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Interferences of Minangkabau-Indonesian EFL Students' Dialogues: A Result of Double Language Transfer

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A B S T R A C T

Learning English as a foreign language is a long journey of language transfer for students in West Sumatera, Indonesia. When the students learn to produce a sentence in English, they often use double language transfers, that is, from Minangkabau language as their native language to Indonesian language as their national language and from Indonesian language to English Language. Furthermore, the effect of literal translation which is used as mainly method in the process of learning languages at schools worsen the students' errors and mistakes in learning English language.

This research seeks to investigate the interferences in English Conversation scripts made by students of UPI YPTK Padang who were assigned to create a conversation in groups to certain topics. The results of the lexical and syntactical interferences found in the scripts indicated that the students are struggling with noun-verb confusion, subject matters, word choices, tenses, and non-existence forms of auxiliaries in L1. The findings provide insight into English learning and teaching techniques and present suggestions for lectures and materials developers.

I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country with multiple ethnics and culture. As the bonus, each ethnic has its language and custom. However, Indonesia has an Indonesian language to unite the whole archipelago. This language is taught at any level of schools and is used as a formal language. In the other words, when it comes to structural formal written language, any ethnics in Indonesia will refer to Indonesian language.

The students in West Sumatera province in Indonesia mostly use Minangkabau language (ML) as their first language and Indonesian language (IL) as their second language. The two languages are different in both grammar and vocabulary. Since most of the students are Islam, they also learn to read and comprehend Arabics to read Qur'an. After all, English as an International language comes as the third or the fourth language for them (Sukandi, 2014). As you can see, students then will learn

English in accordance with their knowledge of their first and second language; Minangkabau and Indonesian language. That situation become the first reason of many errors and mistakes in students English language production.

The second reason is that because the students learn English mostly with the means of translating, English teaching method which mostly applied in Asia is Grammar-translation method (William, 2003). In West Sumatera, this method has also been inherited by teachers to teachers at school (Sukandi, 2014). For example, in explaining tense, the teachers feel like explaining it in Indonesian language or Minangkabau language will make the students comprehend more than just explaining it in English, and so they try to translate it word to word into Indonesian language. Frequently, when the students want to know the meaning of a word in English, the teacher find its synonym in Indonesian or Minangkabau frame of mind. In his Journal Sukandi also explains that both teachers and students cannot avoid using this method since "they were born in a community that already has a language and culturally-embedded contained in words."

Third reason is most students feel easier to translate a language from the native language to English language, rather than finding how is to say the appropriate expression they mean in English by thinking of some tense and proper vocabulary.

This paper is aimed to look at the interferences as seen in errors and mistakes in students' English language when it is written in English conversation as a result of the three reasons above.

Interference has been defined by many of experts all over the world. Lekova (320) says that language interference is one of the current problems in foreign language teaching. Dulay et al (1982) states that interferences is a custom in the way of transferring surface structure of the native language onto the surface structure of the foreign language. And

Lott (1983) defines interference as 'errors in the learner's use of the foreign language that can be traced back to the mother tongue'.

The presentation and the progress that students make in the target language are influenced by the indigenous language structures, which means L1 interference is cause by cross-linguistic and language transfer (Hashim, 1999). The difference of structures in L1 and L2 will cause moderately to the occurrence of mistakes students make in L2, which representing an interference of L1 on L2 (Dechert, 1983; Ellis, 1997).

Erdogan Bada conducted research about Japanese first-language. In his research he found interferences toward learning English in Japan found that "...interference incorporates the tendency of transferring of the rules of the learner's native language to the foreign language-this could either be a second or a third language" (3). Bada's research gives us insights that what EFL students do, in the case of learning English in Japan, is that they put the rules existing in the first language and incorporates those into English. Likewise, this phenomenon is likely to happen in Minangkabau-Indonesian EFL students. On the surface, they might learn English through grammar drills, but in their mind, they construct the sentences that they utter or write through what they already have in mind about constructing sentences and ideas in Minangkabau.

For example, "The phenomena of language change that are observed in Italian speech of the second and third generation may be defined on the basis of two processes. The first process is simplification. The second process is transfer. By 'transfer' we mean 'the incorporation of language features from one language to another'" (Marzo, 2002). Marzo's research clearly tells us that linguistic transfer between one languages into another one exists among students whose English is a foreign language for them.

The case study was purposed to answer the following questions:

- a) What are the interferences in ML and IL which cause error and mistake in EL?
- b) What are ML and IL structures which interfere the structure of EL?
- c) How the multiple language transfer can cause interference of ML and IL onto EL?

II. METHODS

Participant

The participant of the study in students in the second semester at Putra Indonesia University YPTK Padang. There are 50 students in class who are grouped into 7 groups. The students have already taken basic English grammar course in the first semester, so that they are expected to understand how to produce sentences in correct grammar of English.

The 7 groups of students are assigned to create a conversation related to a certain topics given (family, holiday, tourism places, hobby, friendship). The students may choose any topic they like, and may use dictionary if necessary. The task is given for about one week in order to give the student enough time to discuss the conversation scripts.

Method

After giving a week of discussion, the scripts were collected and then were analyzed by the errors and mistakes. After that, the students in each group was called and interviewed. It was done to find out the student intention behind the 'error'. The questions were "what did you mean by saying this?" or "Why did you use this words?". The answers to the interview are used to help the process of data analysis.

III. RESULT

L1 Lexical Interference

Usually the students just picked up the words they saw in the dictionary, based on the words the searched from their L1.

