

Mother tongue interference on EFL: The case of English department students in Udayana university

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Abstract: During the EFL process, learners often come across difficulties. One of the difficulties is caused by differences between their mother tongue (L1) and the second language (L2) or foreign language (FL). This is observable through errors found in production of L2 by the English learners. The errors are observable in areas of phonology, vocabulary, and grammar. These errors are commonly referred to mother tongue interference. This study aimed at analyzing the influence of mother tongue into English produced by the students of English Department in Udayana University. The data in this paper are taken from 40 descriptive essays written by second semester students who are enrolled in Writing subject. The data were analyzed by using error analysis (EA) method to see the influence of L1, specifically on the grammatical errors. Grammatical errors refer to sentence or construction formation. Most of errors found were on the area of tenses followed by word order (constituent order). The errors demonstrate that differences between Balinese and Indonesian cause interference on the learners' English essays.

Keywords: mother tongue, interference, error analysis

Introduction

English learners in Indonesia experience difficulties in mastering the language. One of the reasons is the different system between English and the learners' native language or also known as a mother tongue. The difficulties on learning English have become subject of many studies and it is found that the difficulties on mastering English skills that come down to problems in learning pronunciation of English sounds and grammar (Sawir, 2005). The difficulties are shown by errors made by the learners while producing English sentences as the learners apply grammar of their mother tongue.

This is the case which is studied on the descriptive essays written by students of Udayana University. The study shows that errors

are made on word order, tense, subject-verb agreement, the use of article, singular and plural noun, pronoun, active and passive construction.

Literature Review

Mother tongue refers to someone's parent language that is transferred to their children. The term mother tongue is usually used interchangeably with native language, as both refer to the same entity.

Mother tongue interference refers to 'the influence of the native language of the learner on his/her acquisition of the L2 (Thyab, 2016). The interference is positive when it helps the learner during the acquisition process, such as understanding of text format in L1 is applicable knowledge to learn L2 (Bhela, 1999). However,

the influence is negative when it causes errors in the learner's English production. Therefore, in this kind of research, it is important to find out the error as to find out the interference of mother tongue.

Error Analysis is the approach introduced by Richard (1974) used to identify error. Error is defined mistake committed by language users due to lack of knowledge of the foreign language (Mortaga in Abushihab, 2004). EA is the branch of applied linguistics used to identify, describe and explain learners' errors in speech or written performance (Ellis and Barkhuizen in Amiri and Puteh, 2017). Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) differentiates errors into 6 types, namely: omission of grammatical morphemes, double marking semantic features, use of irregular rules, use of wrong word form, alternating use of two or more forms, and misordering. While James (in Sermsook et al, 2017) divides errors into five types, they are: (1) grammatical errors which include: adjectives, adverbs, articles, nouns, possession, pronouns, preposition and verbs; (2) substance errors: capitalization, punctuation and spelling; (3) lexical errors: word formation and word selection; (4) syntactic errors: coordination/ subordination, sentence structure and ordering; (5) semantic errors which refers to ambiguous communication and miscommunication).

Runkati (in Sermsook et al, 2017) in her study found errors which are categorized into sentential level and word level. In sentential level, the errors were runs-on, subject-verb agreement, word order, tenses, capital letters and punctuation. Whereas errors in word level include: articles, prepositions, word choices, nouns and numbers.

Further they, mentioned steps in conducting EA as in the following points: a) Collection of sample of learner language; b) Identification of errors; c) Description of error; and d) Explanation of errors

Studies were written on errors caused by mother tongue interference. Watcharapunyawong and Usaha (Denizer, 2017) wrote an analysis on errors in writing by EFL learners in Thailand. The findings show that errors found in the aspect

of pronunciation and grammar. It is also found that writing is the most difficult skill, demonstrated by more than 100 errors found in various genre of essay written by English learner. The error include verb tense, word choice, sentence structure, article preposition, subject-verb agreement, and singular/plural form.

Richards (1974) mentioned several factors as the causes of errors made by foreign language learners, the causes are: a) Interlingual and intralingual errors (Richards, 1974); b) Interlingual and intralingual transfer (Penny, in Sermsook et al, 2017); and Interlingual and intralingual interference (Runkati, in Sermsook et al, 2017).

The influence in terms of grammar is the application of mother tongue's grammar onto the production of L2 (Bhela, 1999) mentioned that the more different of the mother tongue and the L2 the most errors were found. Fauzati (2016) conducted a research on interference of Indonesian onto English found in English handbook as teaching instrument in primary high schools in Indonesia. The finding of the research seven types of grammatical interference which include mismatching, preposition, superfluous expression, parallel construction, passive construction, conjunction and adverb.

This paper analyzes the interference of mother tongue on students' essays. Both Balinese and Indonesian are considered as mother tongue, as both languages are learned from the early age. Balinese and Indonesian have similar grammatical features. In terms of verbs, verbs in Balinese as well as Indonesian do not reflect for number and tense as English does. Time of event is simply shown in the use of adverb of time, such as *ibi* in *Balinese* and *kemarin* in Indonesian. Pronoun forms also do not change regardless their position in sentences. Similarly, there is no change in form of nouns, whether they are singular or plural. Article is another problematic feature of English, as there is no similar grammatical equivalent of article in students' mother tongue.

Problems to answer in this paper are as follow:

1. What grammatical errors found as the influence of mother tongue?
2. What is the most grammatical errors found as the influence of the mother tongue?

