

THE MORPHOSYNTACTIC STRUCTURE AMONG ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL MULTILINGUAL STUDENTS IN INDONESIA: A LANGUAGE TRANSFER PHENOMENON

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Abstract: This study investigates the phenomenon of language transfer among multilingual students at an Islamic boarding school, focusing on the morphosyntactic structures in recount texts written by students. Using descriptive quantitative methods, the research was conducted at a boarding school in South Kalimantan. Data were collected through free-writing exercises with ten selected students. The findings showed no significant statistical difference in language transfer between English and Arabic. However, interviews indicated that students often use Indonesian when forming sentences in English and Arabic, supporting the TPM theory. Future research should include a larger sample size, particularly from boarding schools, as each institution's unique approach to multilingual education can influence language transfer in different ways

Keywords: Multilingual, Language transfer, Islamic boarding school.

INTRODUCTION

This research investigates the phenomenon of language transfer on morphosyntactic structure of learners' writing in recount text among multilingual learners at an Islamic boarding school, where students are exposed to multiple languages, including the local language, Indonesian, Arabic, and English. As Islamic boarding school students exhibit distinct characteristics, such as diverse language use, structured language learning activities, and a strong emphasis on Arabic, which is the primary language of instruction (Hanafiah et al., 2018; Asgara et al., 2022; Nilan, 2009). Despite limited English exposure, this setting of this research has introduced multilingual programs and language dormitories to encourage English practice outside regular classes, supporting active language use and embracing multilingualism.

A multilingual person can use, understand, and develop in multiple languages, with a deep grasp of language characteristics (Grosjean, 1989; Brice, 2009; Fromkin & Hyam, 2007). Research suggests that multilingualism enhances metalinguistic abilities, cognitive, linguistic, and academic achievements (Admiraal et al., 2006; Shiloh, 2017). However, not all studies agree that bilingualism consistently improves academic performance, as learning in a second language can pose challenges in comprehension and content acquisition (Heugh et al., 2007; Nordin, 2010; Mukminin et al., 2019).

In the realm of multilingual students, who navigate the production of multiple languages, language transfer plays a crucial role in facilitating their acquisition of new languages. This

phenomenon involves both the native language (L1) and second language (L2) potentially influencing multilingual learners (Alonso & Rothman, 2017; Hopp, 2019). What sets L3 settings apart is the diverse linguistic exposure of learners, encompassing more than one language. Consequently, language transfer among multilingual students manifests in four potential scenarios: (1) absence of transfer from L1 and L2 to L3, (2) L1 as the primary source of transfer, (3) L2 as the primary source of transfer, and (4) either L1 or L2 serving as a transfer source (Alonso & Rothman, 2017).

Research shows that multilingual students transfer language patterns in morphosyntactic contexts. Abbas et al. (2021) found that native and second languages influence the processing of a third language's morphosyntactic structures in real-time, differing from offline judgments. In Indonesia, Sidupa (2018a) observed that Indonesian (L1) influences the acquisition of English (L2) past tense forms among elementary ESL students. Based on a review of prominent studies, several conclusions can be drawn: (1) Existing research on language transfer, particularly in morphosyntactic aspects, has primarily focused on European languages like Arabic, Hebrew and English. (2) Current research trends highlight the language transfer processes among children and adult learners. (3) However, there is a notable gap in research focusing on morphosyntactic transfer from Indonesian (L1) and Arabic (L2) to English (L3) within the Indonesian context. Additionally, there has been insufficient attention given to Islamic boarding schools, where natural language transfer processes occur as students navigate multilingual environments.

Building on previous research, this research explores whether language transfer occurs in the morphosyntactic structures of multilingual learners at an Islamic boarding school in their English writing of recount text. Moreover, this research aims to identify the ungrammatical instances produced by the learners.

METHOD

This study used descriptive quantitative methods to examine language transfer in one Islamic boarding school in South Kalimantan. It focused on how Indonesian and Arabic influence English morphosyntactic structures in students' writing. Free writing tasks were used to analyze students' writing, while interviews explored factors affecting language transfer (Cresswell, 2012).

This study targeted twelfth-grade students at a private Islamic boarding school in South Kalimantan. Ten students were selected using purposive sampling by using these criteria for selection included participation in and graduation from English and Arabic dormitory programs, and residency at the school for six to eight years.

