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BEHIND ACADEMIC WRITING: ISSUES ON L1 INTERFERENCE

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Abstract

There have been many studies examining the interference of the First Language (L1) into English which causes errors through texts produced by students. The results of investigations from mainstream research show four levels of language that are affected by the influence of L1, but academic writing does not only consist of physical processes and their output. There is a significant process that can determine the occurrence of this interference, namely the prewriting process. This study examines the prewriting process in the form of a thinking process with the language used. The results of research conducted on students of the English Language Education study program at University of Timor in 2024-2025, found three stages of mental processes that fall into the category of psycholinguistics (encoding), namely determining basic ideas and concepts (using local languages), constructing structured ideas and concepts (using creole languages), and finalizing ideas and concepts (using Bahasa Indonesia). The reasons for the interference of Indonesian into English in the draft of the student's research proposal were also found because Indonesian is included in the Language Learning (LL) group while other languages are acquired languages (LA) where previous studies have not clearly make boundaries and differences between them.

Keywords: *Interference; Encoding; Academic Writing; Language Acquisition And Language Learning.*

INTRODUCTION

First language interference in English learning in Indonesia has been known as the main factor causing errors in English output. In the Indonesian context, various research results on first language interference show that Indonesian is the dominant first language that influences English production. Putra's (2020) research through high school students found that 80% of errors found through tests were due to lexical interference factors, which means that at the level of words, phrases and sentences in English, students are influenced by Indonesian as their first language. A similar thing was also found by Syafutri and Saputra (2021), for example, stating that the production of English speaking by final semester students is phonologically influenced by their first language, namely Indonesian. Another example of the complexity of the influence of Indonesian on English learning is the results of research by Wulandari and Harida (2021) who investigated Indonesian interference through all linguistic aspects of English production by students of STKIP PGRI Ponorogo, Indonesia.

Some of the research results above illustrate that the interference of Indonesian language to English learning in Indonesia is still very high. However, the question is why is Indonesian the only language that influences the process

of learning and producing English? The vast territory of Indonesia with a large population, cultural diversity, religion and regional languages does not place local languages as the first language in the problem of interference. This question then refers to another problem, namely how the language processing occurs in the prewriting process mentally.

A similar case was also found in final year English Study Program students at Timor University, Kefamenanu, East Nusa Tenggara. Observations conducted showed indications of interference from Indonesian in the draft of English research proposals in almost all linguistic aspects except phonology. This case strengthens previous findings that Indonesian does have a major influence on English learning. However, if we look further, there are other phenomenal aspects that were not answered by previous studies as stated above. The Kefamenanu area is a border town between Timor Leste and Indonesia. The majority of its population is multilingual with a composition of two or three regional languages, Kefamenanu Malay and Indonesian. The most dominant regional language used daily does not interfere with English production but rather Indonesian. This study will answer the question of why Indonesian, which is not

dominant in the research area, can be the main factor of interference.

Encoding and Decoding

Prewriting is a preparation process that is carried out before starting to write. In the academic writing process, prewriting includes determining ideas, determining concepts, researching the topic to be written, collecting references and providing writing facilities (Richards, 1984). At this prewriting stage, the linguistic process has begun to occur, especially when determining ideas and determining the concept of writing. This process is indeed invisible but has a significant impact because it is the basis for the structure of the writing to the formulation of conclusions. This mental process can only be known through special interactions with the author through in-depth interviews. In linguistics, this process is called encoding, a process of meaning that occurs in the human mind to compile and conclude the complete meaning of what he receives. The encoding process in each person is different depending on the language they master and the frequency of use of the language. In general, the first language will play a dominant role in the encoding process because at this stage there has been no speech so that everyone can choose the language that is easiest to understand to compile the concept of meaning.

In terms of science, encoding is included in psycholinguistics because the entire process does not occur physically but mentally in the human brain. According to Brown (1970), encoding is the process of receiving code from outside through human senses that can capture language which is then continued with meaning. This process is also called code production (Slobin, 1974 in Mar'at, 2009). Encoding requires collaboration between the senses as human receptors for language and sufficient topic knowledge and language skills. Without these three things, the encoding process will not be optimal and will result in errors in the decoding process (language production) physically.

