

## **'I school at...' and Other Sentences: A Phenomenon of English Sentence Production of Indonesian EFL Learners**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Learning English as a foreign language is important but it is also difficult. The reason why it is important is that it can support learners to reach the opportunities in the future, for example getting a job, getting a scholarship, conducting a research and many others. However, it is also difficult. The difficulties can be seen from various aspects, such as learners' background knowledge, learners' mother tongue, and learners' anxiety. Indonesian who learn English experiences these kinds of difficulties. English is learnt as a foreign language in Indonesia. Though it has taught since early level, there are mistakes found by the writers when the learners produce spoken or written utterances. The mistake that triggers the writers to write this paper is the sentence 'I am school at SMA 5 Kupang,' when the student meant to say 'Saya bersekolah di SMA 5 Kupang.' This kind of mistake raises since the students do not get used to English and they have lack of knowledge of English. Therefore, instead of saying 'I study at SMA 5 Kupang,' they say 'I am school at SMA5 Kupang.' This phenomenon likely influence students' ability in producing utterances especially in direct translation. The data of this research was collected through observation and students' performance in class. The data was analysed qualitatively and the result showed that most students made mistakes before the teachers correct them. This paper aims to dig out more on this phenomenon and it is expected to give more insight to the English learning and teaching process.*

**Keywords:** sentence production, English, EFL Learners, Indonesian.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Language has important roles as a mean of communication. Language allows people to say many things and express their needs. People use language to express their thoughts, ideas, feelings, attitudes, and experiences in different or various gambits. Richards and Rodgers defines language in three different views of language and the nature of language proficiency (1986: 16). The first is structural view, which means that language is structurally related elements for delivering meaning. The second is language as functional view. Language becomes a vehicle for the expression of functional meaning without emphasizing the grammatical characteristics of language. The other one is interactional view, which sees language as a tool for creating interpersonal relations and social transactions.

As a mean of communication, the use of language is also not limited on certain field. People interact with other people that have different cultures, social conditions, origins, and languages. This condition makes people need to learn not only their mother tongue but also other languages. People from different countries are also able to communicate using global language, that is English. English plays a great role in the world because it has been used as lingua franca, an international language, and popular to the countries all over the world. Several countries use English as their national language, meanwhile in Indonesia, English is considered as foreign language.

Regarding the importance of English as lingua franca and English as Foreign Language (EFL) in our country,

Indonesian provides English learning in all levels of education, from kindergarten up to college. English and Bahasa Indonesia actually have some similarities and differences. The similarity is both have the same sentence structure which consists of subject, predicate (verb), and object. Another similarity is English and Indonesian sentences have active and passive forms. The difference is English has different tenses to show the time at which an event happens, whereas Bahasa Indonesia does not. The other difference is the predicate in English changes based on the tense and the preceding subject. The predicate in Bahasa Indonesia does not change though it is utilized in different time.

Learning language is easy, but it takes time. The second language learning environment is encompassed to what language the learner hears and sees in the new language (Bhela, 1999). It may include a wide variety of situations, such as exchanges in restaurants and stores, conversations with friends or for business, reading street signs and newspapers, and talking about classroom activities. Though English has been taught since early level, errors are found when the learners, especially for beginner level, produce spoken or written utterances. Errors constitutes gaps in the learner's knowledge, which occur because the learners do not know what is correct (Bhela, 1999).

One of the mistakes that will become the focus on this study is the way learners translate L1 to L2. For example, learners tend to say 'I am school at SMA 5 Kupang,' when they meant to say 'Saya bersekolah di SMA 5 Kupang.' This kind of mistake is also encountered in the words *breakfast*, *lunch*, *dinner*, *church*, and *age*. For example, learners say 'I dinner with my family' rather than 'I have dinner with my family'. The word *dinner* is a noun, but learners change it into verb when they directly translate 'Saya makan malam bersama keluarga' into English. Therefore, in this research, the writers try to observe whether some words become problematic or not when students have direct translation in both spoken and written

utterances. Furthermore, the writers also try to find out whether there are other words misused by Indonesian learners when they have to create utterances in English. The reasons and explanations on this problem are also discussed in this paper.

## DISCUSSION

The differences between Indonesian and English has always been the problem to Indonesian learners who learn English in school. As what have been stated before, there are some differences between English and Indonesian. The differences occur in terms of the grammar of the sentence, the tenses, the phonology and many others. The most distinctive feature which makes English become a problem for Indonesian learner is the tenses and the order of the sentence. English has several tenses which indicate the time of the utterances. It requires people to use different tenses when they want to say an action happens in the past, something is on going or the action happens in the future. Meanwhile, Indonesian does not require people to use different tense for actions, which take place in the past, in present or in the future.

