

# Permeability of Students' Interlanguage: A Case Study on Indonesian Students Learning English as a Foreign Language

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**Abstract-** One of the most significant and enthralling aspects of human development is language development. This study presents learner's attempts at constructing a linguistic system that progressively approach the target language system. This process is call as Interlanguage. The focus of this study is on one of interlanguage characters, it is permeability. Permeability reflects the students' native language transfer and overgeneralization in their efforts to produce the intended meaning in target language. The objective of this study is to present observed proves of the permeability of the students' interlanguage by describing the types of influence from the native and target language and presenting the what causes this influence. The data were collected from erroneous sentences taken from students' composition. This study is descriptive qualitative typed of SLA research. The results indicate that native and target language influence students' interlanguage at the aspect of vocabulary and grammar. This study is expected to give pedagogical implication; it will build teacher's positive attitude on interlanguage errors. Understanding error and language process can help teacher to provide appropriate training for the students so that they are able to develop their interlanguage system.

**Index Terms-** Interlanguage, permeability, English foreign language

## I. INTRODUCTION

It is not difficult to master native language because most of the time people are exposed to natural settings and they can easily interact with native speakers which make language development is smooth. On the other hand, learning a foreign language is difficult especially for people who learn the language in a foreign setting for example in Indonesia. Some Indonesian students who learn English as a foreign language find it difficult to master English because of some problems, for example: they do not get enough exposure for the language input and not enough source people to practice with. It can be inferred that English language development of Indonesian takes place unnaturally.

While learning a foreign language, learners commonly construct a system for themselves that is different in some ways from the system of their native language (mother tongue or first language) and foreign language or the target language (or TL hereafter), the

language that the learners are learning. Learners go through linguistic stage during the process of mastering the target language. Selinker (1977) is the one who first introduced this process as Interlanguage (IL). The term Interlanguage refers to the reflection of learners' attempts to construct a linguistic system that gradually approaches the target language system. Since it was introduced, Interlanguage has become a major concern in second language acquisition study and theory.

The fundamental idea of Interlanguage is that the learners create Interlanguage when they are trying to express meaning in a second language linguistic-cognitive system. Interlanguage describes the type of language formed by learners of foreign or second language whose process of learning a new language is still happening. It reflects the journey of learners from their native language or first language to the target language (TL) or second language (L2) acquisition. It is seen as a third language which the structure status is between native language and target language. It is unique because the system falls between native language and target language. Ellis & Barkhuizen (2005) and Saville-Troike (2012), as cited in in Fauziati (2016) summarized IL for its characteristics as follows: (1) Systematic, means that there exists an internal consistency in the rule and feature system which makes up interlanguage (2) Dynamic, means that the system of rules which learners have in their minds change frequently, resulting in a succession of interim grammar; (3) Interlanguage is variable because learner employs various forms of grammatical structure at any stage of development.; (4) Learning strategies such as active language transfer, simplification or generalization is produced by Interlanguage ; (5) Fossilization, means that errors may have become fossilized or permanent features on the learner's speech; and (6) Permeable or the susceptibility or Interlanguage to infiltration by L1 and L2 rules or forms. Because of these characteristics, permeability of Interlanguage is the focus of this present study.

As cited in Fauziati (2016), Brown (1994) is the one who first noted permeability of Interlanguage followed by Connor (1996) who divided the errors of language learners into two types. They are interlingual and intralingual. Interlingual errors are errors which come from native language influence of the learners or from external factors. Intralingual errors are errors that are caused by internal factors or the system of target language itself. Brown claims that beginners of target language are commonly only familiar with native language system. Therefore, many

learner errors in this stage are because of the influence from their NL system.

Permeability of IL means the system of IL that is influenced by both learners' NL and TL being learned. This study wants to examine not only NL influence but also TL influence on students' Interlanguage. The main objectives of this study are to classify, explain, and portray the influence of both NL and TL to the IL of Indonesian students learning English as a foreign language. Based on the purpose of the study, detailed objectives of the present study the followings: (1) to describe the types of the native language influence (Indonesian) on the Interlanguage production of students; (2) to describe the types of target language (English) on the production of students' Interlanguage

## II. RESEARCH ELABORATIONS

This study is qualitative typed of SLA (Second Language Acquisition) research which use classroom as the context (Ellis, 2006). This study used descriptive qualitative as framework. The data were collected, identified, described, and explained from students' English composition. The subjects of this study are 32 students of eighth grade learning English as a foreign language. Indonesian is the students' native language and through formal schooling they have learned English as a foreign language at least eight years. The students have the same nationality, education background, English proficiency level, language background and age. The data were sentences containing interlanguage; there were 289 erroneous sentences which were collected for this study. The data source was English composition written by the students with topic: My Daily Activities and My Last Holiday.