Encoding includes three stages in the brain, namely the semantic process, the grammatical process and the phonological process, morphology or syntax and symbols depending on the type of speech (Chaer, 2015: 47). The semantic process is when the encoder receives a message from outside in the form of language in various forms such as spoken speech, writing and symbols. The message that has been received will be processed in the brain to understand the meaning of the message. After going through the semantic process, the grammatical process will be carried out to conclude the construction of meaning that has been built in the semantic process. The last stage of encoding is the phonological process, morphology or

syntax and symbols. This process determines how the message or code will be expressed through various media.

Messages that have been processed at the encoding stage will be produced in a physical process. In the context of this discussion, messages are expressed through academic writing with academic standard construction. It is called a physical process because the series of stages are carried out physically by the author. In addition, if the writing has been completed and read, then a decoding process will occur, namely the process of receiving messages as the reverse process of encoding.

Language Acquisition and Language Learning

Malay is a language used by the Malay group from the Malay Peninsula to the east of the Indonesian archipelago. Initially, this language was a local dialect of the Malay community around Sumatra and Malacca, but along with the development of trade, this language was carried to various island regions which then adapted to the local language. Almost every region in the archipelago, Indonesia today, has a Malay creole that is juxtaposed with local languages, for example Javanese Malay, Sundanese Malay, Borneo Malay, Makassar Malay, Manado Malay, Ambonese Malay, Kupang Malay and Papuan Malay. Therefore, each region has a creole resulting from the interaction between two or more languages (Malay, local languages, Dutch, Portuguese).

The diversity of languages above for a country like Indonesia is not only a linguistic wealth but also has the potential for disintegration based on differences in language and culture. The nation's predecessors have seen this potential gap as a threat so that awareness arose to unite the archipelago, one of which was through language. In 1928 when the youth congress was held, the youth oath was initiated which voiced national unity through language. This is a historical milestone for Indonesian to be used as the main language in communication, especially in formal circumstances. The legalization of Indonesian in a structured manner was carried out by accommodating many vocabularies from regional languages, Malay, to Dutch and Portuguese as well as Arabic. The official codification of Indonesian continued during the New Order when Indonesian became a compulsory subject at every level of education starting in 1965.

Six decades have passed and Bahasa Indonesia, the result of the Youth Initiative in 1928 and the New Order era policies, has succeeded in placing Bahasa Indonesia as the main language in the social life of Indonesian society. Not only in a formal context, mastery of Bahasa Indonesia for many people indicates a person's level of education. This Language Policy also gave rise to public awareness, especially students and college students, that the school

and campus environment where they study is a place where Bahasa Indonesia must be used.

The above phenomenon is in line with the theory of language in society put forward by Fromkin, et al. (2012:370-414) about how a creole is formed until the process of legalizing the creole into a language. Indonesian is designated as the official language of the country in the 1945 Constitution, article 36. This is the basis for the implementation of mandatory Indonesian language until now. As a country with a large population, the large number of Indonesian speakers makes this language one of the most widely spoken languages in the world. In the ASEAN region, Indonesian has become popular due to trade and tourism relations. In 2009, Indonesia enacted Law Number 24 of 2009 which mandated the government to make Indonesian an international language.

In terms of language acquisition, Indonesian is a second language (L2) after regional languages and creole languages. However, politically, Indonesian is the first language (L1) and is a lingua franca for Indonesian society in general which is introduced through the language teaching and learning process. Language acquisition and language learning are distinguished based on the order and group of languages' origin. Elis Rod (1986) the one who stated not to combine these two terminologies in order to avoid misunderstanding.

METHOD

This study was conducted on final year students majoring in English Language Education at University of Timor. This university is located in Kefamenanu City, North Central Timor Regency which directly borders the Timor Leste region. The research subjects were determined based on the purposive sampling technique system (Bernard, 2002) with several criteria, namely; 1) students have completed the thesis demystification exam, 2) have completed the draft of the research proposal, 3) are currently undergoing the process of guidance for compiling a research proposal, and 4) have not attended a research proposal seminar. From the criteria above, there are 10 research subjects determined in the period from August 2024 to January 2025.

