

## **NATIVE LANGUAGE INTERFERENCE IN LEARNING ENGLISH WRITTEN TEXT AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The study deals with classroom interaction with the main focus on the interference in learning English of the written text for the Indonesian native language. The outcome of this study is the significance of the effect of the differences between the structures of English and Indonesia on English written text. And this study also concentrates on the effect of students' first language (Indonesia) in learning foreign language (English) particularly in the written text. This aspect of the study also tries to provide new information in the English learning context. The study shows that the process of first language 'acquisition' (L1) is somehow fundamentally different from the processes involved in 'learning' a second or foreign language (L2). It can make the language interference occur as the learners transferred element of their first language into second language or foreign language. The elements of language interference are grammatical, morphological, phonological, lexical, syntax, cultural and semantic level. In the interference process the errors and mistakes occurred in learning a new language or second language (L2) as a result of negative transfer or native language interference.*

*Keywords: Language Interference, Native Language, Language acquisition*

### **ABSTRAK**

*Penelitian ini berkaitan dengan interaksi kelas dengan intereference pembelajaran bahasa inggris teks tertulis bagi penutur indonesia. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan efek signifkan perbedaan antara stuktur bahasa inggris dan bahasa indonesia pada teks tulisan bahasa inggris. Penelitian ini juga memusatkan pada dampak bahasa pertama (bahasa indonesia) dalam pembelajaran bahasa asing dalam hal bahasa inggris. Penelitian menunjukkan proses pemerolehan bahasa pertama berbeda dengan bahasa kedua. Hal ini membuat intereference bahasa terjadi karena pelajar mentransfer elemen bahasa pertama kedalam bahasa kedua atau bahasa asing. Unsur-unsur interefence bahasa yaitu grammar, morpologi, ponologi, leexikal, syntax, dan semantik. Dalam proses intereference, kesalahan terjadi dalam pembelajaran bahasa baru atau bahasa kedua sebagai hasil dari tranfer negatif atau intereference bahasa asli.*

*Kata Kunci: Interference bahasa, bahsa asli, pemerolehan bahasa*

## INTRODUCTION

Language is one of unique phenomena that is interesting to be observed and investigated. It is valuable instrument of thought to interact in human communication dealing with verbal and non-verbal communications patterns. When people interact with others in society at anytime and anywhere certainly they must use a language. Without language people will find a number of troubles when they do their activities and toward the others because the interaction or communication among individuals through language is the interaction where the ideas are shared from and to subject dialogically and each interaction actively takes role in it. There is no society without a language. It makes the role of a language among the people in this life is very crucial.

In many parts of the world it is just a normal requirement in daily life that people speak several languages: perhaps one or more at home, another in the village, still another for purposes of trade, and yet another for contact with the outside world or wider social or political organization. In daily interactions with others, people usually choose different code in different situation. They might choose a particular code or variety because it makes them easier to discuss a particular topic, regardless where they are speaking. When talking about work or school at home, for instance, they might use the language that is related to those fields rather than the language used in daily language communication at home.

Language processing refers to the way human beings use words to communicate ideas and feelings, and how such communications are processed and understood. In communication, human being produces any words which have been stored in the brain. The interaction between the words and its process in the brain happened completely or it is called as mental lexicon. In the mental lexicon words are organized in terms of their phonology, syntax, semantics and other linguistic aspects happen into complex structure. The linguistic aspects of the mental lexicon are reflected in the structure of speech and contribute to the development of new mental lexicons. Need long time to develop the words because the process is complex. According to Caplan (1992) there are four models of language processing, first, the way in which the linguistic

structures are active by each processor needs to be specified. For instance, the forms of words might be listed and searched for as separate entries in a mental dictionary. Second, most processors are obligatorily active when their inputs are presented to them. Third, language processors generally operate unconsciously. Fourth, components of the system operate remarkably quickly and accurately. The four models of language processing had shown a complex system between one system and another. The complex words will be stored in the mind where in the brain the processing of information occurs. The mental space where this phenomenon occurs has been called the mental lexicon. The mental lexicon is a complex system of the mind that allow human to access information in a variety of ways. By having an efficient and effective mental lexicon can improve vocabulary acquisition.