To address the research questions, several tools were used: an English proficiency test, an Arabic proficiency test, a free writing task, and interviews. These instruments provided

comprehensive data. The free writing task, conducted over three sixty-minute in three sessions, required students to write recount texts on different topics to examine their use of target structures. Topics included “What did you do during the last holiday?”, “What was the best experience you ever had?”, and “What was the worst experience you ever had?”. This approach ensured consistency and robustness in the data. Interviews with open-ended questions were used as supplementary tools to support the main information on students’ writing.

The analysis began by coding students’ writing into numerical data based on linguistic features and their frequency (Gerot & Wignell, 1994). This data was analyzed using SPSS with Chi-square tests. Interview data were as supplementary to support prior instrument also analyzed, considering factors like learner and language background (Sharwood & Eric kellerman, 1986; Dewaele, 1998; Odlin in Murphy, 2003; Selinker, 2013; Avis, 1957). The data were organized according to these models, and verified by raters, including expert cross-checking, to ensure validity and consistency.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Linguistic features of students' production in English and Arabic

After conducting several free writing tasks that produced thirty students’ recount texts, I classified the linguistic features that emerged in the students’ writing, whether they were grammatically correct or incorrect. Subsequently, I analyzed these sentences using the Chi-square test to investigate whether language transfer occurred in the students’ writing.

Table 1 Summary of Chi-square 1

aspect	Writing I (asymptotic significance score)	Interpret	Writing II (asymptotic significance score)	Interpret	Writing III (asymptotic significance score)	interpret
gi of subject * ugi of subject	.633	not statistically significant	.350	not statistically significant	.265	not statistically significant
gi of main process * ugi of process	.231	not statistically significant	.283	not statistically significant	.254	not statistically significant
gi of c of extent * ugi of c of extent	.680	not statistically significant	.157	not statistically significant	.566	not statistically significant
gi of c of location * ugi of c of location	.234	not statistically significant	.323	not statistically significant	.864	not statistically significant
gi of c of manner * ugi of c of	-		.274	not statistically significant	.212	not statistically significant

manner						
gi of past tense * ugi of past tense	.242	not statistically significant	.242	not statistically significant	.256	not statistically significant

The results in Tables 1 shows no statistical significance in the linguistic features of students' recount texts in English, indicating no evident language transfer between these languages. The differences in patterns and rules between English and Arabic support the idea that language similarity influences transfer, as closer languages promote crosslinguistic interaction (Antonova-Ünlü & Sağın-Şimşek, 2015). However, this study found that these differences enhanced students' linguistic awareness, allowing them to distinguish between the languages' rules and patterns (Klein in Rothman and Halloran, 2013). Despite this awareness, the findings appear contradictory, as students show no transfer despite recognizing linguistic differences. Nonetheless, transfer can still occur without obvious similarities (Kellerman in Santos, 2013.)

Differences between English and Arabic were evident in students' writing, especially with the use of null subjects in Arabic. In Arabic, verbs are inflected to indicate the subject, making it often implicit. For example, in “إِذَا أُرِيدُ أَنْ أَعْمَلَ عَمَلًا” the verb includes the subject “I” implicitly. Unlike English, which usually requires an explicit subject, Arabic often omits it, except in imperative sentences like “come here.” Research by Ortin and Fernandez-Florez (2019) on English and Spanish speakers learning Portuguese as an L3 supported the L2 Status Factor (L2SF) theory, showing that L2 influences L3 acquisition. Their data indicated that similarities, such as null subjects, between Spanish and Portuguese facilitated linguistic pattern transfer. Rothman et al. (2011) proposed four models of language transfer: (1) no transfer, (2) L1 factor, (3) L2 status factor (L2SF), and (4) cumulative enhancement model (CEM) and typological primacy model (TPM). Based on these theories, I believe transfer is occurring. Interviews revealed that students often apply Indonesian patterns when constructing sentences in Arabic and English.

“I still use Indonesia pattern in making English sentence because it makes me easier to make it
(participant 1, interview)

I still use Indonesia pattern when I make Arabic sentence because it helps me in making it (participant 6,
interview)”

Moreover, some students also incorporate Arabic sentence patterns into their English writing for simplicity. For example, the Arabic noun phrase “جملة اسمية” is similar to the English non-verbal sentence structure (subject + complement of subject). Although Arabic lacks an auxiliary verb like “to be,” the structural pattern is similar. Additionally, Arabic verbal phrases

often omit the explicit subject, highlighting a key difference between the two languages.

