An Error Analysis of Indonesian EFL Learners at the University Level: The Types and Factors Leading to the Error Production

Sabrina[1], Nyak Mutia Ismail[2], Hafidh Maksum[3]

[1] Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Aceh, Indonesia
Email: sabrina@serambimekkah.ac.id
[2] Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Aceh, Indonesia
Email: nyakmutiaismail@serambimekkah.ac.id
[3]Hafidh Maksum is a Lecturer of Universitas Serambi Mekkah, Aceh, Indonesia
Email : hafidh.maksum@serambimekkah.ac.id

Abstract

Purpose: The ability to transfer meanings from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL) in accurate and natural fashions has become a fundamental necessity in this multilingual world. For Indonesians, English has become the top foreign language to master due to its status as the lingua franca of the world. Its significance is heightened nearly in all life aspects and it has been part of the national curriculum. As a large body of literature has focused on examining the errors produced by Indonesian EFL Learners at the school level, this paper aimed to investigate: 1) The types of errors frequently produced by Indonesian EFL learners at the university level who, technically, have a long period of exposure to English, as well as 2) The factors behind the error production. **Design/methodology/approach**: This research was descriptive qualitative. Thirty EFL learners at the university level were the research subjects. A translation task and interviews were the data collection instruments. The data from the written test were analysed using the Surface Strategy Taxonomy proposed by Dulay et al. (1982) while the interviews were processed using the Thematic Analysis. **Findings:** It was revealed that the types of errors produced from the most dominant to the least were Omission (50.60%), Misinformation (36.7%), Addition (10%), and Misordering (2.7%). The results of interviews also unveiled the causes of error production, with limited linguistic knowledge being the most dominant (33.5%), followed by L1 interference (32.5%), cultural factors (24.2%), and anxiety (9.8%) worth teachers' attention. This study implies that English acquisition is challenging for Indonesian EFL learners, even for those at the tertiary education level with years of exposure to English since nursery school.

Keywords: Error Analysis, Translation, Surface Strategy Taxonomy.

INTRODUCTION

Geographical boundaries have become blurred in today's era since digital technology penetrates and reshapes the landscape of humans' life, creating an interconnected world. Increasing frequency of interactions between individuals from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds have created a multilingual world that is heavily in need of a global means of intercommunity communication. Due to its historical background, English, in this case, becomes the lingua franca of the world.

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This circumstance then leads to the adoption of English by many non-English speaking countries. Indonesia is one of the countries that puts a large emphasis on the importance of learning English as a foreign language (Insyirah, 2020; Dardjowidjojo, 2003). Its importance is reflected through its integration into the national curriculum, requiring all Indonesians to learn it in formal education, starting from the kindergarten level to university level. Its significance is also widely recognised and constantly heightened in informal domains. The proliferation of non-formal English course institutions in Indonesia also shows how pivotal English is for the people. In social media, English contents gain popularity and reach the non-native speaker audiences as well. All of these are led by a belief that those with good English proficiency have much better chances in life than those with low English proficiency (Nishanthi, 2018; Winnie et al., 2023; Agustin, 2015).

However, the acquisition of English is not always easy for non-native speakers of English, including Indonesian EFL learners. Errors are often produced as part of the learning process. There has been a body of literature focusing on examining the errors made by Indonesian EFL learners when writing or speaking English. Kaharuddin (2013) studied Indonesian EFL learners at the high school level in Makassar City and reported the most frequent errors produced were tenses of verbs (33.8 %), errors in article use (17.5%), errors in preposition use (14.1%), and errors in subject-verb agreement (13.1%). A study by Amalya et al. (2018) on students at the same education level also reported surprising findings. The high school students in their study produced several types of errors in significant numbers when assigned to translate two Indonesian texts to English: 1) Inversion of meaning (65 errors in text 1 and 68 errors in text 2), 2) Omission of meanings (47 errors in text 1 and 93 in text 2, 3) Addition of meaning (78 errors in text 1 and 62 errors in text 2), 4) Deviation of meanings (43 errors in text 1 and 112 errors in text 2). In Manado, Halimah et al. (2021) also identified the errors generated by the junior high school students, namely the errors related to the use of "be" as a verb (169 occurrences) as well as verb forms in simple present tense (160 occurrences). Aziz et al. (2022) investigated the participants taking Public Speaking Class and noticed some errors produced fell under the categories of word formation errors, diction errors, pronunciation errors and sentence formation errors. A study conducted by Abriani et al., (2022) on high school students also found four forms of language error production, namely in the form of addition, subtraction, word choice, and arrangement. Nuarta et al. (2016) reported a similar finding where their research subjects at the junior high school level frequently produced errors of omission, followed by misformation, addition and misordering. In addition, they made non surface strategy errors including past tense, spelling, identifying the noun, creating ideas, and capitalization. Isa et al. (2017) examined the error production of students at the high school level and discovered two dominant errors committed, namely verb tense and word choice.

