



# Proceeding

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*"Language Awareness on TEFL for Multilingual Learners"*

*English Department, Faculty of Languages and Arts*

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# PROCEEDING

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**Annual Seminar on English Language and Teaching 2014**

**“Language Awareness on TEFL for Multilingual Learners”**

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## Factors Causing Indonesian Grammatical Interferences on English Use: A Case of Undergraduate Students' Expository Writing in Padang, Indonesia

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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. The interference may occur on lexical, morphological and syntactical elements which cause by many factors. This paper discusses the factors causing Indonesian grammatical interferences on English use shown in the English students' writings of the two universities in Padang, Indonesia.

As a whole, the main causes are linguistics and non-linguistics factors which contributed to any grammatical interference appeared in students' writing concerning syntactical, morphological and lexical elements. Limited vocabulary and lack competence of English were the linguistics factors. The tendency to use such vocabularies caused grammatical interferences since those vocabularies could not be appropriately used in the contexts of sentences. While the non-linguistic factor contributed to this phenomenon in terms of cultural internalization and social status as well as psychological drive. The influence of Indonesian cultures, such as the use of complicated and twisty sentences appeared on students' writing instead of being direct to the point as in the English culture. A sort of motivation gained by students, that is instrumental motivation, may also result interference.

**Key words:** grammatical interference, linguistics factor, non-linguistics factor, cultural internalization, motivation

### **Introduction**

It cannot be denied that 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 turns to misconception of his/her purposes. The result is that the readers hardly catch the idea or even lead to wrong conclusion. Thus, people need to know the rules of English to express their ideas in correct grammatical and linguistic patterns.

There have been many studies conducted related to language interferences. Some of which are by Lay, (Bella (1999), Lee (2009). They have similar findings on their studies. Lay found out that students, in their English essay writing, got the problem with using appropriate word order in English. Translating the patterns used in Chinese is a cause of the problem, which makes English used interfered. Bella's (1999) study shows learners' difficulty in organising their knowledge into coherent structures appropriately albeit they have accumulated structural entities of L2. They always base their English response on their native language structures. As

a result, high frequently errors occurred in English, which indicates an interference of the native language on the target language. In another case, Lee demonstrates that the way the court interpreters cope with inexplicit language may result in inaccurate rendition of the evidence, and thus have legal implications for court proceedings.

The problem of the interference of mother tongue (Indonesian) to English also arose in the English department students' writings of two universities in Padang, namely State University of Padang (UNP) and Bung Hatta University (UBH). The indication 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 (Syarif & Wahyuni, 2013). This interference occurred in such grammatical elements, such as lexicon, morphological and syntactical elements. And the most problematic element dealt with syntactical elements in which the students hardly differentiated the use of some English words into the right context of their sentences. To my concern, factors causing those Indonesian grammatical interferences in the use of English is interesting to discuss. The factors are generally divided into two main factors, namely, linguistics and non-linguistics factors.

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 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.

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. As 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. This negative attitude usually arises from cultural knowledge of the language got from unexpected programs of television, film, and from printed media (Brown, 2007). It turns to decrease motivation to learn and use the language.

While learning a language, Gardner and Lambert (1972) in Steinberg (2001) proposed two kinds of motivation involved. Whenever a learner wants to be recognized by native speakers s/he tries to integrate her/himself with them. Then s/he is eager to use the language learned. Gardner and Lambert name it as an integrative motivation. The next is instrumental motivation that refers to the motivation of learning in order to get a job, in which 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 rise the interference.

This paper discussed how linguistics and non-linguistics factors caused grammatical interference on students' writing in using English. The data gained from questionnaire were divided into two main factors linguistics and non-linguistics factors. Simple quantitative analysis was used in order to analyze how far the linguistic and non-linguistic factors contributed to the phenomenon of grammatical interference in using English on students' writing in Universitas Negeri Padang (UNP) and Universitas Bung Hatta (UBH).

## Result and Discussion

Both linguistics and non-linguistics factors really contributed to the grammatical interferences on students' expository writing. The linguistics factors dealt with students' language mastery (morphology, syntax, as well as vocabulary) in target language (English). Moreover, the non-linguistic factors were related to the cultural internalization, motivation, control of social status, etc.

Based on the data gathered, linguistics factor was a part of causes for any grammatical interferences appeared on students' writing. The data obtained from the questionnaire proved that most of the students had such limitation of their language mastery. In this case, the lack of knowledge related to the appropriate context for certain words was one of the causes on this grammatical interferences. By and large, almost 30% of students have lack of language mastery. Compared to language mastery problem, the data on vocabulary were much more problematic. More than 50% students in both universities had limited vocabulary mastery. However, both of them are the main factors that caused grammatical interferences on their writing production.

Let's start with the lack of vocabulary mastery on students' writing as the more problematic one, in more detail, as it is seen in Table 1.

