

Grammatical interference in Islamic school students’ English narrative writings

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ABSTRACT

Employing a qualitative approach, this study aims to discover the types of grammatical interference that mostly occur in narrative texts written by Indonesian students at a senior high school level. The grammatical interference covered in this article is categorized into two, namely syntactical interference and morphological interference. Moreover, 20 eleventh-grader students of an Islamic school were chosen randomly to be the sample of this research. The students were asked to compose a narrative text with a topic that has been determined by the teacher. Their writings were then analyzed descriptively to find out the dominant types of grammatical interference made by the students. It was revealed that the students encountered morphological inferences related to tenses, articles, subject-plural forms, and pronouns. Besides, syntactical inferences regarding word order, noun phrase, and passive voice are found in the students’ writings. Thus, it implies that students often used the grammatical rules of their first language in composing their writings in English.

Keywords: *Grammatical interference; Narrative text; Indonesian students; Writing*

1. Introduction

The use of written communication is inseparable from human life as people frequently produce many kinds of writing to express their ideas and thoughts. Occasionally, people are encouraged to communicate on various platforms such as text

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messages, e-mails, announcements, and letters that allow them to write. Additionally, in academic settings especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, writing becomes one of the fundamental skills that should be mastered by students as it comes with a lot of advantages. Oybek et al. (2021) claim that writing proficiency enables students to utilize their foreign language competence and knowledge for communication with speakers around the world using modern means of communication. It is also noted by Miftah (2016) that the ability to write in English is one of the primary needs for individuals who want to participate in professional and international affairs. It is because writing stimulates thought, makes learners focus in organizing ideas, and develops their capacity to summarize, analyze, and critique (Maghsoudi & Haririan in Zakaria & Aziz, 2019).

However, it is a common fact that learners experience numerous difficulties when they begin to learn a foreign language since everything looks strange to them, including the new vocabulary, grammatical structure, and pronunciation (Rao, 2017). Thus, when they attempt to learn English as a second language or a foreign language, they may face some issues during the learning process and they possibly make certain mistakes or errors while producing the language. Irma et al. (2018) believe that students' native language has a significant impact on their English proficiency. If there are similarities between the students' native language and the language they are learning, it is easier for them to learn the new language; yet, the uniqueness of each language might be a barrier to master English. Puspita (2021) proposes a similar idea by saying that learners occasionally produce errors since, whether consciously or subconsciously, they often employ their first language (L1) while trying to communicate in their second language (L2), causing them to follow the same grammatical patterns in both languages. This statement is justified by Hikmah et al. (2021) that language learners mostly commit errors in grammar, word choice, and pronunciation that are impacted by their L1.

In linguistics, that kind of error is called interference. Interference of first language refers to the rearrangement of structures caused by the introduction of foreign elements into the more highly organized domains of language, such as a significant portion of the systems of morphology and syntax, as well as certain vocabulary domains (Weinrich, 1953). It is mentioned by Grabe and Kaplan (2014) that the information process in a first language may affect grammatical development in a foreign language. In this context, Bhela (1999) states that if students do not understand the structures of their second language, they adjust their L2 written utterances using the rules of their first language. Thus, the inability of students to completely understand a foreign language or second language is a major aspect that might contribute to interference issue (Sari, 2019). Added by Lopez (2011) that this interference issue is noticeable while using productive skills particularly in writing, for example, Indonesian students employ Indonesian writing structures while composing a text in English. She also points out that it is very typical for students to translate from Indonesian to English word by word. As a consequence, students' first language brings a serious impact on the use of English grammar in writing.

Nevertheless, grammar is the core of communication as the better the grammar then the clearer the message (Hans & Hans, 2017). It can be said that grammar rules support communication that is concise and straightforward. Alharthi (2021) also mentions that the mastery of grammar is a necessity for writing proficiency, thus, any grammatical mistake may influence the intended messages conveyed by writer which leads to misconceptions. It can be stated that EFL students should be able to write properly in order to avoid misunderstanding so the messages conveyed will not be lost to the readers. Therefore, it is important to explore grammatical errors caused by first language interference to help both teachers and students identify the difficulties encountered by students in writing so that they may find an appropriate solution to overcome the problem.

