

LANGUAGE PREFERENCES IN NOTE-TAKING FOR CONSECUTIVE INTERPRETING: INSIGHTS FROM INDONESIAN EFL STUDENTS

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Abstract: *In the dynamic field of consecutive interpreting, language choice in note-taking is a critical skill that bridges cognitive processing and ensures the accurate delivery of messages. The present small-scale study investigates the language choice in note-taking for consecutive interpreting practices among Indonesian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students. This aims to determine whether the students prefer to take notes in English or Indonesian when interpreting between these two languages and to reveal the reasons behind their preferences. This study employed a case study design, analyzing 45 note-taking samples, followed by conducting face-to-face interviews with 4 students to gain a deeper understanding. The findings reveal a significant preference for taking notes in English, irrespective of the direction of interpreting. This preference highlights the students' inclination towards using English as a medium for cognitive processing and information retention in consecutive interpreting tasks. The results suggest that English proficiency plays a crucial role in the note-taking strategies adopted by Indonesian EFL students. These insights can inform teaching methodologies and curriculum design in interpreter training programs, emphasizing the importance of English proficiency in enhancing interpreting skills.*

Keywords: *note-taking; consecutive interpreting; EFL*

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INTRODUCTION

In multilingual contexts, consecutive interpreting is a critical skill for language learners as it helps create effective communication between speakers of different languages. This skill requires the interpreter to listen to a segment of speech in a source language, take notes, and then accurately deliver the message of the speech in the target language. In many cases, the speech could last up to 15 minutes per segment (Phelan, 2001). Such lengthy duration poses a significant challenge, especially for novice interpreters, in terms of recalling the source message. The limitations of human memory make it difficult to



remember the details of the message, which can result in omissions or inaccuracies if not properly managed. These characteristics underscore the vital role of note-taking activity in consecutive interpreting, primarily to assist the interpreters' memory. In other words, it can be stated that the effectiveness of the process of consecutive interpreting often heavily depends on the quality and clarity of the notes taken (Liu et al., 2023; Phuong et al., 2023; Wang, 2023; Zhou, 2023).

Furthermore, it should be highlighted that the time for the interpreter to take notes coincides with the speaker's speaking time. As Gile (2009) mentioned, the listening and note-taking activities belong to the same stage, namely phase one. Given the limited time available for note-taking, Gran (1988), cited in Alexieva (1994) stated that scholars and practitioners have developed a common basic approach in the modern note-taking systems, incorporating techniques such as the use of abbreviation, symbols, and specific note layout. In addition to these structural elements, the choice of language in note-taking is also a crucial aspect to consider. The language selected may affect the interpreter's ability to efficiently capture and accurately recall information. In other words, certain languages might potentially allow faster notation, thereby reducing cognitive load. Although there is no universally correct approach to note-taking (Weber, 1984) there could be best practices and strategies to adopt by interpreters.

In the context of EFL students, examining their language preferences in note-taking is particularly relevant. Since they are still developing both language and interpreting skills, the choice of whether to take notes in their native language or in English can significantly impact their performance. For instance, taking notes in their native language may facilitate faster recall and understanding, but it might also disrupt the flow of interpreting if they need to mentally switch languages. Conversely, taking notes in English could reinforce their language proficiency and interpretation accuracy but might present additional cognitive challenges. By exploring these language preferences, this study aims to identify patterns that could guide more effective note-taking strategies for EFL students, ultimately supporting their interpreting skill development.

Previously, a number of similar studies on the topic have been conducted by several researchers. For instance, Dam (2004) examined the language choices of interpreting students working with Spanish-Danish language pairs, and the analysis results suggested that the selection of language for note-taking is primarily determined by its role in the interpreters' language combination (whether it is an A-language or B-language) and is much less affected by its role in the interpreting assignment (whether it serves as the source or target language). To confirm Dam's, Szabó (2006) investigated students' language choice using different language pairs, specifically Hungarian as the A language and English as the

B language. The study, however, yielded different results, revealing that the students have a strong tendency to take notes in English, regardless of whether the source language is their A or B language. Furthermore, Błaszczuk & Hanusiak (2010) explored 4 languages namely Polish, English, Swedish, and Finnish to identify linguistic characteristics that may influence the note-taking strategies. Its key findings show that the interpreters often use a mix of languages in their notes, sometimes even incorporating a third language for convenience, especially when certain words are shorter or more intuitive in that language. A supporting argument was also presented in a recent study by Zhan (2019), focusing on Chinese-English language pairs. Zhan argued that language choice in note-taking cannot solely explained by the “source language vs. target language” distinctions; it is also shaped by factors such as handwriting efficiency and the interpreter's training background.