Someone's knowledge develops by his interaction with his environment and the use of assimilation and accommodation. In every level of human's age the language can be seen differently between fast and slow. In the child level where the process of acquiring the language happens firstly, sometimes a number of people are able to produce the language quickly. They are able to store many indexes and processing the vocabulary into speaking. The ability to acquire the words will influence to their fluency in daily interaction. Meanwhile the fluency will effect to their knowledge. We can say that the limit of someone's knowledge refers to the limit of his or her acquire the language. But in other case the problem will appear in daily interaction especially in producing the second language. It is because the interferences in producing between the mother tongue and the second language. Both language systems exist together in the individual's mind and are independent of one another. When the individual has good command of the two languages there is no interference and vice versa.

Along with the global interface among humans across countries in all over the world, there is a significant impact that has influenced the use of a particular language that can be used as the medium to communicate used by individuals coming from different socio-cultural background. It is relevant when we reflect to the fact that the study of foreign language has been of interest among thinkers and educators. During

the process of learning particular foreign language there might be a number of problems both to the teachers and to the learners. To the teachers, the difficulties would be in the manner of techniques, strategies and methods in teaching process, while to the students, the difficulties might vary. It is likely that in learning certain foreign language, the learners commonly would produce a number of errors probably caused by language interference from the learners' native language. It can be on phonological, morphological or syntactic level. Factors that cause language interference is the student's tendency to their mother tongue, according to Bhela (1999) students tend to rely on their first language in producing the target language. In the mother tongue and the foreign language occurred transfer which produces the interference in both.

The study of particular foreign language, indeed, would cause a number of difficulties, either to the learners or the teachers. To the learners, there would be a number of difficulties in learning the target language; while to the teachers, the difficulties would be in the manner of techniques, strategies and methods.

The existence of different system in a number of level is very offending the students in acquiring the Bahasa Indonesia. That is one of the main factors causing interference from Indonesia into the target language. Besides, the morphological form or words formation written by these students is still having a lot of errors and sometimes the writing can not be understood or less meaning when it read by English native speaker (ambiguous). Other errors also occur at spelling level, the learners have problem how to write English words correctly.

This investigation is simply focused on the Indonesia interference in English written text that produced by Indonesia speakers. This study is conducted to answer two questions that have relation to the interference;

1. What negative transfers native Indonesia speakers can discover in English written texts?
2. What are the most common errors made by Indonesia speakers when producing English texts?

## **METHOD**

In this section, the researcher describes how this research works and what kind of method is used in analyzing data. It used qualitative-analysis where the types of findings could not be obtained through statistical procedures and data is not shaped figure, but the form is narratives, descriptions and written documents, so that it is relevant with the data collected.

This analysis carried out in two steps. The first step of this research is to find out the characteristics of interference and classify what kinds of interference occur on the writing sample. In spelling and lexicon level, it used the Indonesian dictionary (Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia) as reference to indicate whether the words are belonging to bahasa Indonesia or not. The next step is analyzing the meaning of words based on its context. The context means is that the words used must be in accordance with the context or situation. If the words used are not appropriate with the context the researcher conclude that it is interference because of literal translation from L1 into TL.

The data of this study was collected by researcher from the learners' teacher in Pusat Bahasa UNRAM, the data was collected from the learners' final assignment (free writing in bahasa Indonesia) as their obligation to finish their study in Language Centre Mataram University (Pusat Bahasa UNRAM) that assigned by their teacher. They were assigned to write a summary that have relationship with their activities in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara Indonesia. I got five assignments (written task in Indonesian) from the students. In the assignment, they completed the task not class; the teacher gave them seven days to complete the assignment out of class room.

The participants are the Australian students in grade eight (advance level) at a Language Centre Mataram University. They were all native Australians whose English as their mother tongue and learning Indonesian as foreign language. They had learned Indonesian during six months in Language Centre (Pusat Bahasa-Unram) Mataram University and they had studied Indonesian in their country before coming to Indonesia. In other word, they could speak in Indonesian. Therefore I investigated how far the students were able to master Indonesian structure and any interference occurring when producing Indonesian particularly in writing.

