

EXAMINING THE INTERFERENCE OF L1 ON ENGLISH TRANSLATION QUALITY OF GRADE VII STUDENTS

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Abstract

Translating English into Indonesian is still a significant challenge for junior high school students. English is a foreign language that Indonesian students speak after their mother tongue or local dialect and Indonesian language as the second. This study looks at first language (L1) interference on translation quality among grade VII of Junior High School students on descriptive text. As the importance of multilingual education grows, it is critical to understand how a person's first language (L1) interferes with how accurately, acceptably and readably they translate. This understanding is key to developing effective language teaching practices. This study used a mixed method by giving translation test and questionnaires to students. The study included 31 students of VII.3 class in SMP Negeri 3 Ampek Angkek. The researcher used a purposive sampling technique that chose one out of three classes. The results showed a considerable effect of students' first language on translation quality in the aspects of accuracy, acceptability, and readability. Students who dominantly use Indonesian as their first language perform better than those who spoke Minangnese the most. The findings suggest an increase in the utilization of Indonesian in English learning process.

Abstrak

Menerjemahkan bahasa Inggris ke bahasa Indonesia masih menjadi tantangan yang signifikan bagi siswa Sekolah Menengah Pertama. Bahasa Inggris merupakan bahasa asing yang dipelajari siswa setelah bahasa ibu dan Bahasa Indonesia sebagai bahasa kedua mereka. Studi ini mengkaji pengaruh bahasa pertama (L1) terhadap kualitas terjemahan pada teks deskriptif pada siswa kelas VII Sekolah Menengah Pertama. Seiring dengan meningkatnya kebutuhan akan pendidikan multibahasa, memahami bagaimana bahasa pertama (L1) seseorang mempengaruhi kualitas terjemahan menjadi sangat penting. Pemahaman ini menjadi kunci dalam mengembangkan praktik pengajaran bahasa yang efektif. Penelitian ini menggunakan mixed-method dengan memberikan tes menerjemahkan dan kuesioner kepada siswa. Penelitian ini melibatkan 31 siswa kelas VII.3 di SMP Negeri 3 Ampek Angkek. Peneliti menggunakan teknik purposive sampling dengan memilih satu dari tiga kelas. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya pengaruh signifikan bahasa pertama siswa terhadap kualitas terjemahan dalam aspek akurasi, keberterimaan, dan keterbacaan. Siswa yang dominan menggunakan Bahasa Indonesia sebagai bahasa pertama mereka menunjukkan hasil terjemahan yang lebih baik dibandingkan dengan mereka yang menggunakan Bahasa Minang. Temuan ini menyarankan peningkatan penggunaan Bahasa Indonesia dalam proses pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is an archipelago consisting of 300 ethnic groups and 1,340 tribes (Ananta et al., 2015). It is impossible to say with certainty that each tribe will always remain in a specific location. Population movements and cultural mixing due to inter-tribal marriages are



the main causes of the increasing diversity of tribes within a region. Furthermore, there are 746 regional languages from all over Indonesia (Haerudin et al., 2024). This has a major influence on the first language used in the community. Indonesian, as the national language, often becomes the second or even third language. This, of course, reflects the languages used by students.

The acquisition of a foreign language, in this case English, is largely determined by students' cognitive abilities, environment, and social factors (Saienko, 2017)(Yazigi, 1991). In addition, the first language used by students is also a determining factor in their success in mastering a foreign language. This is particularly true for Indonesian students, whose first language is likely to differ from the language of instruction used in the educational environment. The first language is the regional language or mother tongue they use in their daily lives, while the language of instruction in the educational environment is Indonesian, which has been designated as the national language.

The first and second language patterns used by students are in some ways very different from English language patterns. Different language structures and rules affect how students understand English language rules. Interference occurs when patterns, structures, or rules from the L1 are inappropriately applied to a second or foreign language (Arifin, 2016). This affects all linguistic levels such as syntax, morphology, semantics, and discourse. Furthermore, this affects students' ability to translate English into Indonesian.