[1] *Hello ata, I'm still on the road.*

The students mean I am still on the way, they chose the word road instead of way when they transferred the word 'jalan' in ML and IL into English. Unfortunately, the students fail to consider the exact word meaning for 'jalan' in ML and IL according to the context. In IL "Saya sedang di jalan" does not mean that the students are exactly on the street, but on the way of journey to the certain location. Both languages have the same expression, but mistakes happen when student wrongly interpreted the context of the word use.

[2] *OK, I along mutia.*

The students mean *awak samo Mutia* in ML and then the word *samo* is transferred into IL became *bersama dengan*. The students fail to choose the correct word to represent their idea. Because the word *bersama dengan* in English can be translated literally into together with, along with. But these need to build in one complete sentence like *I along with mutia went to the library*. But of course in their context, the student just should write it as 'I am with Mutia'

[3] *Yes, already you home alone.*

The students mean in IL *ya sudah, kamu ke rumah saja sendirian*. The correct translation for the sentence is *Okay, Just go home by yourself*. The students fail to transfer the whole message correctly by translating word to word from IL to EL. The expression of *ya sudah* should not be translated into *yes already*, and the imperative of *kamu ke rumah saja* need verb in English that is *just go home*. The, *sendirian* should be transferred into reflexive pronoun that is *by yourself*.

[4] *I join sad Widya.*

English has special expressions in giving their condolence and those not include *I join sad*. Even though there is the word *ikut bersedih* in IL, in EL people say *I am sorry to hear that* or *I am deeply saddened by the loss that you have encountered*.

[5] *I go to Jakarta to place my brother.*

Beside there is an issue with tense, the translation of word 'to place' is also wrong. It derives from ML 'ka tampek abang wak' and transfer to IL 'ke tempat abang saya' which means in English *to my brother's house* or *to visit my brother*.

[6] *I college in UPI YPTK.*

The confusion of noun and verb in language transfer from ML and IL to EL often cause interference. The students mean in IL *saya kuliah di UPI YPTK* and try to translate the word *kuliah* into college because he does not know that the structure of sentence in English must form Subject and Verb afterwards. The word *kuliah* can be noun and verb in ML and IL but not in EL. Therefore the correct language choice should be verb *study*.

[7] *I am dizzy because task campus lots.*

The student's main clause *I am dizzy* mean *saya pusing* in IL, but in English, although most of adjective you put directly after to be, the adjective *dizzy* commonly comes after the word feel, like *i feel dizzy*. The subordinate clause of the sentence is false because the student just transfer ML into EL word to word without considering her grammar lesson. '*karena tugas kampus banyak*' means she has a lot of campus assignment to do. In EL, the quantifier should be put before noun as the adjective.

[8] *Task which one.*

The student wanted to say *tugas yang mana* in IL. The structure of the sentence in IL enable us to put question words after noun. However in EL is different. The structure of the question sentence must begin by question words or to be. In this case he should said *which task?*

[9] *That can be arranged.*

The sentence seems to come with proper grammar in EL. In fact, it is out of the context while the students mean '*itu bisa diatur*' in IL as a sign that he took an ease at his friend's problem. In this context, the word choice 'arrange' is not appropriate and should be changed with 'managed'. Moreover, it is commonly to say 'take it easy' in EL so such situation given.

[10] *Your body hot or tired.*

The word to be and auxiliary verbs does not exist in IL. Therefore, even though the students have learn tense for at least 9 years at school, the use of them is still unmaximized. Besides that, the question sentences is ambiguous to statement sentence if it emerges in spoken context. In the context, the student want to ask his friend in IL '*kamu sakit atau lelah?*' but fail to transfer it to EL. I should be 'are sick or tired?'

[11] *Have you gone to the doctor?*

The grammatical factor of the text is correct. But in EL people will say 'Have you seen the doctor' to express the same idea. The word 'seen' when it is transfer to IL means 'melihat'. It will break the idea of the questions. Therefore, the case like this should be explained clearly by the teachers.

L1 Syntactic Interference

[12] *When we can go?*

The matters of auxiliary when they have to be inverted in question must be understood by the students. Again, it is difficult since IL do not have these auxiliaries. So, in this sentence, the students made the sentence only by using the form of making question in IL.

[13] *If you play futsal how do you feel?*

The sentence is in conditional. In English conditional sentence comes with rule that the next clause should have modal like 'would'.

So, the correct sentence should be ‘...how would you feel?’.

[14] *The pattern of life regularly how.*

Clearly, the student had no idea of word positions in EL like you have to put adjective before now, etc. The actual sentence in IL is ‘pola hidup teratur yang bagaimana’ in EL, you should say ‘How to have disciplined life syle?’” But the student had no idea to find such expression in English so he just translated word by word from IL to EL. Worse still, they put the question word at the end of the question sentence.

After analyzing some errors and mistakes the students made, it can be seen that interferences existed because of the several factors, including the frequency of using local language and first language and limited understanding of English structure. In speaking, most of students speak using Minangkabau language, but in relation to

formal language, Minangkabau students are referred to Indonesian language. Both of languages used also cause interferences. As a result, speaking or using English language by Minangkabau students has multiple interferences. The students have limited knowledge of the structure of sentence in English. Even they have learned grammar and tenses for years, it seems that they still catch that as a puzzle.

IV. CONCLUSION

The research shows indicates that tense still become the main problem in making sentences. Although many of lessons at school focus on this skill, the students still confuse to set the sentence in correct grammar and tense. Beside, question and conditional structure absolutely bring the most errors and mistakes. There is a huge confusion of noun and verb from L1 to L2. In choosing a word to say, the students cannot differentiate whether the word the use is noun or verb in English, because in Indonesian language they can be interchangeable.

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