Having the distinction on students scored significantly higher in Arabic (85-97.5) than in English (33-67), indicating that Arabic, their primary language, strongly influences their English sentence construction. Intermediate-level students may not have fully mastered L3 or L4 structures, allowing L1, L2, and L3 factors to impact their acquisition. Despite no significant statistical difference in chi-square analysis, this aligns with the Transfer of Processing Mechanism (TPM) theory (Alonso et al., 2017; Rothman, 2011), which suggests language transfer can occur from previous languages. Students reported using Indonesian patterns in English for convenience and adopting Arabic patterns when learning English, supporting the idea of language transfer in multilingual learners.

Ungrammatical sentences in students' production of English and Arabic

The linguistic features recount texts include subject participants, main processes, circumstances of extent, location, manner, and past tenses. The summary of students' English writing indicates that ungrammatical instances frequently appear in their texts.

The outcomes indicate several common grammatical errors in students' English writing: (1) subject issues such as including missing subjects; (2) main verb problems, such as omitting "ed," incorrect use of "to be," missing irregular verbs, and misuse of "always" in the past tense; (3) errors in expressing extent, including incorrect prepositions; (4) location errors, such as incorrect preposition usage; (5) manner issues, including incorrect use of adverbs and misplacement of adjective phrases; and (8) past tense issues, such as omitting "ed," missing irregular verbs, and incorrect tense usage.

“When arrived at Banjarbaru Airport (participant 4, writing I)”

In the recount test, many ungrammatical sentences were produced, particularly with missing subjects, similar to Arabic, a null subject language where the subject is implied and attached to the verb. This pattern led to errors, as students omitted subjects in English sentences. These errors indicate a lack of understanding of the distinction between subjects and objects and proper sentence structure (Corder, 1976; Dulay et al., 1982; Hammer in Simbolon, 2015).

“I play mobile legend (participant 1, writing I)

We was on the flight for two hours (participant 3, writing I)

It was time to shone (participant 2, writing II)”

Students made ungrammatical sentences due to missing "ed" endings, incorrect use of "to be" and misuse of irregular verbs, indicating unfamiliarity with recount texts. Errors included placing irregular verbs incorrectly after "to" or an auxiliary verb, suggesting overgeneralization of English grammar rules (Corder, 1976). Additionally, it indicates negative transfer since some students failed to transform verbs into their past tense forms, overgeneralizing English sentence structures.

“He putted me off hardly into the bathroom (participant 6, writing III)

I decrease handsome verily (partipant 9, writing III)”

The misuse of adverbs, where students often over-generalize by adding "ly" to adjectives. Additionally, students misplaced adverb phrases, placing them after adjectives instead of before. Another linguistic issue is the ungrammatical use of past tense, which includes missing "ed" endings, omitting irregular verbs, failing to use the correct form of "to be", and errors with past perfect and perfect continuous tenses. Additionally, there is a misuse of the adverb "always" in the past tense.

“My parent always checked my duty and my homework (participant 3, writing II)

The condition forced to held your tears (participant 7, writing II)

When I am in my uncle house (participant1, writing III)

I and my friends teach along three days (Participant 1, writing II)”

Since ungrammatical instance occurs here, there are some possibilities of error that students produce, even these instances are inclined to intralingual error, which leads to transfer from previous languages (Corder, 1976). Additionally, it was line in Nurkholijah and Al Hafizh, (2020); Khairunnisaak et al., (2022) stated the grammatical weakness of students, difficulty of composing recount text, and less of practice it may lead to negative transfer since they are not used to writing a recount text as the complexity of grammar and idea.

CONCLUSION

This research synthesized data from students' bilingual writing and interviews to address two main objectives: (1) to determine whether language transfer occurs in the morphosyntactic structures of English among multilingual learners at an Islamic boarding school, and (2) to identify the ungrammatical instances that learners produced. The results showed no significant statistical difference between English and Arabic in terms of language transfer. However, interviews suggested that language transfer might still occur, as students often use Indonesian when constructing sentences in English and Arabic, aligning with the TPM theory. Furthermore, students reveal several common grammatical errors in students' English writing, including issues with subjects, main verbs, extent expressions, location, manner, and past tense usage. These errors encompass missing subjects, incorrect verb forms, improper prepositions, and misplaced adverbs and adjective phrases.

Limitations and suggestions

The data for this research were gathered from students' written work and interviews. A significant limitation was the small number of participants, as only students enrolled in both English and Arabic language dormitory programs were eligible. Additionally, the instruments used concentrated solely on students' free writing. To address these limitations, future research should consider including other tools, such as a grammatical judgment task.

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