in which there were a lot of mistakes and errors appeared. Indeed, students competence on linguistic features is really demanded in practising their English in order to avoid grammatical interference. The way how cultural internalization interferes the use of English can be identified from students point of view that they mostly thought what to write in the Indonesian language before they formulated an English sentence. This way of thinking should not be used when someone uses the second language (Lekova: 1990) since both of the languages have different language structures and style.

Somehow, this phenomenon cannot be separated from the previous source of problem, that is students' lack competence. The reciprocal connection has been built between these two factors since the students' lack of competence can be influenced by their cultural internalization or vice versa.

Concluding Remarks

In the conclusion, the grammatical interference of Indonesian in the English writing of English department students falls on the three main linguistic elements; they are syntactical, morphological and lexical elements. However, one that really dominated the language interference is syntactical element. Of the three indicators of syntax investigated, word order is the most problematic to the English language use. Lack competence of English and the interference of cultural internalization of Indonesian (the first language) into English are the causes of the problem.

On the morphological interference, verb inflection, the inaccurate use of tense marking, has higher degree of interference. The absence of verb inflection of Indonesian seems to be the cause of the problem. While the case of lexicon is

mostly seen in the spelling, followed by the choice of words. It is suspected that lack of vocabulary is the cause.

The intertwined problems make the interference more complicated. More cases of linguistic elements found in a single sentence or writing is an example. As a matter of fact, grammatical interference is caused by the lack competence of the students in English. Besides, internalizing the rules of the first language with different culture into English is also the factor of causing grammatical interference.

As it is used in academic writing within classroom setting, the knowledge of English linguistic elements should be transformed into practice by either students or lecturers in intruotional activities. Students should be trained to be aware of thinking in English while expressing ideas in English writing.

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