Furthermore, several researchers have previously conducted research on the topic of grammatical inference. Syarif (2014) carried out a study focusing on the grammatical inference issues faced by English Department students who studied at two universities in Padang. He finally discovered that the three elements of grammatical inference, syntactical, morphological, and lexical, appeared in the students' writings. Those inferences were caused by the lack of awareness of English rules and internalization of their first language structure into English. In addition, Septiana (2020) ran a similar research that she intended to know the factors of the occurrence of grammatical inference in EFL students' writings. By having undergraduate students registered in an academic writing class as the participants, this study revealed that the students experienced interference due to the grammar used in their native language. It was discovered that the structural differences between Indonesian and English make it difficult for the students to write properly, leading to many inaccuracies found in their sentences. Moreover, the students most of the time produce writing in Indonesian and then translate it into English. The failure of the translation enables the students to make some errors. The last study was done by Muziatun et al. (2020) by exploring types of morphological interference in English Department students' writings. From their research, it was found that there were three types of morphological interference that mostly occurred in students' writings which covered the use of article, plural marker, and simple past tense. It was also unveiled that interference in the morphological area arouse primarily within a group of morphological components in which the variation in governing systems and rules across languages serve as causes for linguistic interference.

From the previous studies above, it can be inferred that most studies regarding grammatical inference were done to university students as the subjects. Thus, this recent study aims to analyze grammatical inference in Islamic high school students' writings. It is assumed that the findings can be a reference for English teachers in teaching grammar that they may focus on the students' errors discussed in this research. The following are the research questions of this study.

1. What is the type of grammatical interference in terms of morphological error that mostly occurs in students' narrative writings?

2. What is the type of grammatical interference in terms of syntactical error that mostly occurs in students' narrative writings?

2. Literature review

2. 1. Grammatical interference

Interference is a common phenomenon experienced by individuals when learning a foreign language, which arises due to the extent of dissimilarity between their native language and the language they are learning. The primary cause of interference is attributed to the grammatical or structural differences between the first language and the target language. Therefore, grammatical interference arises when language learners utilize the grammatical framework of their primary language in the context of the target language, thus affecting the target language structures (Puspita, 2021). According to Ekawati (2018), in cases where the first and second languages convey the same meaning but utilize distinct methods of expression, there is a high probability of errors occurring in the L2. This is due to the learner's tendency to transfer the realization device from their primary language to the secondary one. The learners will attempt to transform a familiar expression from their native language into the target language. Nonetheless, they tend to apply the sentence structure of their mother tongue, resulting in the creation of grammatically flawed sentences in the target language.

Additionally, Weinrich (1953) mentions that grammatical interference is divided into two types namely morphological and syntactical interferences. Morphological interference refers to the absorption of affixes from another language, which impacts the use of morphemes, inflection, and affixation. The occurrence of syntactical interference refers to the integration of the syntax of one language into another, covering various aspects such as the connection between word order, agreement in sentence structures, and the construction of declarative and interrogative sentences (Syarif, 2014). Furthermore, syntactic interference encompasses a literal translation of a syntactic arrangement, whether it be the entire sentence or a specific component thereof. The original sequence of words is maintained in the target text, although sometimes results in awkward, unnatural, or odd sentence structure (Tarukallo et al., 2017).

Moreover, Pudiyono (2012) argues that the importance of communication highlights that grammatical interference has a considerable impact. The presence of grammatical errors in sentences can potentially create difficulties for the receivers, resulting in problems or misinterpretations. Thus, proficiency and comprehension of a second language greatly influence an individual's mastery of the language. Budiharto (2019) claims that the effect of a learner's native language on the target language has emerged as a significant challenge. This issue affects language learners' ability to acquire a new language and has implications for the quality of written English as the target language. Consequently, an analysis of grammatical interference in the students' written works is regarded as a way for enhancing the accuracy of their writing. Moreover, it

enables teachers to gain greater insight and understanding regarding the learning processes of their students.