Data analysis refers to *Tata Bahasa Baku Bahasa Indonesia* (Indonesian standard language), research journals and *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (Indonesian Dictionary) in analyzing the data. This analysis indicating the kinds of Interference occurred on the students writing text. I used the Indonesian language book as a reference in this analysis. The first step of this analysis; marking the types of Interference and classify which one is belong to interference in spelling level, lexical and grammar. After classifying, the researcher explained the factors of interference.

## DISCUSSION

English as foreign language is taught in a number of formal education institutions, such as schools and universities, as well as non-formal ones. English plays an important role in the world and becomes an international language. Moreover, it is used in international forum whereby the members of the forum might express their ideas, thoughts and feelings by using English. But for the Indonesian learners who come from different ethnic groups with different languages as well sometimes have trouble in understanding the target language. Frequently, numerous learners that are studying Second Language (L2) or foreign language have difficulties in producing words or sentences on writing and speaking (pronunciation, spelling and grammar). It is caused by the learners' first language has different structure or formations that make the learners tend to produce their first language (L1). When writing or speaking the target language (L2), second language learners tend to rely on their native language (L1) structures to produce a response. If the structures of the two languages are distinctly different, then one could expect a relatively high frequency of errors to occur in L2, thus indicating an interference of L1 on L2.

The difficulties of Indonesian native language in learning English as second language is very complete. They should able to switch their language role when they produce the target language (English). *Indonesia* is different with English, for instance, there are the problems resulting from L1 (Bahasa Indonesia) interference in terms of pronunciation, many Indonesian native speaker have trouble pronouncing consonant cluster (three or more consonants together in a word), because these

clusters do not occur in Bahasa Indonesia, but this study will not concentrate on pronunciation but on the structure and morphology. *Bahasa Indonesia* does not have tenses as such, and a simplified method of talking about different points in time is often attempted in English for example 'I went to the market yesterday'. The concept of Indonesia tenses, especially the more complex perfect tenses, is often difficult to grasp for Indonesian speaker. The different of Indonesia and English will affect the Indonesia speaker in learning English. There will be numerous mistakes and errors happened in producing English, it is caused by the learners' tendency on their first language knowledge.

The errors and mistakes occurred in learning a new language or second language (L2) as a result of negative transfer or native language interference. The problem had paid many linguists' attention to conduct a number of researches. There are many researchers claimed that language interference is caused by the learners' tendency to produce the target language in their first language (L1). According to Bhela (1999), that second language learners tend to rely on their native language (L1) structures to produce a response.

The Indonesia speakers' tendency in producing English in *Bahasa Indonesia* structures can be both help and hindrance. It can be help if their first language is transferable 'positive transfer', and it can be hindranced if their first language is not transferable 'negative transfer'. Example of a negative transfer from Indonesia into English is that noun phrase *rumahbesar* 'a big house' from Indonesia noun phrase into English *house big*. *House big* in English is not correct; it should be *a big house*. In English, the learner should put article *a/an/the* in front of the noun phrase. The error was caused the English learners tend to produce their first language rule in English. According to Bhela (1999) second language learners tend to rely on their native language (L1) structures to produce a response.

In general, Language interference is the effect of the learner's first language in learning or producing the target language. The tendency of second language learners to produce the target language in their native language causes interference in the target language. According to Galina kavaliauskienė (2009), all the learners

customarily rely on their mother tongue in learning English. The student's tendency in their mother tongue will be a main factor of interference in second language learning. Learning English as second language or bilinguals, of course, it will face many problems that caused by a number of rules or systems between First languages (L1) and second language (L2) is not the same and can occur interference in the second language. Huffsines in Hoyt (2004), assumes that the majority of interference happens with bilingual speakers. It occurred because no other bilinguals can acquire the rules of the L2 completely and able to switch the rule between L1 and L2. There are no bilinguals who have a complete command of two languages and possess the ability to switch from one language to another according to the changes that occur in the speech situation, such as interlocutors and topics.