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Nonetheless, most research has directed its focus on Indonesian EFL learners at the school level, while in fact, very little research has been devoted to investigating those at the university level. The present research therefore sought to identify the types of errors frequently produced by Indonesia EFL learners at the tertiary education level as well as the factors leading to the error production.

English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia

Indonesia is a country known to have hundreds of regional languages. According to Zein (2018), Indonesia is the second most linguistically diverse country after Papua Guinea. There are an array of 704 languages spoken in the archipelagic country, with Bahasa Indonesia being the national language (Ethnologue, 2014), mainly used in formal settings. Meanwhile, in the community, a vast majority of Indonesians use regional languages to interact with each other (Abdullah et al., 2014).

This language diversity then makes English gain status as a foreign language. Unlike Malaysia, Indonesia's neighboring country where English is recognised as the second language used in daily communication, Indonesians very rarely use English in daily communication (Rini, 2014).

English learning in Indonesia generally takes place in the formal manner at school. As mentioned earlier, the people do not acquire it through daily exposure in the society, but rather theoretically than practically. The learning starts from the kindergarten level to the university level, and grammatical accuracy is often highly highlighted, even in speaking, causing the students to feel anxious (Iswandari, 2013). Error correction done by teachers often occurs. Thus, the process of gaining English in the country can be regarded more as "learning" rather than as acquisition (Rini, 2014).

Surface Strategy Taxonomy

In 1982, Dulay et al. introduced a framework called Surface Strategy Taxonomy for analysing linguistic errors. There are five categories proposed by Dulay et al. (1982), namely Omission, Addition, Misinformation, Misordering.

Omission refers to the missing of one or more elements that must be present in a sentence. Addition, on the contrary, is the type of error that occurs when one or more elements exist in a sentence where they actually should not. Misinformation can be identified when the incorrect form of structure is placed. Misordering takes place when one or more linguistic units are placed in the wrong position, and Mis-selection is recognisable when one or more incorrect words are chosen.

Since its introduction in the 1980s, this theory has been adopted by many researchers interested in finding the errors made by second and foreign language learners either in writing, speaking, or translation tasks.

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Translation

There are an array of definitions of Translation given by the experts. Newmark (1988, p. 5) refers to translation as "rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the author intended the text". This definition emphasises on the intention of the author that should be carefully safeguarded when transferring the message from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL). Similarly, Machali (2001) states that translation involves finding the equivalence of meanings in TL, suggesting that a linguistic unit must be carefully selected in TL based on its similar or exact intended meaning encoded in the SL.

According to Nida and Taber (1982, p. 12), "translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message", which means that the naturalness of the message TL should be the core aspect to take into account in reproducing a language into another.

Translation has become a daily-basis phenomenon, especially in this interconnected world. People tend to translate signs, texts, or utterances spoken in another language mentally or physically. When they are required to re-produce messages in SL, they also carry out translation either written or verbally.

METHOD

The research method was descriptive qualitative. Thirty Indonesian EFL learners at a higher education level were selected as respondents using the purposive sampling method. They had to meet the following criteria, namely being university students and having learned English since nursery school. They were given a written test in the form of a translation task. The task required them to translate a synopsis of a novel called "Janji" by Tere Liye (2021) from Indonesian to English. There were 12 sentences in the synopsis that the respondents had to translate.