Translating between English and Indonesian is one of the most common activities in the learning process. This includes translating words, phrases, sentences, and even longer texts. In the translation process, an understanding of grammar, vocabulary, and sensitivity to linguistic differences is required. Issues arise when it is recognized that the two languages have differences in grammatical rules and linguistic aspects.

Learning a second language, like English, is closely tied to the first language a student speaks. The first language is the one we grow up speaking from early childhood. A second language (L2) is usually learned later in life, often through school or to communicate more widely. The connection between the two languages can make it easier or harder for someone to learn English (Festman, 2021).

One of the most common ways the first language affects learning English is through what is known as language transfer (Lightbown, P. M., Spada, 2013). This happens when patterns or habits from L1 carry over into L2. This can be helpful, especially when the two languages have similar grammar structures. Language transfer can also create problems, often called interference. It is well-known in second language research. It refers to how a person's first language affects their ability to learn and use another language. This influence comes from the ways in which the learner's existing languages are similar and different from the new one (Johnston, 2024).

In places where people speak more than one language, like Indonesia, it gets more complicated. Students might start by learning a local language like Minangkabau, then Indonesian, and then English. Interference is more likely when the languages have very different structures. This can lead to mistakes in grammar, word choice, or sentence structure especially in writing and translation (Kenzhetayev, H. M., A. S. Keniskhanova, 2016)

Furthermore, descriptive texts were chosen for this study because they are the texts that students learn from the beginning of their English studies in seventh grade. These texts are studied in a simple form that helps students to learn the basic rules of English. Researching the interference of first language on English translation outcomes is not new, but researchers want to know the influence of Indonesian as the national language and Minangnese as the students' everyday language on translation quality.

METHODS

This study used a mixed-method approach to investigate the impact of first language (L1) on the translation quality of students of SMP Negeri 3 Ampek Angkek grade VII. The research aimed to obtain a comprehensive understanding of how L1 affects students' ability

to translate English into Indonesian. The sample of the research is students at VII.3 class that consist of 31 students. The class is chosen because it is highly relevant to the research question. The students were mostly of Minangkabau ethnic background and only 29% of the students from a mixed ethnic group. The first language of the students is mostly Minangkabau language and use Indonesian as the second language.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Students' First Language

West Sumatera is a province where 88,35 % of the people are Minangkabau (Ikranegara, n.d.). The Minangkabau language, as the local dialect rooted in Minangkabau culture, is the most dominant first language among students. The first language is acquired naturally through the home environment (Holmes, Janet, 2022). The prominence of using the Minangkabau language as the first language among students reflects how this language plays an important role in daily conversation and cultural identity (Thamrin, 2018). The use Minang language is not only as a medium of communication but also for the transmission of cultural values, norms and customs (Smeets, 2004).

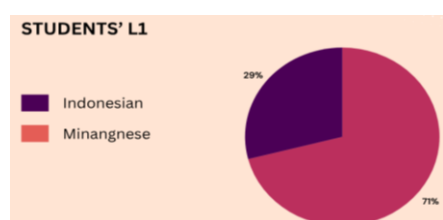
From the questionnaire filled out by the students, it is known that there are nine students who speak Indonesian as their first language. Additionally, only a small number of students speak other languages, 3 of them speak Javanese and only one speaks Bataknese. It is caused mainly by the origin of the parents.

There are 21 students who speak Indonesian as L2. There are 8 students who are originally from other ethnic groups speak Minangnese as their second language. A few students speak Betawi and Malay, which is one student for each language. This reflects how these students strive to integrate the dominant language in their environment to enhance social inclusion. This language adaptation is a common phenomenon in multilingual environment in order to be accepted in that society (Mona, 2024).

English is the most foreign language learned by the students. It reflects how important English is as one of the global languages studied by students at school. Some students have a strong interest in learning languages. There are 8 students learning Arabic, as well as Javanese, Japanese, Korean and Spanish with 1 student each. Arabic is studied by some students for religious reasons. And the popularity of Korean and Japanese is influenced by trends among the younger generation, who are influenced by social media and cultural trends such as anime and K-pop (Islam, 2024).