Table 1. English department students vocabulary mastery at UNP and UBH

No	Lack of students' vocabulary mastery	UNP (%)	UBH (%)
1	I don't know the meaning of some English words that makes them misused	40	56
2	I don't know the appropriate words used in English context that leads to misinterpretation	53	59
3	I don't have enough vocabulary to express my ideas.	47	54
4	I can't differ the use two words that have similar meanings	25	27
5	I tend to use the vocabulary I have mastered to say something instead of choosing the appropriate word	51	56
6	I choose an English word that I think having the same meaning as the Indonesian word for expressing my ideas.	39	56

Data in Table 1 showed that students tended to use the common words they have known in formulating their sentences whenever they were faced to the new sentences construction. Almost all of the indicators given were responded similarly since they are mutual expression. Nevertheless, the highest degree of students case is on their low comprehension in using appropriate words in certain constructed sentence, that is 53% of UNP and 59% of UBH students. It produced misinterpretation of the meaning gained from their writing. This problem affected to the tendency of using English vocabulary having the same meaning to the Indonesian language when they wanted to express their ideas (51% students from UNP and 56% students from UBH). This phenomenon leads to another situation in which the students use English words by transferring Indonesian words into English directly. They did not really pay attention to words equivalence of English and Indonesian based on the context they are used.

In calculation, the internal cause of interference in the English use is dominantly on the limited vocabulary of the students. This is stated by 53% of UNP and 62% UBH students as respondents from two universities. And only 19% of UNP and 11% UBH students stated no. It is calculated that more than 50% of students from ensured that lack of English vocabulary indeed becomes the main factor influencing the Indonesian interference into their writing product. This is also proved by the data of their writing as in the statement *If the users can not master the time, ....* The verb *master* in the sentence shows the problem of the word choice. It does not actually collocate with the phrase *the time*. In this context, it will be probably appropriate to use the verb *control*. Students' writing contained most words that were not appropriately used in certain context of sentences as showing the interferences commonly dealt

with the problems of vocabulary mastery. Then, students limited knowledge on context needed certain vocabulary, the tendency to use known words instead of using suitable word, and putting dictionary meaning of words into any kind of text are assumed to be the causes of the problems.

The data description above proved that lack of vocabulary and linguistics mastery contributed to the grammatical interferences on students' writing. It is in line with the idea proposed by Troike (2006) in which two different structure and style of languages can build a interference when the language user cannot differ them well. The lack of vocabulary leads students to use the vocabularies that they have known by ignoring the appropriate context when they are used. Besides, it also leads the students to transfer the Indonesian vocabularies into English as an impact of their lack of vocabulary mastery.

Next is language problem as the factor causing the interference. There were also 25% students of UNP and 32% students of UBH who got problem related to their language mastery. It is the second factor which caused grammatical interference in using English on students' writing in UNP and UBH. There were three items indicated as the case of language mastery, the way of expressing ideas, the way of starting the communication, and the ethic of English communication. From the answer of the questionnaire, it seems that these did not show much to the availability of language interference.

However, the analysis of their essay is different. Students' competence in differing the patterns of constructing sentences in Indonesian and English commonly influenced students' writing production that led to the grammatical interference. One of the examples from students' writing was *Maybe in the future we cannot see the clubs like we have now*. The bold phrase showed that the interference appeared because the students are not familiar with and did not know the common language used for expressing this ideas, which deals with the language ethic. This sentence can be formulated as *It is possible not to find the similar club later in the future*. It is clear that their insufficient knowledge related to the common expression in English may be as one of the factors that caused the grammatical interferences on students' writing.

An average number of students showed the tendency that they used English when needed. It reflects that they rarely use English, and as the consequence, they are not familiar with using good and appropriate English. Another factor emerging the interference is also from the use of Indonesian rules in English. It can be seen in a case of using *to be* and *modal auxiliary*. As it is known that the Indonesian language does not recognize these two components, so that at the time students transferred the rules directly into English sentence, the language interference occurred. It was also worsened because students did not really care about the rules of English when using it. Consequently, it affects to the emergence of syntactical interference.

This study also proved that the lack of students' language mastery also becomes one of the linguistics factors that influence grammatical interference. It is similar with Bella's (1999) finding that the first language acquisition influences the mastery of second/foreign language that can make the language users do grammatical interference. Her study also stated that the more different the patterns of syntax of the two languages, the more probable the interference happens.

The next is how far the non-linguistics factors influence grammatical interferences in using English on students' writing in UNP Padang and UBH Padang. It seems that almost all factors indicated have the possibility to be the factors of interference causes. For the clear data it is described in Table 2.