To answer the first research question, the data collected from the written test were then analysed using the Surface Strategy Taxonomy by Dulay et al. (1982). Next, the error production was classified into five categories mentioned previously, starting from those with the highest occurrences to the lowest ones.

To find the factors contributing to the error production, semi-structured interviews were arranged with the respondents. The results were then analysed using Thematic Analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Error Classification and Occurrences

Despite being at the university level with adequate exposure to English since nursery school, the learners surprisingly still produce linguistic errors that categorised into the following types:

Table 1
Error Classification and Occurences in the Students' Translation Task

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Item No.	Types of Errors	Examples	Frequency
1.	Omission	(1) ST: Kita semua pengembara di dunia ini. TT: All of us are <u>wanderer</u> in this world. (2) ST: *Hebat <u>sekali</u>.* TT: That is great. (3) ST: *Ada yang bahkan bingung <u>besok</u> makan apa.* TT: Some are even confused about what to eat.	50.6%
2.	Addition	(1) ST: *Tapi, sesungguhnya, dimanakah kebahagiaan itu hinggap?* TT: Yet, where does true happiness reside? (2) ST: *…, melakukan apapun yang dia mau,...* TT: …, do what they're want,... (3) ST: *Sungguh membuat frustasi.* TT: It's undeniably frustrating.	10%
3.	Misinformation	(1) ST: *Tapi, sesungguhnya, dimanakah kebahagiaan itu hinggap?* TT: But, actually, where <u>is</u> happiness land? (2) ST: *Ada yang seolah <u>bisa</u> membeli apapun, melakukan apapun yang <u>dia</u> mau, hebat sekali.* TT: Some seem tobe <u>can</u> buy anything, do whatever <u>she</u> want, amazing." (3) ST: *Ada yang terkenal dan berkuasa, ...* TT: Some are famous and <u>power</u>, …….	36.7%
4.	Misordering	(1) ST: *Dari satu tempat ke tempat lain.* TT: From one place to place another. (2) ST: *Dari satu kejadian ke kejadian lain.* TT: From one incident to incident another.	2.7%

From Table 1, it can be seen that the most dominant type of errors found in the students' translation is omission (50.6%), followed by misinformation (36.7), addition (10%) and misordering (2.7%). The aspects of omission the students frequently committed is omission of lexical items and omission of inflectional items, as seen in the samples provided (Table 1). The source text (ST) *"Hebat sekali"* was rendered by the students as "That is great", in which the lexical item "so" is omitted. In fact, it was necessary and must precede the word "great". This lexical item is important as it indicates the intensity of the greatness. Another case in which the omission of lexical item occurred is in the translation of the sentence *"Ada yang bahkan bingung besok mau makan apa".* In its English translation "Some are even confused about what to eat", the students omit the lexical item "tomorrow" that must exist at the end of the sentence. As this word carries

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the temporal information, it must be present in the TT. Meanwhile, the omission of inflectional morpheme can be seen in the sentence "All of us are <u>wanderer</u> in this world" which is the translation of *"Kita semua pengembara di dunia ini"*. The student omitted the particle -s that must be bound to the word "lexical item" as it requires a plural form.

The next type of error with the highest frequency of occurrence is misinformation (36.7%). As previously mentioned, misinformation occurs when the incorrect form of structure is used. This can be seen in a student's translation for "*Tapi, sesungguhnya, dimanakah kebahagiaan itu hinggap?"*. It was translated into *"*But, actually, where <u>is</u> happiness land?". The correct auxiliary verb that should be used here is 'does'; nonetheless, the student placed "is" as the auxiliary verb. Another example of misinformation is found in the target text of "Some seem to be <u>can</u> buy anything" which is the translation for "*Ada yang seolah <u>bisa</u> membeli apapun"*. "To be can" was grammatically incorrect in English as it should be translated as "To be able". In addition, the students translated the sentence "*Ada yang terkenal dan berkuasa"* as *"*Some are famous and <u>power</u>". "Berkuasa" is an adjective in Indonesian, and its equivalence in English is "powerful"; however, "power" which is a noun was used here instead of "powerful".