The data collection process was carried out through semi-structured in-depth interviews that emphasized the prewriting process in compiling a thesis. Students were asked to tell how they thought in compiling ideas and concepts and what language they used in the process. The collected data were analyzed using the content analysis method according to the theory of Hayes and Krippendorff (2007).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The subjects of the study were 10 students consisting of 2 international students from Timor Leste and 8 students from several regions on Timor Island such as Kupang Regency, Belu Regency, Malaka Regency, North Central Timor Regency, and South-Central Timor Regency. Based on the distribution of the subjects' areas of origin, several languages were found that they use, namely:

1. From Timor Leste: Tetun Fraca dialect Dili, Bahasa Indonesia, Portuguese
2. From North Central Timor: Dawanese Language, Tetun dialect Belu and Malaka, Kefamenanu Malay, Bahasa Indonesia
3. From Belu and Malaka: Tetun dialect Belu and Malaka, Marac language, Atambua Malay, Bahasa Indonesia
4. From South Central Timor: Dawanese language, SoE Malay, Bahasa Indonesia
5. From Kupang: Dawanese language, Kupang Malay, Bahasa Indonesia

The above findings are evidence that the subjects have multilingual abilities that allow them to communicate and interact using more than two languages. Students from Belu and Malaka have linguistic closeness because they speak the same language, namely Tetun with a dialect adapted to their respective regions. Similar things were also found in students from North Central Timor. This district is flanked by Belu and Malaka Regencies which allows language contact to occur which influences their speech. The eastern part of North Central Timor borders Belu Regency so it tends to use Belu dialect Tetun while the southern part bordering Malaka Regency uses Tetun dialect Malaka.

The two districts where the students come from, namely South-Central Timor and Kupang regency, use the same language, namely Dawanese Language, which has no dialect differences only at the intonation level (phonology). The similarity of all subjects from all the regions above is that they can speak Indonesian and understand each other.

Idea and Concept Construction: Mental Process

Idea and concept construction is a mental process carried out by students in their brains before these ideas and concepts are poured into writing through a physical process. The question asked to students in this section is 'how do you build ideas and concepts in your mind before writing?' The process of determining and forming ideas and concepts from 10 students can be described through the mental process diagram below:

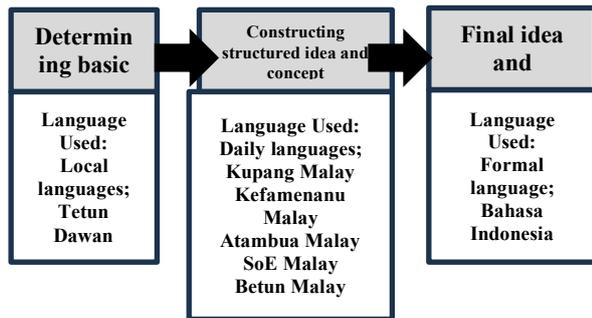


Figure 1. Steps in Students' Mental Proses

The figure above shows the process of determining, forming and finalizing ideas and concepts that occur in the minds of students before they write. The first stage is determining basic ideas and concepts. This process is an independent introduction of writing topics by students that are still abstract but already have a clear vision and purpose. At this stage, students think using their respective local languages. The same answer from each student to the question, 'why do you use your local language when determining ideas and concepts in your mind?'

"Saya menggunakan Bahasa Tetun karena gampang untuk berpikir. Maksudnya kalau saya pakai Bahasa Tetun saya tidak susah berpikir. Saya leluasa untuk menghubungkan pengetahuan saya dengan apa yang akan saya tulis. Kalau pakai Bahasa Indonesia saya terbatas dalam berpikir." (Informan 1)

"I use Tetun because it is easy to think. I mean if I use Tetun I don't have a hard time thinking. I am free to connect my knowledge with what I am going to write. If I use Indonesian I am limited in thinking." (Informant 1)

"Bahasa Indonesia itu kan Bahasa formal, kami biasa pakai di kampus. Tapi saat berpikir sekalipun untuk susun skripsi saya pakai Bahasa daerah saya sendiri. Saya bebas berpikir kalau pake Bahasa daerah saya sendiri. Lagipula tidak ada yang melihat dan menilai jadi apa salahnya saya pakai Bahasa daerah sendiri dalam berpikir. Saya lebih cepat paham kalau saya berpikir dan membangun ide dalam Bahasa saya sendiri. Nanti saat menulis baru saya perbaiki pada saat menulis pakai Bahasa Indonesia." (Informan 5)

"Bahasa Indonesia is a formal language, we usually use it on campus. But when I think, even to write my thesis, I use my

own regional language. I am free to think if I use my own regional language. Besides, no one is watching and judging, so what's wrong with me using my own regional language in thinking. I understand faster if I think and build ideas in my own language. Later when I write, I will correct it when writing using Indonesian." (Informant 5)

The two examples of expressions above show that the initial process of determining basic ideas and concepts in students' minds is carried out in their respective regional languages for the reason of freedom of thought. For them, when thinking using their regional language there are no obstacles to finding scientific terms. They choose to use simple expressions in their regional language until the stage of introducing basic ideas and concepts. The key word for using regional languages at this first stage is freedom of thought.