Interference of L1 in SLA covers every aspect of language where the languages have a close connection with human thinking. The influence of mother tongue in learning second language is very significant in interference pattern. Gabriela (2009) argues that the solid rules and patterns of one's native language seem to be the main cause for the interference phenomena between L1 and L2. In the context of language learning, the transfer is as the prior linguistic knowledge influencing the native language on L2 context. The transfer has main role in interference. A definition of the term *transfer* is given by Gass & Selinker (2008): "It is a term that was used extensively in the first half of the century and refers to the psychological process whereby prior knowledge is carried over into a new learning situation. The transfer can be either positive or negative. The positive transfer occurs when those similarities in the mother tongue and the target language can facilitate the learning while the negative transfer refers to the negative influence that the knowledge of the first language due to the differences existing between both languages.

According to Ellis (1997), Interference as 'transfer', the learner's of L1 exert over the acquisition of L2. The transfer is governed by learners' perceptions about what is transferable and by their stages of development in L2 learning. In learning a target language, learners construct their own interim rules. The interference will be frequently occurred if the

structure of learners' first language (L1) is distinctly different or more distant from the target language (TL). It can be a hindrance or big problem if the learners' first language is not the same to the target language structures or they are distinctly different (negative transfer or *interference*). Ellis (1997) pointed out that if the structures of the two languages are distinctly different, then one could expect a relatively high frequency of errors to occur in L2, thus indicating an interference of L1 on L2. So it will show that if there are similarities between the first and the second languages, the learner will acquire second language structures with ease; and if there are differences, the learner will have difficulty. The learners will easily acquire structures that are similar to the structures of their mother tongue, but will encounter difficulties where there are differences. The learner would find difficulties to learn and understand a completely sentence. The interference of L1 on L2 can be occurred in many components levels like grammatical, morphological, and orthographic, or spelling. Sinha et. al (2009) explained their study on the relationship between first and the second language acquisition where the reasons behind the first language interferes in the acquisition of the second language could be various like:

1. While learning second language (L2) alphabetical shapes and structures of first language (L1) would create interference;
2. In schools, teachers might not appropriately make them do practices or exercises in the Acquiring (L2) language;
3. Medium of instruction and communication in schools or colleges are mostly held in first language. Therefore, they do not get enough exposure to acquiring language. Monolingual and bilingual students were compared with respect to grammar awareness, reading comprehension and phonological awareness skills. The result showed that monolinguals students were better in English receptive vocabulary, reading comprehension and writing fluency. Nevertheless, in English grammar awareness, phonological awareness, expressive vocabulary, vocabulary density and writing quality both the groups were equivalent. It shows the bilinguals despite being proficient in two languages (L1 and L2) do not completely excel the

monolinguals in reading-writing related skills.

The concept of above refers to error in using a second language for effect of first language uses. So it should not be interference when a bilingual borrows some words from a language into his uses of another language or when the bilingual switches from one language to another. In the school situation when the learners are speaking in L2, they tend to rely on their L1 structures to produce the utterances. If the structures of the two languages are not so much different, then the influences of L1 produce error in L2. In other words, the error found in the L2 is indicating some interference of the L1 on the L2.

Sentence is a smallest unit of language that consists of two or more words to express what in our mind. The sentence structure in Bahasa Indonesia is different with the sentence in English. The standard sentence in Bahasa Indonesia at least has two functions; subject (S) and Predicate (P). Each word in the sentence is categorized into three classification; (1) syntactic category (2) syntax function and (3) semantic rule. The Noun phrase pattern in Bahasa Indonesia is opposed to English. The difference is that phrases in Bahasa Indonesia constructed by a head coming before its modifier or the head proceed the modifier, but instead of the construction of English phrase is opposite to Bahasa Indonesia. For example;

- *rumah*    *besar* → 'big house'  
           ↓            ↓  
       house    big
- *pijar*      *sekali* → 'very smart'  
           ↓            ↓  
       smart    very

The different structure between Indonesia and English like the examples above will be a problem for Indonesia speaker in acquiring English.

In general, words in Bahasa Indonesia never begin with the following consonant clusters: scare, school, street, spring, scratch, sphere, slow, small, svelte and spelling in Bahasa Indonesia does not use the following doubled or combined consonants: /bb/, /dd/, /ff/, /gg/, /mm/, /pp/, /ss/, /th/, /zz/, /gh/, /ph/, or /hn/.