2.2. Narrative text

A narrative text is a work of literature that conveys a story or describes a series of events. It is a written text containing a message aimed to help the reader comprehend the context of the story told by the writer (Latifa & Manan, 2018). Muliani et al. (2019) state that narrative text can be divided into fictional or imaginary narrative and nonfictional narrative. The fictional narrative describes a story that took place in an imaginary world, similar to those found in fairy tales, folktales, fables, legends, and mythology. In contrast, a nonfictional narrative tells the story of an actual person's life in the form of a short story or slice of life.

Moreover, Sinaga (2020) argues that the purpose of a narrative text is to amuse or entertain the reader with various actual or fictional experiences. Therefore, narrative writing should include sufficient information about the action and its setting for the reader to comprehend the events. Consideration should also be given to identifying and emphasizing events and details that serve the purpose of the text. In addition, Purba (2018) explains that the generic structure of narrative texts entails characters with clearly defined personalities/identities, creates visual representations for the reader, and enhances the story. There are four fundamental elements of a narrative text: orientation, evaluation, complication, and resolution. In the orientation, the author presents the setting, the primary characters, and any necessary background information for readers to comprehend the entire plot. The story then begins to develop and become more intriguing in the evaluation. It consists of events, conflicts, or obstacles that the characters encounter as the plot develops. In contrast, the story's complication or climax is the most significant and tense part. It is the moment where the conflict reaches its climax and the most thrilling event occurs. Following the complication, the plot begins to wound down. In the resolution, the author demonstrates how the characters respond to the aftermath of the climax and how they begin to resolve the conflict.

In this research, students were asked to create a short story about some issues happened in their surroundings such as bullying and cheating. However, they still encounter some difficulties in expressing their ideas in grammatically correct sentences due to their first language interference.

3. Method

3.1. Research design

This study applied a qualitative approach with a case study design which aims to investigate students' grammatical inference in their narrative writings. However, a simple quantitative calculation was used to find out the percentage of the students' interference in each category. There were two types of grammatical inference analyzed in this study, those are syntactical and morphological interference.

3.2. *Sampling method*

The population of the study were eleventh grade students of SMA Al-Kautsar Bandar Lampung, one of reputable private Islamic schools in Bandar Lampung. By using random sampling, the researchers took 20 eleventh-grader students with the age ranging from 16 to 18 years old as the participants of the study. As they were taken randomly, thus the students come from different classes.

3.3. *Data collection method*

The data were collected through students' writings. The teacher administered a writing test which consists of several instructions including the writing topic and the maximum number of the words. After that, the students were asked to produce a narrative text based on the topic given by the teacher.

3.4. *Data analysis*

All of the students' writings were analyzed descriptively. First, the interference errors that frequently occurred in the students' works were evaluated by considering their grammatical structures. After that, the researchers calculated and classified the students' errors in terms of grammatical interference into several categories based on the morphological and syntactical errors made by them. The result of the calculation was used to determine which type of errors that were mostly produced by the students. To give more elaboration, the most representative sentences for each category were chosen and described in the result section.

4. Findings

This section presents the finding of the study which is used to answer the research questions mentioned in the introduction. From the data analysis, it was revealed that the students' grammatical errors in English were due to the significant influence of their native language. The researchers illustrate the interference in English sentence patterns produced by the students by dividing them into several classifications including morphological and syntactical errors.