For the data collection, elicitation technique and documentation technique are used. Elicitation technique used to support the students to produce the writing. Elicitation is used because it is able to give a better insight on learners' ability and a better understanding of their interlanguage than the study of naturally occurring speech or writing can provide. The second technique of data collection is documentation. The processes of documentation are as follow: (1) The students were given a task to perform a free composition; (2) The researcher supervised the students and read the composition accurately to identify the erroneous sentences (3) The researcher wrote down all the erroneous sentences taken from the composition to be described how the permeability of their language system.

## III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### A. NL Influence Types on Students' IL

After analyzing the data, it is found that there are two main types of NL influence to the students' IL. They are lexical influence and grammar influence. The influence of lexical covers the use of items of vocabulary, Indonesian acronym, and Indonesian cognate. The influence of lexical The influence of lexical is often found in the borrowings word which is converted so it makes natural sounds and spelling. The influence of grammar was found in the use of Indonesian collocation, passive pattern, and conjunction.

The use of Indonesian vocabulary in the students' IL production is the first type of lexical influence. The students use their native language (Indonesian) such as in "My friends and I like to go to *bioskop* together" The word *bioskop* is Indonesian words, referring to cinema. Other Indonesian words found is about Indonesian food and place as in "Mother usually buy *pecel* for me" and "The *pecel* shop is near *wedangan Gerkung*". The word *pecel* refers to Indonesian food, that is vegetables with peanut sauce. *Wedangan* is a word to describe food stalls that provides traditional food and it is easily can be found at the road side, whereas 'Gerkung' is the name of the food stall. In fact, it can be understood that these kinds of term are not transferable easily when target language is being learned. The students find it difficult to translate the words into English because it is deeply embedded in their culture.

The next lexical influence type is related to the use of Indonesian cognate. According to Richards & Schmidt (2002), cognate is one word in a language which has similar form and meaning with a word in another language because both languages are related, such as *legenda* (legend), *kuliner* (culinary), *baterai* (battery), and *foto* (photo). This phenomena occurs because students think that both in Indonesian and English these cognates have the same form and meaning. For instance, they wrote "It's about *Legenda Toba Lake*"; "We enjoyed the *kuliner*"; "My phone *baterai* was only 16%"; and "We took many *foto*". In fact, these cognates only share the same meaning and but different in spelling. To deal with their problem in expressing their ideas in English, the learners had taken some benefits of the similarity. This shows how learners bridge to their expression to English.

Another type of influence in lexical is the use of acronym of Indonesian, for example 'RT' (*Rukun Tetangga* means a group neighborhood and 'RW' (*Rukun Warga* means hamlet, consists of several groups of neighborhood). These words belong to living circumstances-related terms which are strongly rooted to the culture of Indonesian. The situation that the students faced was where they weren't able to find their English equivalence, therefore, they wrote "I live in RT 001, RW 005" These acronyms are used to fill up the gaps in their English vocabulary knowledge. The NL grammar influence on students' IL was recognizable enough because the linguistic knowledge of TL is not adequate. They used the system of linguistic that the know the best from NL, including the use of Indonesian collocation, passive construction, and negative construction.

Collocations are known as two or more words which go together and sound correct to the native speaker of NL but it doesn't sound right for native speaker of foreign language.

Indonesian collations were found in the data such as "I'm difficult to learn English." This sentence is translated from Indonesian *Saya* (I'm) *sulit* (difficult) *belajar bahasa Inggris* (to learn English) and this collocation only sounds correct to Indonesian native speaker. In English it is more appropriate to say 'I find it difficult to learn English'. Students tend to have word for word translation to express their idea. So it resulted in the creation of IL production. The example above portrays how Indonesian collocation has found in IL production.

Other influence on grammar was in the form of passive sentence. The students formed sentence like "The hat was dropped by me"; "The driver was not careful, the woman was hit"; "The food can be delivered by that shop". These examples show that they often

use passive construction in their target language expression. It might be because of the fact that in Indonesian culture people likes to talk more about the people or things around them rather than about themselves. As a result they tend to put the object (person or thing) which is affected by an action and position the subject later. This was because of the modesty virtue of Indonesian people tend to avoid making direct negative statement by hiding the doer or subject and choose to express it in passive sentence. Students' IL production reflected this tendency. This style surely does not belong to English version. The examples above can sound more natural in active sentence such as: "I dropped the hat"; "The driver was not careful. He hit the women"; and "The shop can deliver the food".