The second stage is the construction of structured ideas and concepts. At this stage, students tend to use everyday language in social interactions according to their origin. The language used is creole Malay according to their respective regions such as Kupang Malay, Kefamenanu Malay, Atambua Malay, Betun Malay, and SoE Malay. The basic ideas and concepts that have been determined in the previous stage are constructed according to the context of the topic they will write. Then, why is the language used a local creole language?

"Saya pakai Bahasa Melayu Atambua karena ini kan sudah ada idenya, biasanya ide ini saya diskusikan juga dengan teman saya. Karena kami berkomunikasi menggunakan Bahasa Melayu Atambua, jadi saya juga berpikir menggunakan Bahasa ini. Maksudnya biar lebih gampang supaya ide ini saya susun dan saya diskusikan dengan teman untuk dapat masukan." (Informan 4)

"I use Atambua Malay because I already have an idea, usually I also discuss this idea with my friend. Because we communicate using Atambua Malay, so I also think of using this language. The point is to make it easier for me to organize this idea and discuss it with my friend to get input." (Informant 4)

"Kalau saya berpikir untuk Menyusun ide itu pakai Bahasa Melayu Kefamenanu. Saat itu saya sudah mulai baca-baca sumber. Walaupun sumber bacaannya berbahasa inggris atau Indonesia, saya

memilih untuk memahaminya melalui proses berpikir dalam Bahasa Melayu Kefamenanu. Selain lebih gampang dan cepat paham, saya juga bisa bertanya ke teman-teman karena kami tinggal di Kefa jadi kami pakai Bahasa Melayu Kefamenanu.” (Informan 7)

"If I think about organizing the idea, use Kefamenanu Malay. At that time I had started reading sources. Even though the reading sources are in English or Indonesian, I choose to understand them through the process of thinking in Kefamenanu Malay. Besides being easier and quicker to understand, I can also ask my friends because we live in Kefa so we use Kefamenanu Malay." (Informant 7)

The answer to the question about the type of language and the reasons for its use in the second stage above shows that the selection of local creole language aims to compile more structured ideas and concepts and further communication and discussion. Communication and discussion at this stage have begun to be directed so that to facilitate it, the regional creole language used daily is used. The purpose of using this type of language is to make it easier to communicate and discuss, especially to obtain input, suggestions and criticism from other fellow students and from lecturers. In short, the local creole language used at this thinking stage aims not only to facilitate the formation of structured ideas and concepts but also to facilitate communicating these ideas and concepts with other fellow students.

In the final stage of the mental process, students finalize the ideas and concepts that have been formed. This thinking stage is passed by students using Indonesian. This final stage allows students to create concept maps based on scientific terms that they will write in their research proposal drafts. Each student admitted that at this stage they used Indonesian because the ideas and concepts they had developed were ready to be written. Questions about the use of Indonesian at this stage were answered as follows.

“Setelah selesai semuanya saya harus siap untuk menulis dan sebelum menulis saya harus berpikir apa saja ide dasar yang harus saya tulis. Untuk itu saya berpikir dalam Bahasa Indonesia supaya tidak salah nanti ketika menulis.” (Informan 3)

"After everything is finished, I have to be ready to write and before writing I have to think about what are the basic ideas that I have to write. For that, I think in

Indonesian so that I don't make mistakes later when writing." (Informant 3)

“Sebelum menulis tentu saja saya pakai Bahasa Indonesia. Bahasa Indonesia kan Bahasa formal yang dipakai dalam tulisan. Jadi untuk memudahkan saat menulis, semua ide saya rangkum dalam pikiran saya. Semuanya itu saya lakukan dalam Bahasa Indonesia.” (Informan 6)

“Before writing, of course I use Indonesian. Indonesian is a formal language used in writing. So, to make it easier when writing, I summarize all my ideas in my mind. I do all of that in Indonesian.” (Informant 6)

The ideas and concepts that have been formed in the minds of students are finally formulated in Indonesian. The use of Indonesian based on the results of the interview is based on the academic awareness of students who will carry out the physical writing process. They admitted that when forming concepts and basic ideas they thought in regional and creole languages, but when the ideas and concepts were formed, they reconstructed them in Indonesian on the grounds that the results of this thinking were ready to be written and the language they would use to write the draft ideas was Indonesian. In short, at this stage the ideas and concepts were ready to be written so they thought about formulating them in Indonesian.