4.1. *Morphological interference*

Morphology is the study of how words are formed and how they fit together. Morphological interferences emerge when morphological component in a sentence is altered or misunderstood. According to analysis, the majority of students often generalize the morphological structure of L1 into L2. It indicates that they generate a structure similar to L1 and L2. Moreover, there are four types of morphological interference found in the narrative text made by the students, those are article, subject-verb agreement, singular-plural form, and pronoun. The occurrence frequency of each type and the examples of students' errors are presented below.

Table 1

The frequency of morphological interference in each aspect.

Types of Grammatical Interference	Aspect	Frequency
Morphological Interference	Tenses	34
	Article	17
	Singular-plural form	11
	Pronoun	9

From the table above, it can be seen that the highest frequency of morphological interference made by students is tenses by having a total of 34. After that, the second most dominant error found in the students' writings is related to articles as it has a frequency score of 17. Then, the interference regarding singular-plural form comes in the third place by having a total number of 11. Lastly, pronouns have the lowest frequency as there are only 9 errors in this aspect that appeared in the students' writings. Therefore, it can be inferred that the syntactic interference related to tenses was commonly made by the students.

4.1.1. Tenses

The most obvious grammatical interference detected in the students' writings is the use of tenses as it has the frequency score of 34. Given that the genre of the writing assigned to the students is narrative, it is quite predictable that they may make errors related to past tense. Besides, English and Indonesian have distinct grammatical rules. In Indonesian, the rules of using tenses to mention action at a different time are not available, thus Indonesia verbs do not shift from present to past or future. In contrast, the English verb must be changed from present to past or future. Additionally, the contrast between regular and irregular past tense verbs is particularly difficult for students. The examples of the students' errors in using tenses are provided below.

Table 2

Morphological interference in the use of tenses.

L1 Interference	Expected L2
Once upon a time, an inspector come to the school.	Once upon a time, an inspector came to the school.
He knowed the truth.	He knew the truth

From Table 2, it is seen that the students made two kinds of errors in using simple past tense. In the first sentence, the students used the base form of a verb ('come') while he should use an irregular verb ('came') instead. In contrast, the verb 'know' in the second sentence is written incorrectly and the students mistook it as a regular verb.

4.1.2. Article

Nouns in English are usually preceded by indefinite articles such as *a* and *an* and definite articles including *the* and zero article. Due to the absence of an article system in Indonesian, students are more likely to ignore the English article system. As a result, they tend to neglect or omit articles in English. The table below shows the students' errors in using articles.

Table 3

Morphological interference in the use of articles.

L1 Interference	Expected L2
Once upon a time, there was little kid named Tardo.	Once upon a time, there was a little kid named Tardo.
One day, there was group of children...	One day, there was a group of children...

The sentences produced by students in the table above prove that they were not aware of the use of the article 'a'. It is shown that students omitted 'a' in both sentences.

4.1.3. Singular-plural form

Errors related to singular-plural form were frequently found in the students' writings. Those errors were caused by interlingual transfer that there is no singular-plural noun in Indonesian. It differs from English in which singular and plural nouns, classified into countable and uncountable plurals, are commonly used in English sentences. Below are the examples of the students' errors in singular-plural form.

Table 4

Morphological interference in the use of singular-plural form.

L1 Interference	Expected L2
There were three friend named Adit, Daffa, and Naufal.	There were three friends named Adit, Daffa, and Naufal.
Some student went to the library.	Some students went to the library.

Table 4 presents the students' errors in applying singular-plural rules. The noun 'friend' and 'student' in the two sentences above should be added with the inflectional morpheme '-s' to indicate plurality. However, the students did not write them correctly as they should have.

4.1.4. Pronoun

Generally, English pronouns are divided into several types. However, there are three kinds of pronouns that are usually used to replace nouns including subject,

possessive, and object that each of them has a different function and form. However, Indonesian pronouns do not have any classification based on the function that people use the same pronoun to point out a subject, object, and possession. This contrast causes syntactic interference in terms of pronoun as presented in the following table.

Table 5

Morphological interference in the use of pronouns.