The last grammatical influence found the data was in the negation or negative sentence. The students believe that English negation was similar to Indonesian negation. Most of students do not use auxiliary before negation marker (no/not). It is due to the absent of auxiliary in Indonesian negation. Hence, they wrote "Our journey not easy"; "I not speak English well". In the examples, "Our journey not easy" was the literal translation of Indonesian *Perjalanan kita* (our journey) *tidak* (not) *mudah* (easy); I not speak English well from *saya* (I) *tidak* (not) *berbicara* (speak) *bahasa Inggris* (English) *dengan baik* (well).

### B. TL Influence Types on Students' IL

Target language also influences students' IL in the aspect of lexical and grammatical. In lexical aspect students' IL can be seen in the use of false friends (the similarity of meaning and form in vocabulary), while the influence of grammar can be seen in the use of pronoun, verb tenses, and preposition. The influence of TL lexical was due to the students' confusion in English words have similar meaning. For instance, the words tall and high have the same meaning in Indonesian, which is *tinggi*. So, the students produced "I want to hike in tall mountain". The words walk and operate can be translated into Indonesian as *menjalankan* and they wrote "I learnt to walk computer"

The next influence of lexical from TL was because students have problem with part of speech in English. Part of speech is a category of word based on its syntactic function. The students are confused how to use verb and adjective as in "To beautiful the decoration, we put some flowers"; "Don't forget to additional sugar in your tea"; "The doctor helped to healthy the patient". "Beautiful", "additional" and "healthy" are adjectives that are commonly acquired first by the students; so they are more recognizable and ready to use than other verbs which has the similar function or position.

The influence of TL grammar on students' IL includes the use of verb tens, pronoun, and preposition. The first type of grammatical influence was the use of English verb tense. In English, verb means an action, and the action is related to the time when the action is done by the doer. Learning verb tense was the most difficult part of grammar that they have to acquire. It is due to the absence of verb tense concept in Indonesian. The first type of verb tense concept was the use of BE. In Indonesian concept there is no BE. In the data, the absence of BE found in the sentence such as "The books mine"; "My phone inactive". The students abandoned the occurrence of copula BE in a

sentence since it has no semantic contribution in the sentence. Second, the use of present tense to express past tense is found in the students' IL. For examples, "Last holiday, I go to Bali"; "Grandma sleep when we arrive there". Third, incorrect comparative degree commonly occurred in their IL production because in their current knowledge comparative degree is made by adding -er to all adjective, such as "Beach is *gooder* than mountain"

Similarly, the problem in understanding English personal pronoun becomes another influence in students' IL. It is because gender and number difference do not exist in Indonesia. The students wrote sentences such as "My parents are wonderful. I love they so much."; "Jack is a smart student. She is also diligent"

Last, the most problematic category that the students meet in learning English is preposition. It is because there some differences between English and Indonesian system of preposition. The number of English prepositions is more various compared to Indonesian. For instance, Indonesian preposition *di* to tell where and when actions happen may have equivalents in English i.e. in, at, on. Confused by the various prepositions to use, they tend to use the preposition that they are familiar such as in sentence "In Sunday, I go to church"; "We arrived in 5 p.m".

### C. Discussion

The findings of this study show the empirical proof of native language and target language influence on students' Interlanguage production. This corresponds the theory of Interlanguage proposed by Selinker (1997), Ellis & Barkhuizen (2005), Gass and Selinker (2008) and Sabelle-Troike (2012) that stated learner language is open to the permeation not only from learners' NL but also learners' TL systems.

Examining the types of NL influence in students' Interlanguage can give insight about what types of NL influence on vocabulary that occurred the most especially on the use of NL words, and that the influence on TL grammar occurred on the use of tenses. It can be assumed that lexical and grammar were the most difficult area that is faced by Indonesian students learning English as a foreign language.

The current study found that there are three sources of influence on students' IL. The first one is the students' good mastery of native NL (Indonesian), the second one is the students' limited knowledge of TL (English), and the third one is the possession of two language systems in one mind. This finding is in line with the theory of Selinker (1997) and Saville - Troike (2012) claimed that IL is easily influenced by both learners' NL and TL systems. Due to the students' limited knowledge of TL, they took alternative to the linguistic knowledge, both from NL and TL, causing IL production.

## IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, the writer can draw several conclusions from this present study. First, the study proved that students' IL production was influenced by both NL and TL. It is because in one mind, students have two language systems

(Indonesian and English). Students were lacking the necessary vocabulary and grammar in TL so when they tried to express their ideas in English, they tend to find help from NL and TL system. Second, the major influence from students' NL is related to lexical items in the form of Indonesian borrowings, including expression of cultural bound, cognates, and acronym. The sources of NL influence are students' good mastery in NL and their limited knowledge of English. Third, grammar was the first influence from NL especially about verb tense. Last it can be concluded that due to students' lacking in necessary vocabulary and grammar in the TL, they mix two languages (Indonesian and English) to make utterance and it is reflected in students' IL.

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