Table 2. Non-linguistics factors that influence the grammatical interferences of students English department in UNP Padang and UBH Padang

No	Non-linguistics factors	Percentage of students' answer (%)					
		Agree		Quite agree		Disagree	
		UNP	UBH	UNP	UBH	UNP	UBH
1	Lack of motivation	41	50	22	9	37	40
2	Cultural internalization	59	59	27	19	19	21
3	Prestige and style	38	32	33	49	28	19

4	Language loyalty	39	37	33	35	28	28
5	Control of social status	39	54	40	33	21	13

Tabel 2 shows 5 non-linguistics factors analyzed as the causes of grammatical interference in using English as the written work of English department students of UNP and UBH Padang. From 5 factors asked on the questionnaire, it was proved that the most influential factor was cultural internalization in which 59% students of UNP and UBH stated that culture influenced them to transfer Indonesian style into English. The second is lack of motivation. Their limited vocabulary shows that they do not have the eagerness to practise themselves on developing their vocabulary. Control of social status had the probability to become the factor that causes the interference as we can see 39% of UNP and 54% of UBH students felt like that.

Basically, the problems that caused interference related to cultural internalization were described in table 3 as follow:

Table 3. Factors of cultural internalization on students' writing in UNP Padang and UBH Padang

No	Factors of cultural internalization	Percentage of students' answer (%)					
		Agree		Quite agree		Disagree	
		UNP	UBH	UNP	UBH	UNP	UBH
1	Start the discussion or writing with less important information	57	39	35	28	1	25
2	Using words by considering the degree of politeness	79	51	15	20	4	21
3	Use Indonesian culture in using English	35	44	33	22	32	25
4	Think in Indonesian while using English	40	54	37	17	23	27
5	Think in western culture when using English	1	9	28	37	67	41

Data on table 5 above proved that all those problems were the causes of cultural internalization in which more than 50% students showed agreement for all those statements. Furthermore, using words by considering the degree of politeness was the most problematic case from all those problems. It was proved by the data in which there were 46% students of UNP and 35% students of UBH who stated that they always used words containing such politeness values in every moment and to everyone. It was stated as a way to show the respect to others, just as Indonesian culture. Thus, it caused the grammatical interference because Indonesian and English have different cultures. One of the examples is shown by the use of address term *you* in which it can be used for all second person addressee in English while in the Indonesian language, it means as 'kamu'. It can cause such kinds of interferences when the students consider *you* in a more specific function because 'kamu' cannot be used for the older people than the user or formal situation. It is internalized when they use English.

Besides, the use of less important words commonly appear on students' writing. They commonly started their writing by providing any less important information, such as *They see that, although there are many advantages of using facebook there are also disadvantages of using it.*, may actually be reduced into *There are many advantages and disadvantages of using facebook*. The words that were bold were categorized less important. It directly links to the case in which the students tended to create English sentence while thinking in Indonesian style. It results such interferences since they took Indonesian culture and style on English communication.

Based on this research, it can be stated that basically non-linguistics factors influenced the grammatical interferences. As described above, cultural internalization became one of the factors that produce grammatical interferences since two languages, English and Indonesian, have different style, culture, and especially grammatical system. Both of the these languages



have a high degree of differences in case of grammatical system since Indonesian is a kind of *aglutinative* language while English is *flexi* language (Jufrizal, 2007). During teaching and learning process, comprehending and acquiring English rules is quite difficult. It is caused by the significant differences grammatical system of those languages. as a result, students tended to transfer the Indonesian language into English which leads to the language internalize.

The finding of this study is also supported by Arifin (2011) in which he explains that environment is one of the factors that cause language interferences when the students directly do translation in their writing. The translation process and the environment which cannot build an effective communication in using English results a worse students' achievement in acquiring English.

Based on the data analysis above, it can be stated that both of linguistics and non-linguistics factors influence the grammatical interferences on students' expository writing in Universitas Negeri Padang (UNP) and Universitas Bung Hatta (UBH). Linguistics factors dealt with lack of vocabulary and linguistics mastery while non-linguistics factors related to cultural internalization, language loyalty, etc.

### Conclusion and Recommendation

In the conclusion, the grammatical interference of Indonesian in the English writing of English department students were caused by two main factors, linguistics and non-linguistics factors. These two factors were related each other to the grammatical interferences because they dealt with students' competence in English and also the influence of the environment in using English.

Linguistics factors that caused the grammatical interference on students' expository writing in Universitas Negeri Padang (UNP) and Universitas Bung Hatta (UBH) were students' lack of vocabulary and students' lack of linguistics mastery that finally result any grammatical interferences. Beside that, non-linguistics factors that caused the grammatical interference on students' expository writing in Universitas Negeri Padang (UNP) and Universitas Bung Hatta (UBH) were cultural internalization, language loyalty, motivation, prestige and style, and control of social status.

Many causes of grammatical interferences on the use of English should be decreased. Thus, in English language learning, it should be considered to emphasize on language awareness by strengthening the activities more on practice beginning from the basic to the more complex patterns. Practice on linguistic elements should be based on *contrastive analysis*. I assume it is suited to the importance of grammatical interference case. Furthermore, strengthening the cross cultural knowledge in the instruction is needed to be put into account in the subject of *Cross Cultural Understanding*.

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