Those various results could be taken to suggest that the interpreter's language combination plays an important role in an interpreter's choice of note-taking language and highlight the need of further research to expand the scope of note-taking techniques that can be applied in interpreter training. Notably, a similar study focusing on the perspective of English and Indonesian has not yet been conducted. Although Emilia et al (2011) analyzed this language pair, their study primarily examined students' general abilities and challenges in note-taking. Thus, this research aims to fill this gap by specifically investigating language preferences in note-taking among interpreting students working with English as an A or B language alongside Indonesian.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Interpreting: An Overview

Interpreting refers to the oral translation of a spoken message or text (M. Shuttleworth & Cowie, 1997). More specifically, it involves oral communication in which one person speaks in the source language, an interpreter processes the message, and then delivers it in the target language, while a third-party listens to the interpreted output (Wilss & Brislin, 1976). Based on this definition, it can be stated that interpreters basically share similarities with translators in their role as facilitators (Genser, 1994) and “human bridges” (Durban, 2011): connecting speakers of different languages to possess mutual understanding.

Based on its mode, interpreting is divided into two: Consecutive and Simultaneous. In consecutive interpreting, the interpreter will start delivering the interpretation of a complete message after the speaker has finished producing the source utterance (Phelan, 2001; Saehu, 2024). Meanwhile, in simultaneous interpreting, the interpreter needs to interpret what the speaker conveys at the same time as the speaker is giving the speech

(Pöchhacker, 2016). The present study focuses on consecutive interpreting; thereby this will be discussed in greater detail.

There are several key characteristics of consecutive interpreting. The first is the use of pausing. In this mode, the speaker can deliver their speech for up to 15 minutes per segment (Phelan, 2001), making it impractical for the interpreter to provide their interpretation immediately after the speaker stops. Pausing allows the interpreter time to organize their thoughts. The length of these pauses can vary, typically ranging from 6 to 7 minutes (Gentile et al., 1996), depending on the context and the amount of information delivered.

Given the extended duration of speech segments, note-taking, as the second characteristic, becomes essential. It might be very challenging for interpreters to recall all the key points accurately after such a lengthy duration without taking notes. Effective note-taking techniques help interpreters capture key ideas, structure, and supporting details, facilitating accurate and coherent interpretations. Since this study places particular emphasis on note-taking, this will be explored in greater detail in the following section.

In addition to note-taking, consecutive interpreters rely heavily on their ability to listen actively and retain information. Therefore, short-term memory is crucial, especially for longer segments, as interpreters must temporarily store details while preparing to deliver the target message. To enhance accuracy, interpreters often use mnemonic devices or develop personalized symbols in their notes to represent complex ideas succinctly. These strategies help manage the cognitive load and ensure the interpretation remains faithful to the speaker's intent and meaning.

Note Taking in Consecutive Interpreting

As mentioned earlier, note-taking is a critical skill that interpreters must master alongside listening, analyzing, and translating, particularly in consecutive interpreting. This skill is so essential that it is explicitly included in the stages of interpreting outlined by Gile (2009) and Riccardi (2002). As the term suggests, note-taking involves recording key information from the speaker using specific techniques designed to aid memory and enhance accuracy.

Rozan (2002) identifies seven core principles of effective note-taking:

1. Noting the key idea (message), not every word – Focusing on the main points to avoid information overload.
2. Using abbreviations – Saving time and increasing efficiency by shortening words or phrases.
3. Links – Highlighting connections between ideas to preserve the logical flow of the message.

4. Negations – Clearly marking negations to avoid misinterpretation.
5. Adding emphasis – Indicating important points to ensure they are appropriately conveyed.
6. Verticality – Arranging notes vertically to make them more readable and structured.
7. Shifts – Using symbols or markers to signal changes in topics, time, or speakers.

While these principles provide a solid foundation, note-taking is far from straightforward. Taylor-Bouladon (2007) argues that the less interpreters rely on notes, the more they are forced to engage their memory, often resulting in better overall interpretation quality. This suggests a delicate balance between note-taking and active listening, where excessive reliance on notes can hinder the flow of interpretation.

For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, note-taking presents additional challenges. Limited time and unfamiliarity with efficient note-taking practices often lead to overly detailed, wordy notes, which can impede their ability to deliver concise and accurate interpretations. This highlights the need for targeted training in both note-taking techniques and time management.

Moreover, beyond the principles of note-taking, several studies have explored the impact of language choice on the quality of interpretation. Researchers such as Dam (2004), Szabó (2006), Błaszczuk & Hanusiak (2010), and Zhan (2019) have investigated how using different languages in notes—whether the source language, target language, or even a third language—affects the interpreter’s performance. These studies reveal that the choice of language in notes can influence factors like cognitive load, recall accuracy, and fluency in the delivery, emphasizing the nuanced role of language in consecutive interpreting.