As a result, spelling patterns were confusing the native speaker. There are similar words in English and Bahasa Indonesia which create

confusion for the learners. The students in learning to speak English often make no distinction in pronouncing /t/ or /d/ and other words so the sounds will be the same when they are uttering them. It can make misinterpretation to understand the meaning of the words. The learners also hardly to make distinction between short and long vowel which make the error in producing English words. In English spoken by learners in Indonesia, interferences are often occurred. Many Indonesians are often found to use wrongly the English in producing expression such as *I use black shoes*. It must be *I wear black shoes*. It occurs because in the Indonesian frame of thought the word 'memakai' can use to all concept of English phrases. However it should be learnt that the verb *memakai* as in the phrase *memakai sepatu* correspond to wear. The structure of English noun phrase is distinctly different with Indonesia. In construction of the noun phrase, English uses word order in which the modifier or modifiers precede the head. For example 'new book' (the noun with underline has a function as a head) is the type of combination between adjective + noun, noun+noun, adjective+ noun+ noun. Indonesia noun phrase, for example in *Bahasa Indonesia*; *buku bagus* 'a good book', it can be constructed to be noun + adjective. In English, the adjective modifier is put in front of the head, it opposite to Bahasa Indonesia structure that put modifier after the head. Example in the table below;

**English    Indonesia**

Modifier	Head	Head	Modifier
White	House	rumah	Putih
A Big	Problem	masalah	besar
A beautiful	Girl	gadis	cantik
Old	Man	lelaki	tua
A rich	Man	orang	kaya
Chicken	Feed	makanan	ayam

In order to understand the errors found in language interference. We need to know the process which is happened to the language interference. The type of interference will be explained as follows; Language is very sensitive to all the processes that take place in the society, formal education such as the process of students' learning process in learning second or foreign language. Language interference is generally a lifelong experience when speaking or writing in a second language. The language interference can occur in pronunciation, grammar,

vocabulary, and meaning both in speech and in writing, this case occurs especially on students learning a second. According to Lott (1983) interference was classified into three types:

#### a. Over Extension of Analogy

This occurs when the learner misuses vocabularies item in L2 because of both L1 and L2 are similar, phonetically, orthographically, either semantically or syntactically. For example: the use of 'claim' by Japanese speaker rather than 'complain', as 'kureim' is a Japanese term borrowed from English and has a similar meaning to that of 'complain' in English.

#### b. Transfer of Structure

These happen when the student commits a grammar error because the mother tongue rules are followed.

#### c. Interlingual/Intralingual

This part consists of the grammar or vocabulary errors that made by the students because of a word distinction, either lexical or grammatical, which is made in the L2 does not exist in their native language. There are three kinds of errors:

- 1 Interference Errors, it is occurs because the learners used elements from one language while speaking another. For instance:
- 2 Intralingual errors, it also called over generalization. This error occurs when the students produced incomplete application in the target language and the language does not exist both in L1 and L2.
- 3 Developmental errors, it is occurs when the second language learners made their own hypothesis about the rule of second or foreign language that based on their limited knowledge from class room or text book.

The levels of interference might be grammatical, morphological, phonological, lexical, syntax, cultural and semantic level. According to Skiba (1997), Grammatical interference is defined as the first language influencing the second in terms of word order, use of pronouns and determinants, tense and mood. The difficulties of grammar in learning second language was point out by Beardsmore in Bhela (1999), numerous of the difficulties a second language learner with the phonology, vocabulary and grammar of L2 are due to the interference of habits from L1. In Indonesia

language, there is no any word formation can be found to indicate plural or singular (inflection) and there is no any particular verb that used to express something happening in the past, future or present. While in English we can found regular and irregular verb that used in different situation, so that, Indonesia speakers might be have big problem that cause morphological interference on English. The possible example is: a student learning English might use say *He go to school everyday* instead of *He goes to school everyday*. This interference occurs as a result of no system of agreement or concord between noun and verb (subject and predicate) in Indonesian language; all the subjects are followed by the same predicate (verb) such as *Sayapergi; Diapergi, and Merekapergi*.