The three stages of the mental process above show that the language used at each stage is different depending on its respective purposes. In the first stage, basic ideas and concepts that are still abstract can be easily determined using the local language because it gives students the freedom to think. In the second stage, they think using the local creole language (local Malay) to form more structured ideas and concepts. In addition, with this language they can discuss with fellow students or lecturers to get input on their ideas and concepts. In the final stage, the concepts and ideas that have been formed are formulated in the minds of students using Indonesian. The reason is to make it easier for them to write using academic terminology that is in accordance with Indonesian language standards.

First Language: Language Acquisition or Language Learning?

Almost all studies on first language interference with English in the Indonesian context mention that Indonesian is the first language (L1) of the speaker. There is nothing wrong with this opinion, but the lack of explanation about why Indonesian is called the first language (L1) creates

ambiguity in drawing the conclusion that all first languages are Indonesian. Through this study, it was found that there is a grouping between language acquisition and language learning.

For the informant students of the research, Indonesian is a formal language that they acquire through the teaching and learning process from elementary school to high school. They admitted that they did not have any other learning process other than at school to learn Indonesian. On the other hand, they acquired regional languages (Dawan, Tetun) and creoles (Kupang Malay, Atambua Malay, Betun Malay, Kefamenanu Malay) naturally from an early age. This means that there is no formal or informal learning process to acquire these languages. Thus, it can be concluded that there are two groups of student languages based on their origin, namely the acquired languages and learned languages. The table below is a group of languages based on their origin.

Table 1. Language Order on Acquisition and Learning

Language order	Language Acquisition (LA)	Language Learning (LL)
L1	Dawan Tetun dialect Dili Tetun dialect Belu Tetun dialect Malaka Marae Portuguese	Bahasa Indonesia
L2	Atambua Malay Kefemenanu Malay SoE Malay Kupang Malay	English German Portuguese

The table above shows that Indonesian is indeed the first language but in the language learning group. English is the second language. Regional languages and other creole languages are in the language acquisition group.

In the context of Indonesian interference found in the draft of the student's research proposal, Indonesian is referred to as the first language (L1) and English as the second language (L2) because the language group is language learning. Indonesian is the first language (LL1) which is learned consciously and through formal institutions starting from elementary school to high school. English is the second language learning (LL2).

Simple language sequence grouping is very significant in analyzing the case of interference of the first language into the second language. If the discussion is about the acquired language group, then it must be emphasized that the language being analyzed is the acquired group. On the

other hand, if the investigation involves Indonesian and English, then it must be emphasized that the discussion is language learning to facilitate identification. This is very important for multilingual communities such as students living in the border area of Timor Leste and Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

The context of English learning in Indonesia, especially in the border region with Timor Leste, includes variations of regional languages, creoles and formal language policies. This complexity results in the emergence of cases of interference of Indonesian (LL1) to English (LL2). Research proposals, which are part of Academic writing, are not free from this interference case, even since in the mind (mental process) language contact which is an early indication of interference can be found.

The three stages of thinking in the prewriting process (determining basic idea and concept, constructing structured idea and concept, and final structured idea and concept) show that there is involvement of regional languages, creole languages and Indonesian in each stage. Indonesian is a bridge in the preparation of structured ideas and concepts in the draft of the research proposal (final stage). The reason is because Indonesian is a formal language in education that can be translated through various machine translation media into English. Regional languages and creole languages do not have a direct influence on English which can be seen from the case of interference.

The results of this study also prove that it is important to be able to distinguish between language acquisition (LA) and language learning (LL) in analyzing cases of first language interference. The aim is to provide a clear boundary between these two methods of language acquisition as well as a comprehensive understanding of the differences between LA and LL so as not to get caught up in the abstract term L1/L2.

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