L1 Interference	Expected L2
They sent he a backpack.	They sent him a backpack.
Anisa didn't want you book.	Anisa didn't want your book.

Based on the sentences shown in Table 5, it can be assumed that students did not use proper pronouns in their sentences. As can be seen in the first sentence that the students used 'he' instead of 'him' in referring to object pronoun. Meanwhile, in the second sentence, the student used an incorrect possessive pronoun as it should be 'your' instead of 'you'.

4.2. Syntactic interference

Syntactic interference occurs due to the literal translation of a syntactic structure, either the whole phrase or a specific part. Usually, the word order of the text written in L1 is retained in the text written in L2, even though the phrase sounds unnatural or weird. Errors regarding syntactic interference may be seen in phrases, clauses, and sentences. The syntactical interference in the students' writings is classified into three categories, namely, word order, noun phrase, and passive voice.

Table 6

The frequency of syntactic interference in each aspect.

Types of Grammatical Interference	Aspect	Frequency
Syntactic Interference	Word Order	15
	Noun Phrase	5
	Passive Voice	2

It is clearly seen from Table 6 that the students had the greatest issue in constructing sentences using correct word order as this aspect has the highest frequency by having a total of 15. Moreover, only five errors related to noun phrases were identified in the students' writings. On the other hand, the students rarely made errors in passive voice since it comes with a frequency score of 2. Thus, it can be concluded that the most dominant syntactical interference occurred in the students' writings is word order.

4.2.1. Word order

It is obvious that the word order in Indonesian sentences is different from English sentences as they have distinct grammatical forms. Thus, some grammatical problems may occur when the students translate Indonesian sentences to English without following English sentence structure as pictured in the following table.

Table 7

Syntactic interference regarding word order.

L1 Interference	Expected L2
Uncle my friend go to Surabaya.	My friend's uncle goes to Surabaya.
Often Mia baked cookies.	Mia often baked cookies.

The table above shows the examples of sentences written in the incorrect order. The first sentence indicates that the students follow Indonesian sentence form which is '*paman teman saya*' while in English it should be written 'my friend's uncle'. Similarly, the students mention the adverb of frequency 'often' at the beginning of the sentence before the subject which forms an improper structure.

4.2.2. Noun phrase

The most common errors made by students were caused by lack of understanding of adjective placement. In Indonesian structure, it is acceptable to mention a noun before an adjective, such as '*topi merah*'. However, when it is written in English, the formation of the words should be shifted by addressing the adjective first, for example, 'red hat'. Some students did not know about this rule as there were 5 errors related to this case occurred in their writings, the two of which are shown in the following table.

Table 8

Syntactic interference regarding noun phrases.

L1 Interference	Expected L2
He found two stone black big.	He found two black big stones.
I play with cat cute.	I play with a cute cat.

As predicted, the students commonly made errors in mentioning the noun phrases in their sentences. The phrase 'two stone big black' is carried out from Indonesian sentence structure since in Indonesian it is stated as '*dua batu hitam besar*'.

4.2.3. Passive voice

Both Indonesian and English sentences have passive forms. However, students are often challenged by the rules of passive voice in English. It is because in Indonesian grammar, people just simply add prefixes namely '*di*' and '*ter*' in all verbs to form passive

sentences. On the other hand, English has various tenses and each tense comes with a different passive voice structure. Nevertheless, there were only 2 errors made regarding this aspect as presented below.

Table 9

Syntactic interference regarding passive voice.

L1 Interference	Expected L2
The castle built a long time ago.	The castle was built a long time ago.
Their dresses made by the best tailor in the town.	Their dresses were made by the best tailor in the town.

From the example above, it is clearly noticed that students omitted the use of to be in past form--they did not put 'was' and 'were' before the past participles. However, the English passive form of simple past tense requires the use of an auxiliary verb.