Subsequently, the students committed addition (10%), in which they added an unnecessary element in the target text. The elements added are mostly in the forms of lexical items or certain forms of structure. This is apparent in the target text (TT) "Yet, where does true happiness reside?" which is the translation for ST: "*Tapi, sesungguhnya, dimanakah kebahagiaan itu hinggap?"*. Here, the students added the lexical item "true" which did not exist in TT.

The last type of error with the least frequency of occurrence is misordering, accounting for 2.7%. In this case, the target texts were written in an incorrect order, as we can see in the TT: "From one place to place another" for ST: "*Dari satu tempat ke tempat lain"*. Grammatically speaking, the word "place" must precede "another" as in English, "another" is followed by a noun. However, the students did the opposite. Similarly, it was found that the ST: *"Dari satu kejadian ke kejadian lain"* was translated as *"*From one incident to incident another", in which "incident another" was placed in reversed positions as well.

Factors Contributing to The Errors

The interview results revealed that there are several factors that cause to the students to produce the errors:

Limited Linguistic Knowledge

The majority of the students (33.5%) acknowledged that they lack linguistic knowledge in English, which then led them to commit misinformation and misordering. For example, they are not aware that the form "to be can" does not exist in English. They used it because it is accurate when translated using the word-for-word strategy. They also did not really understand why "power" is an incorrect translation for "berkuasa", or why

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the translation "what they're want" is inaccurate, or the differences between the auxiliary verbs "is" and "does".

L1 Interference

A significant number of the students (32.5%) said that their English production is still much influenced by their first language (L1), Indonesian language. They have been exposed to the Indonesian language since they were born, and they use it on a daily basis in nearly all settings. It is also the community language used by the local people for various purposes; thus, they are more familiar with the language than English. Due to the high amount of exposure and high level of familiarity with the Indonesian language, the students tend to think in this language. All the language's properties such as structure, word orders, and vocabulary have also been internalised in their mental lexicon for a long period of time.

When they are required to translate Indonesian phrases in English, they tend to think in Indonesian first, then transfer all or some properties of the Indonesian language to English. This explains why they omit some elements in their translation because these elements are not required in Indonesian phrases. This is also the reason why they misordered some phrases in English, making them have similar orders with sentences in Indonesian that basically have opposite positions from those of English.

Cultural Factor

Cultural factor is also mentioned as one of the error causes by 24.2% of respondents. Indonesian people have unique ways of expressing things which influence the students' perceptions about what is idiomatic or acceptable in another language. They tend to assume that other language speakers have the same ways of thinking and expressing self, thus the target readers are assumed to understand their words. This is also the factor driving the students to commit addition, misordering and misinformation in the translation task.

Anxiety

A few respondents (9.8%) admitted that they experienced anxiety when doing the translation task. They said that they actually know the right English structure to use or the vocabulary suitable in the context; however, anxiety seems to affect their memory-recalling activity and knowledge production in English. This factor also accounts for the omission of certain lexical items or grammatical features in the target texts. They temporarily forget what they have learnt and applied in normal circumstances. Misinformation was also partly caused by this, leading the students to use the incorrect structure despite knowing the correct form.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that English acquisition is challenging for Indonesian EFL learners, even for those at the tertiary education level with years of exposure to English since nursery school. In addition, the subjects of the study majored in the English language, which means that they have been focusing on specialising in the English

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language. However, surprisingly, they still produced a significant number of errors in the forms of Omission (50.6%), Misinformation (36.7%), Addition (10%), and Misordering (2.7%). Based on interview results, it was discovered that their error production stems from limited linguistic knowledge (33.5%), followed by L1 interference (32.5%), cultural factors (24.2%), and anxiety (9.8%). This study is expected to benefit teachers as well as policymakers regarding the areas to improve in students and the right strategies to apply in English teaching and learning to ensure that the students' years of exposure to English is fruitful and results in minimal errors in English production.

However, this study also has a limitation. The sample size is small, thus providing an excellent opportunity for future researchers to conduct a further study with a large sample size and strengthened findings.

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