Methodology

The data of this study are taken from 40 descriptive essays written by second semester students of Udayana University. The students were asked to write descriptive essays that consist of 220 – 250 words about their best experience. The essays were analyzed for any error found. In the next step, the errors were classified based on the error group. The writer grouped the errors into tenses, word order,

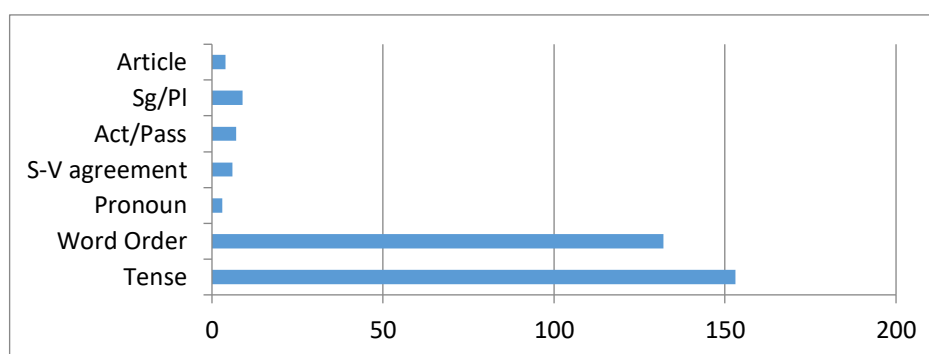
subject-verb agreement, active and passive construction, article, singular and plural forms, and pronoun. The errors were then analyzed for interference of Balinese or Indonesian into English.

Findings and Discussion

The data show errors in students' essay. The errors were categorized into seven types: (1) tenses; (2) subject-verb agreement; (3) word order; (4) pronouns, (5) singular/plural; (6) passive/active, and (7) articles. The errors shows interference of mother tongue.

Table 1 summarizes the interference of mother tongue on students' writing as shown by listed errors.

Table 1 The Interference of Mother Tongue in Students' Essay



The table shows that the biggest interference is on tenses as 153 errors found in this category. The sentences below illustrate error on tenses:

- | | | |
|-----|--|------|
| (1) | Three years ago I <i>go</i> there | 0105 |
| (2) | I <i>am</i> so amazed, it was very beautiful | 0105 |
| (3) | When I went to university, I <i>have</i> to leave my family. | 0106 |
| (4) | My first semester holiday was very exciting because this <i>is</i> the | 0109 |

time that I *have* been waiting for.

- | | | |
|-----|--|------|
| (5) | The first day in my hometown I <i>wake</i> up in the morning; after that I <i>am</i> having breakfast with my mom. | 0109 |
|-----|--|------|

Word order is the next interference found in the essays. There are 132 errors found of this type. The data show errors on word order including: to is followed by verb 1. The mother interferes when it comes to the use of English verbs as there is only one verb form in Balinese as well as in Indonesian. The data below illustrate errors in word order.

(6)	I was very glad to <i>bought</i> it.	0106	The next interference is on Subject-Verb agreement which is shown by 6 errors. Interference causes disagreement between Subject and Verbs on sentences written by students. This is due to absent of verb marker on mother tongue.	
(7)	It was very interesting to <i>went</i> Mount Batur.	0111		
(8)	We must <i>payed</i> fifty thousand rupiah.	0112	(14)	The website is a multimedia entertainment portal that <i>collect</i> users all over the word. 0102
(9)	After cleaned the house, my mother and I cooked together.	0238	(15)	They was happy when... 0119
(10)	The night was came with a dog's roar.	0128	(16)	Jaco beach is an excellent place that bring good vibration. 0103
Data number 6, 7 and 8 show that the verb used must be verb one or basic verb form. Sentence number 9 demonstrate error of verb used after preposition, while sentence number 10 show error on verb following a to be.			(17)	Business skill that <i>define</i> who I am today. 0102
			Singular and plural objects is another area that show mother tongue interference. There are 3 errors related to singular or plural forms. sIn this case, mother tongue interferes on the use of suffix s/es for plural objects. Errors were found on the absent of –s for plural objects on students' essay.	
Passive construction also causes problems for the students because Balinese does not have entity like to be which is used in English passive; and thus construction of the mother tongue interferes. There are 7 errors found in the alternation of active and passive construction. The result is application of active construction to a sentence with passive message, as shown in sentence (12). While sentence (11) is a passive sentence with active message. Sentence (13) is the translation of mother tongue to English, as in the Balinese or Indonesian the phrase happened to me is expressed by using negative construction.			(18)	I saw many <i>kind</i> of animal. 0105
			Interference also found on the use of article, especially article a and the. This two articles were used interchangeably which causes error, as illustrated in the data below.	
(11)	We <i>were cleaned</i> home together.	0238	(19)	It was <i>an</i> best experience that cannot be forgotten. 0238
(12)	We <i>presented</i> beautiful beach view there.	0101	(20)	That morning I read <i>the</i> newspaper. 0221
(13)	I could not believe it <i>was happened</i> to me.	0240	Errors are also found on the use of pronoun. There is only one form of pronoun in the mother	

tongue and this rule is applied on the students' English essays.

(21) So we family prayed in this place. 0101

(22) The beach was super beautiful 0101
that make *our* stunned by the
beauty.

In sentence (21), the use of pronoun we is incorrect, as the pronoun should function as possessive pronoun 'our'. Whereas pronoun 'our' in sentence (22) is incorrect as the form should be one that is used in object position.

Conclusion

The finding shows that are interference of mother tongue in the students' essays. The interference is shown by errors found within the essays. The interference is caused by different system of the mother tongue/L1 and English as the L2. The difference include specific rule related the use of verbs and modal verbs, absent of markers to reflect tense and numbers, absent of marker in plural nouns, the usage of article 'the', and pronoun forms.

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