5. Discussion

The findings reveal that the students' writings were affected by grammatical interference in their first language. Grammatical interference between English and Indonesian happens often in specific patterns with structural rule distinctions between English and Indonesian structures. Based on the sample presented above, it is discovered that all errors are caused by the diverse linguistic systems of the two languages. The students experienced morphological interference regarding tenses, articles, singular-plural forms, and pronouns. Besides that, several syntactical interferences related to word order, noun phrase, and passive voice were also found in the students' narrative texts.

The most frequent morphological interference appearing in the students' writings is related to tenses that the students found difficult to determine the verb that they have to use in their sentences. It happened because there is no distinction of the verb used in Indonesian sentences. On the other hand, in English, it is necessary to use different verb forms when the sentences point out activities that happen at different times. As a result, they tend to write the verb incorrectly. This finding is in line with the idea proposed by Budiharto (2019) that in English, people are required to use various tenses to represent events happening at different periods. In Indonesian, they just simply modify adverbial sentences to express the occurrence of events at various periods. Added by Iman (2020) that Indonesian, on the other hand, lacks morphological tense, which means that the verbs used to differentiate between the present and the past are not available in Indonesian. The distinction between the present and the past is created by using temporal adverbs. Thus, in the absence of a time adverb, the time frame of the phrase might be ambiguous. Irmalia (2016) also shares a similar idea by stating that the category for inappropriate use of verb tense, including subject-verb agreement, is the most prevalent form of grammatical interference observed in Indonesian. It is assumed that the majority of senior high school

students produced interference mistakes in this category because they are still confused by the various usage of verbs in each tense in the L2 compared to their L1.

Furthermore, in terms of syntactic interference, it was found that students mostly encountered problems in using the correct word order based on English grammatical rules. Thus, the sentences produced by them were ambiguous. It is assumed that the students follow Indonesian sentence structure when composing sentences in English. This L1 transfer results in linguistic problems in L2, since English and Indonesian have different grammatical structures. This issue has been highlighted by Irma et al. (2018) that in the practice of spoken or written English, students may add elements of the Indonesian language that they understand first into their utterances in English. In addition, Hajar et al. (2019) suggest that the primary factors identified from L1 are responsible for the occurrence of grammatical interference. Those factors are a lack of knowledge of the rules of the target language, the use of L1 to translate the target language, and a lack of vocabulary which cause the students to construct sentences or phrases word by word. It is in line with the statement from Ardiantari (2021) as she said that syntactic interference is related to translation problems in grammar. Therefore, when students immediately translate Indonesian phrases into English from their minds, they often create sentences in an improper order.

After all, it is proved that the students often employ their first language (L1) grammatical rules while constructing written work in their foreign language, causing them to adopt the same grammatical structures in both languages. As a result, morphological and syntactical interference occurred in their narrative writings.

6. Conclusion

Grammatical interference is a common phenomenon experienced by Indonesian EFL students. The immense effect of the students' native language makes it difficult for them to avoid interference while learning English. As a result, in this study, the students created various errors in their written work as they applied the rules of Indonesian to the rules of English. Moreover, the grammatical interference detected in the students' narrative writings were both morphological and syntactic interference. The morphological interference involved articles, tenses, singular-plural forms, and pronouns. On the other hand, syntactical interference occurred in several elements such as word order, noun phrase, and passive voice. It was also discovered that the students mostly produced errors related to tenses due to the difference in verb usage in Indonesian and English sentences. Besides, the students wrote English sentences using the word order rules of Indonesian which made their sentences become ambiguous. Therefore, it is suggested for English teachers to have a great awareness of the students' problems related to grammatical interference and provide meaningful grammar learning for the students. Teachers should regularly correct students' writings and give them constructive feedback. Moreover, peer-correction methods can be applied during the learning process so the students may have more input for their improvement, especially in grammar mastery. In

addition, further researchers can do research on the factors affecting students' grammatical interference to give more elaborated information about this problem. They may also conduct an investigation of a method used to teach grammar which can serve as the solution to overcome the issue.

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