Morphological interference was found in Czech in learning English as second language by Hopkinson (2007). On the level of word-formation, the most notable cases of interference found in the corpus are those in which the Czech morphological system allows for a simpler and more regular transformation of words into other parts of speech than is possible in English, especially the transformation of verbs into nouns and of nouns into adjectives.

In semantic level, interference occurs when a speaker introduces new semantic structures. Even though the semantic units might be the same in both languages, a foreign way of combining them might introduced as a new semantic structure. Both Indonesian and English, for instance, have comparable units for *mengandung – consist of*; but when an Indonesian language speaker uses a sentence *Paragraf itu mengandung beberapa kalimat* he introduces into his speech a foreign semantic structure based on the English model *The paragraph is pregnant of several sentences* instead of *The paragraph consists of several sentences*.

In cultural level, cases of interference might be found in the speech of the bilingual. The foreign element might be result of an effort to express new experience in a language that does not account for them. An Indonesian speaking English is might result of the introduction of the custom of greeting and thanking in his own language. For instance, he might say 'Good night' instead of 'Good evening'; or he might say 'Thanks' instead of 'No thanks'.

The influence of students' first language in lexicon level is frequently happened on the students' writing text. That case occurred because of the students' habit in their first language (L1) and makes them difficult to say or write in English. The learner's habit in spelling or sounding the words in their first language affected the students in spelling words in the target language. In Skiba (1997), Interference at a lexical level provides for the borrowing of words from one language and converting them to sound more natural in another and orthographic interference includes the spelling of one language altering another. Spelling interference in learning the target language frequently occurs on the students, it happened when they wrote or spelled a number of words that not usual for them. And also the correct written form of the spelling word in learning second or foreign language is one of the others indicator to indicate the students' competence in mastery the target language (TL). Spelling in bahasa Indonesia is different than spelling in English. Consequently spelling words in Bahasa Indonesia frequently influences the students when they spelled or wrote a number of words in English.

The L2 learners in written tasks in the classroom tend to follow their first language structure. It is in the grammatical, morphological, phonological, lexical, syntax, and semantic level. The habit of L2 learners in following the L1 structures effect to the error in writing. Their frame of thought in understanding the target language based on what is on their first language. It can be caused by the learners misunderstanding in producing the words in written form and lack of teaching in the classroom. The teachers in giving explanation frequently using the first language so that it hard for the second language learners achieve the target language. So the teachers as the main role in teaching and learning process in the classroom must solve the errors by giving effective learning and good teaching techniques in mastering the target language for the learners. The plans can help the learners to avoid the interference to the second language learners.

## CONCLUSION

From the discussion above can be listed numerous conclusions as follows:

1. The effect of language learners' first language on their production of the language they are learning can be on any aspect of language: grammar, vocabulary, accent, and spelling.
2. Learners will easily acquire structures that are similar to the structures of their mother tongue, but will encounter difficulties where there are differences.
3. The learner also would find difficulties to learn and understand a completely new and different usage of foreign language.
4. Interference as the automatic transfer, due to habit, of the surface structure of the first language onto the surface of the target language.
5. Interference in learning the target language frequently occurs on the students, its happened when they wrote or spelled a number of words that not usual for them.
6. Language transfer is resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired.
7. Positive transfer is occurred when those similarities of the mother tongue and the target language can facilitate the learning. Positive transfer is happened when the relevant unit or structure of both languages is the same "correct" meaning in line with most native speakers' notions of acceptability.
8. Negative transfer is happened when speakers and writers transfer items and structures that are not the same in both languages (first language and second language). Negative transfer is if the structures of the two languages are distinctly different, then one could expect a relatively high frequency of errors to occur in L2, thus indicating an interference of L1 on L2.
9. The language interference occur when the learners transferred element of their first language (L1) into second language (L2) or foreign language. The elements of language interference such as grammatical, morphological, phonological, lexical, syntax, cultural and semantic level.

10. The success in mastering a target language, however, is not only matter of adopting correct methods or approaches. Lost of people believe that an achievement may also be gained by considering how the students, the teacher, as well as the people around the learners, perceive and judge the language, the culture, and the speakers of the language being learned.

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