In addition, English and Indonesian also have different order of word. It can be obviously seen in the way of making noun phrase. In English, the described vocabulary or adjectives precedes the noun. Meanwhile, in Indonesian, the noun comes first followed by the adjectives. For example, English will have it as *black cat*, while Indonesian will say it as *kucinghitam*. Besides, English also has clear division of part of speech for the noun, verb, adjective and adverb. Those parts have their own position in a sentence.

Actually, Indonesian has a clear division for the noun, verb, adjective and adverb. For example, the word *school* or *sekolah*. Based on The Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language of the Language Centre (KBBI), the word *sekolahis* categorized as a *nominaor* noun. However, the word *sekolah* becomes the

root for the verba or the verb. According to KBBI, the word class change once the prefix *ber-* is added to the root word, sekolah. This system also happens in English. For example, for the word 'govern'. It may change into 'governor' or 'government.' Looking at the case, there is a relevant concept of making the classification of words either in English or Indonesian. Then, it is actually easy for Indonesian learners to avoid errors in constructing sentence in English apart from using the correct tense.

An error takes place when the deviation arises as a result of lack of knowledge or lack of competence (Ellis, 2008). The errors can also arise because each learner has different motivation, social background, and intelligence. It means that the appearance of errors can be detected. In learning English as foreign language, some errors appear because the learners have not yet understood the English grammar. As cited by Krisetyawati (2010), an error refers to a systematic error of competence, both covert and overt, that deviates from the norms of the target language. Covert errors are grammatically correct but not interpretable within the context of communication whereas overt errors refer to the obviously ungrammatical utterances (Brown, 1994; Corder, 1967; Ellis, 1996). In this research, the writers found that overt error occurs in utterances when the learners are asked to translate some sentences directly. There are some examples that the writers found related to this problem, as presented in the following table:

**Table 1. The examples of the intended English sentences.**

| Indonesian                        | Intended English Sentences      |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| a. Sayabersekolah di SMA 5 Kupang | I <b>school</b> at SMA 5 Kupang |
| b. Sayasarapanbersamakeluarga     | I <b>breakfast</b> with my      |

|                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
|                                   | family                                 |
| c. Sayamakanmalamdi restoran      | I <b>dinner</b> in restaura nt         |
| d. Sayamakansiang di kantin       | I <b>lunch</b> at the canteen          |
| e. Kamerauntukmengabadikamomen    | Camera <b>immortalize</b> the moments  |
| f. Sayamauberkelilingdunia        | I want to <b>around</b> the world      |
| g. Sayamaukembalikekampunghalaman | I want to <b>back</b> to my hometow n. |

Then, there are some reasons which the writers can provide to explain this phenomenon. The first reason it is due to the lack of knowledge of the EFL learners. In this study, the learners' lack of knowledge of English especially in vocabulary and part of speech causes the errors presented in table 1. When the EFL learners do not have enough exposure to English, they will assume that every word in their first language (L1) has the equivalent word in the second language (L2). It is supported by Blum Kulka and Levenston (1983) who said that "assuming that there is word-for-word translation equivalent in the L2 is the only way a learner can begin to communicate in a second language."

Therefore, according to the theory from Blum-Kulka and Levinson, the phenomenon in table 1 can be explained. Without knowing that the part of speech for the word 'school' is not a verb, the learners directly put it as a verb to say 'bersekolah' in English, as in example (a). In example (b), learners put the word 'breakfast' as the verb for 'sarapan'. In example (c), learners put the word 'dinner' as the verb for 'makanmalam'. In example (d), learners put the word 'lunch' as the verb for 'makansiang'. Then, in example (e), learners put the word 'immortalized' as

the verb for 'mengabadikan'. In example (f), learners put the word 'around' as the verb for 'berkeliling', and in example (g), learners put the word 'back' as the verb for 'berkeliling.'

The assumption that there is an equivalent word in L2 leads to another reason why this phenomenon happens. It is the interference of the L1. 'When writing or speaking the target language (L2), second language learners tend to rely on their native language (L1) structures to produce a response.' (Ellis, 1997). Therefore, when there is an error or a misconception in the L1, it is possible that learners will make mistake in L2. In this case, the example is the word 'sarapan.' Most Indonesian people say 'sayasarapan..'. Looking at the sentence, the word 'sarapan' is put as verb or *verba*. However, in KBBI, the word 'sarapan' is a *nomina* or a noun. Based on KBBI, the correct word for the *verba* or the verb is 'menyarak'. Therefore, the correct sentence order is 'sayamenyarak.' However, this structure is rarely used by the Indonesia. Then, it leads to the error in L2. They consider the word 'breakfast' has the same part of speech as 'sarapan' which is *verba* or a verb. Therefore, "the learners have accumulated structural entities of L2 but demonstrate difficulty in organizing this knowledge into appropriate, coherent structures" (Ellis, 1997). The significant gap is available between the accumulation and organization of this knowledge.