Overall, the data show linguistic diversity of students toward languages. The multilingual environment supports the English learning environment. It is 71% of the students spoke Minangnese at home, while 29% spoke Indonesian. The data of students first language can be seen clearly on the pie diagram below.

Figure 1. Students' first language



The study looks at three main parts of how well a translation is done: accuracy, acceptability, and readability. Students whose first language is Minangkabau have a hard time because Minangnese and English are very different. Common issues include the application of Minangkabau grammar rules when translating, along with the use of idioms or expressions specific to the Minangkabau culture that do not exist in Indonesian. This can lead to awkward or incorrect translations.

However, students whose first language is Indonesian may have an advantage. They are already familiar with the Indonesian structures, so they can more easily understand English. This helps to avoid confusion between different languages and makes the translations more natural and grammatically correct. Therefore, the L1 is very important for students' success in translation.

The Students' Translation Quality

Researcher use quantitative scoring rubrics (Nababan, M., et al., 2012) to assess the quality of students' translation.

Table 1. Accuracy Assessment

Translation category	Score	Quality Parameter
Accurate	3	The words, technical terms, phrases, clauses, sentences, or texts in the source language are translated into the target language without changing their meaning.
Less Accurate	2	The majority of the words, technical terms, phrases, clauses, sentences, or texts in the source language have been accurately conveyed into the target language. However, there are still problems with the meaning or translations that have two meanings (ambiguities), or some meanings are left out, which disrupt the message.
Not Accurate	1	The words, technical terms, phrases, clauses, sentences, or texts in the source language are sometimes translated incorrectly or left out when they are translated into another language.

Table 2. Acceptability Assessment

Translation Category	Score	Qualitative Parameter
Acceptable	3	The translation result is natural; it uses common technical terms that are easy for the reader to understand, and the phrases, clauses, and sentences follow the target language rules.
Less Acceptable	2	The translation result is natural, but there are some minor issues. There are technical terms that could be rephrased, and there are some grammatical errors.
Not Acceptable	1	The translation result is unnatural or like it was translated. It uses technical terms that are unfamiliar. The phrases, clauses, and sentences do not follow the target language rules.

Table 3. Readability Assessment

Translation Category	Score	Qualitative Parameter
Readable	3	The words, technical terms, phrases, clauses, sentences, or texts of the translated language are easy for the reader to comprehend.
Less Readable	2	The translation result is easy to comprehend, but some parts may need to be read more than once to understand.
Not Readable	1	The translation result is hard for the reader to understand.

Furthermore, the interference of students' first language on their translation results can be seen in the following table:

Table 4. students' translation quality based on their L1

1st language	Number of students	Translation quality			Final score
		Acceptability	Accuracy	Readability	
Indonesian	9	2,7	2,4	2,3	2,5
Minangnese	22	1,8	1,5	1,4	1,6

A good translation has to do two things. It has to keep the original message and it has to make sense in the target language. It also has to be easy for the audience to understand. In the study of translation, especially in the context of teaching languages and applied

linguistics, it is important to have clear ways to evaluate translations. This helps make sure that the translations meet the goals of communicating effectively and using the right language.

To address this need, a widely adopted model that assesses translation quality based on these key dimensions: accuracy, acceptability, and readability (Nababan, M., et al., 2012). These criteria provide a step-by-step way to evaluate translations. This makes them particularly useful in educational settings. In these settings, translations are used not only as a way to communicate, but also as a way to measure language skills.

Acceptability refers to how naturally and appropriately the students can translate text in the target language. It involves evaluating elements such as word choice, register, idiomatic usage, and fluency. A mean score of 2,7 is close to acceptable. It means that the translations result of the Indonesian L1 students are generally fluent with minor issues. The high level of acceptability implies that students have strong understanding of formal Indonesian and aware of the expectation of the target language. It means that those students have knowledge on the target language's norms.

The score of Minangnese L1 students for the acceptability was 1,8. This suggest that many of the text sound unnatural in Indonesian. There are problems with fluency and using appropriate style. It is caused by the interference from the students first language. The way words arranged and the words order in Minangnese are different with Indonesian. Students have difficulties in writing formal Indonesian because they used to speak in Minangnese.

A translation is considered accurate if all of the source text's ideas are fully transferred into the target language without losing or changing the meaning¹. There are a few reasons why there might be inaccuracies. For example, the student might not know enough words in the target language. They might also have a hard time understanding idiomatic expressions. Or they might not know how to apply the grammar rules correctly.

A translation can be exactly right, but it can still feel strange to native speakers if it doesn't follow the rules of the target language. To put it simply, a good translation should feel like it was written in the target language, not like it was translated from another language (Kenny, 2022).

It is especially important to consider cultural differences, common expressions, and the specific context when using this tool. Low acceptability often comes from literal or overly direct translation strategies. These strategies may preserve word meanings but violate the norms of the target language (Kyrychuk, 2018). For learners, acceptability reflects their familiarity not just with grammar, but also with how the target language is naturally used in real-world communication. Evaluating acceptability helps teachers assess students' understanding of style and context.

A score of 2,4 on the accuracy indicates that the students are mostly accurate although there are some minor omissions or slight miss in meaning. These are usually not serious and are often caused by problems in understanding small details on the text. The overall result shows a good understanding of the source content and could transform it well in the target language. Using the right words is the foundation of the translation quality. The students did a pretty good job by keeping the original meaning although there are some mistakes. How the students emphasizing the importance of accurate translation reflect how they understand the text.

The accuracy score for Minangnese L1 students with a mean of 1,5 means that frequent distortions of meaning. Many translations didn't convey the intended message of the source text. It is caused by limited vocabulary the students have in formal Indonesian. The students rarely use Indonesian so that they choose the wrong words and didn't pay attention to the subtle differences in meaning.

The third thing that affects how good a translation is how easy it is to read (Hansen-Schirra, S., et al., 2020). This means that the translated text should be easy for the people who are supposed to read it to understand. It's especially important to make sure that text is

easy to understand in places like schools, where students may have different levels of English skills. Even if a translation is accurate and easy to understand, it can still be ineffective if it is too complex or confusing for its audience.

There are several things that can make it hard for a reader to understand a text. These include how long a sentence is, how hard the words are, how clear the text is, how well it makes sense, and the punctuation (Cutts, 2020). Readability is about how easy the reader understands the students' translated text. The score of 2,3 means that the translations are reasonably readable. The translated text may have awkward sentences. The sentences might not be too exact with the text purpose but it flows quite naturally. The score suggest that the translated text is easy to understand but not very interesting to read. The students need to improve the writing style and using language that is easier for the reader.

The readability score was 1,4 for Minangnese L1 speakers. This is the lowest score of all the evaluated aspects. There are significant challenges in making the text clear and easy to be read and understood. The sentences didn't flow well and poor connection between ideas. Students need to develop a stronger understand of sentence flow, coherence and choosing words in Indonesian.

Students from different linguistic backgrounds tend to produce translation of varying quality, particularly with regard to acceptability, accuracy, and readability. In this context, students whose first language is Indonesian generally perform better on translation tasks.

Learning other languages beside English indicated significant translation quality. In overall students' native language influences their translation quality. the research show that Indonesian L1 students perform better translation quality rather than the Minangnese one.

CONCLUSION

The first language of students, in this case Indonesian, plays a very important role in interfering the quality of students' translation from English to Indonesian. Students whose first language is Indonesian demonstrate better results in terms of accuracy, acceptability and readability compared to those whose first language is Minangkabau. Researcher found that it is crucial to understand the linguistic background of students in West Sumatera to bridge the gap between teachers' teaching style and students' linguistic background. This enables English teachers to provide appropriate support during the English learning process, particularly during translation tasks. This can reduce negative transfer and improve translation outcomes.

Therefore, the researcher recommends using Indonesian as the language of instruction in the English learning process, especially in multilingual schools in West Sumatra. Students from other regions will feel comfortable in the classroom if they don't have any obstacle in comprehending the language used in the learning process. Further research could be conducted to investigate the influence of the first language or regional dialects in larger populations and compare other regional languages. This research could serve as a basis for designing teaching strategies to address the influence of the first language.

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