As for example (c) and (d), for the word 'makanmalam' and also 'makansiang', learners directly put the word 'dinner' and also 'lunch.' It possibly happens because learners automatically find the correspondent words in L2 which represents their intended meaning. However, they do not know that the nature of the word 'dinner' and 'lunch' does not allow them to be verbs of a sentence. Since 'dinner' and 'lunch' is a noun, they can only be a subject or a complement of a sentence. Therefore, in these two examples, learners miss the action verbs which can be put before 'dinner' or 'lunch.' The learners should put 'have' or 'eat' as the correct correspondent for 'makansiang'

and 'makanmalam.' These two examples prove the theory from Blum Kulka and Levinson that in order to survive learners may use their knowledge on equivalent words in L2 to create sentences, without knowing it is correct or incorrect.

In the case of 'berkeliling' which becomes 'around', the learners make an error in understanding the word 'berkeliling' itself. According to KBBI, 'berkeliling' is a *verba* or a verb. Therefore, when it is translated into English, 'berkeliling' should be 'go around' which means *to travel to all the place that you are visiting in order to find out what it is like*. It also happens in example (g), for the word 'kembali'. The learners make mistake in understanding the 'kembali' itself. In the Indonesian sentence, the word 'kembali' actually has the meaning 'return or go back' since it is related to 'kampunghalaman', which is a place. Since they misunderstood the concept of 'kembali', they directly translate it into 'back.' Actually, 'back' is also a verb in English but it has different intended meaning to the Indonesian sentence. Then, in this case, the learners should make the translation into 'return or go back to their hometown.'

Furthermore, based on the systematicity, the errors made by the students in this study can be classified into some aspects. Corder (1974), as cited by Ellis (2008), distinguished three types of error; they are pre-systematic, systematic, and post-systematic errors. In the study, pre-systematic error exist because the learners had not had knowledge of the target language and given any account of why particular form was chosen. The learners' errors occurred when the learners were unaware of the existence of a particular rule in the target language. When the learners say, "I breakfast with my family," they did not pay attention to the grammatical rule. After the subject, 'I', should be followed by verb, such as 'have'. However, the learners did not realize the error they made until they discovered the correct one, helped by the teacher.

Errors need to be explained as whether they are interlingual or intralingual. Generally interlingual errors can be identified as transfer errors which result from a learner's first language features (e.g., lexical, grammatical, or pragmatic, etc.). The writers found that interlingual error occurred in the study because of the interference. According to Richards (1971), interference errors occur as a result of the use of elements from one language while speaking another (Ellis, 2008). Moreover, English as foreign language for Indonesian learners makes the learners often make the sentence sounds equivalent. The example found in this study was when the learners say, "I dinner in the restaurant," because the equivalent sentence in Indonesia is 'Saya makan malam di restoran'. The word 'dinner' was deemed as similar as 'makan malam'. Furthermore, intralingual errors are subdivided as overgeneralizations, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of rules, and false concepts hypothesized (i.e., learners fail to comprehend fully). The learners overgeneralized that predicate in Bahasa Indonesia has the same form with verb in English. In fact, English has different types of verb based on the tense or collocation. 'Dinner' means 'makan malam,' but it

should be preceded by verb 'have' in English sentence, like 'I have dinner'. If it is directly put after the subject, the sentence is apparently ungrammatical.

## CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, it can be inferred that most of learners' errors are pre-systematic errors or as a result of L1 interference and overgeneralization. Selection of a certain word may be interfered if direct translation prevails. Therefore, such errors can be reduced if teachers encourage practices, especially producing L2 sentences, and let the learners be aware of the awkward expressions. Furthermore, teachers should also teach the concept of part of speech and vocabulary dictions in L2. When the learners understand that there are different concepts between words, they can transfer their L1 concept to L2 concept well. Another point that can be done is that learners should be exposed to various real examples of English usage like in the movie, in the newspaper, or in the magazine. By doing so, learners may gain more knowledge and they will be more familiar to English. Then, the result is that learners may produce a more correct English utterance.

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