METHOD

Relevant to the objective, this study employed a descriptive qualitative method with a case study research design. This was undertaken at the English Literature Study Program in a state university in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia. This was selected since the researcher has been one of teaching members in the department, so that it provides an easy access to the research site. Furthermore, since it is a small-scale study, it involves a class of 45 students in the 4th semester of a bachelor’s degree currently taking Consecutive Interpreting course as the participants. The researcher’s familiarity with the site’s condition as well as with the participants is expected to facilitate a more effective and insightful study.

To collect the data, several steps were conducted. First, the students, who had been learning Consecutive Interpreting for approximately half a semester (7 meetings), including Note-taking Techniques as one of the topics, were asked to practice Consecutive Interpreting both from English to Indonesian and from Indonesian to English in two

separate sessions on the same day. The topics assigned were “Diabetes Among Youth” and “Karakteristik Gen Z” “The Characteristics of Gen Z”, respectively. To ensure their natural behaviour performance, they were not informed that their notes would be studied. Second, they were asked to collect their note-taking sheets to be the data source. Finally, the language used in their note-taking sheets were identified and noted down as the data to reveal the students’ language preferences in note-taking. Given their academic background, the potential influence of their familiarity with English on their note-taking preferences is acknowledged. To address this, individual face-to-face interviews were also then conducted with 4 of the participants (labelled as P1-P4). The interviews were audio recorded and included questions about how and why the participants selected a particular language for note-taking, and whether there is any relationship between their language choice and their interpreting quality.

In the process of analyzing the data, since this study was limited to the use of language, other suggested note-taking techniques such as the use of graphic symbols, abbreviation, and acronyms (see Bowen & Bowen, 1984; L. Ginori & Scimone, 1995; Lee & Buzo, 2009; Turner, 2009) were ignored.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The notes of all 45 participants were analyzed and categorized based on the language used during their consecutive interpreting practices. They were divided into three groups: 1) using only Indonesian language; 2) using only English language, and 3) using a combination of both Indonesian and English languages. To clarify, unlike Hanusiak (2021), this study does not differentiate the proportion of each language used within the third category. The following tables provide an overview of the results for both English-to-Indonesian and Indonesian-to-English consecutive interpreting practices.

Table 1.

The Language Preference in English-to-Indonesian Note-taking

Language Used	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
Indonesian	8	17,78
English	30	66,67
Mixed of both	7	15,55

Table 1 presents data on language preferences in note-taking for English-to-Indonesian consecutive interpreting. The results show that 66.67% of participants preferred taking notes entirely in English, 17.78% used only Indonesian, and 15.55% combined both languages.

Table 2.
The Language Preference in Indonesian-to-English Note-taking

Language	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
Indonesian	11	24,45
English	24	53,33
Mixed of both	10	22,22

Meanwhile, Table 2 displays the language preferences for note-taking in Indonesian-to-English consecutive interpreting. The data shows that 53.33% of participants used only English, 24.45% took notes entirely in Indonesian, and 22.22% employed a mix of both languages.

Overall, the findings indicate a strong preference for English in both interpreting directions, with a slightly higher use of Indonesian when interpreting into English. The mixed-language approach remained relatively consistent across both settings. In addition to these, it is also worth noting that one of the analyzed notes included the use of a third language, namely Arabic, and many of them presented some words in the form of graphic symbols, which were beyond the scope of this study for further analysis.

Discussion

Preference for English Notes

The finding that many students prefer to take note only in English, especially in the Indonesian-to-English direction, is somewhat surprising due to its role as their foreign language and their short learning period; thereby requiring a careful interpretation. Nevertheless, this preference firstly aligns with Szabó (2006) finding, which also arrived at similar conclusions. In his initial argument, Szabó suggested that the issue of language choice in note-taking is likely closely linked to the language pair involved. In other words, the nature of the source and target language pair, such as differences in linguistic structure or word length, may shape interpreters' note-taking preferences, whether to maintain accuracy or to facilitate the translation process.

Specifically in my case, another reason the students may have chosen English could be their familiarity with the English terminologies within the topics provided. Considering that the students are all beginners in consecutive interpreting practice, I intentionally selected topics closely related to their everyday lives, which could be one of the limitations of this study. In this context, it is reported and widely known that nowadays the prevalence of diabetes in Indonesia, particularly among youth, is on the rise (Topic 1). Additionally, the students themselves belong to Generation Z (Topic 2). The following is an example of notes in English language.

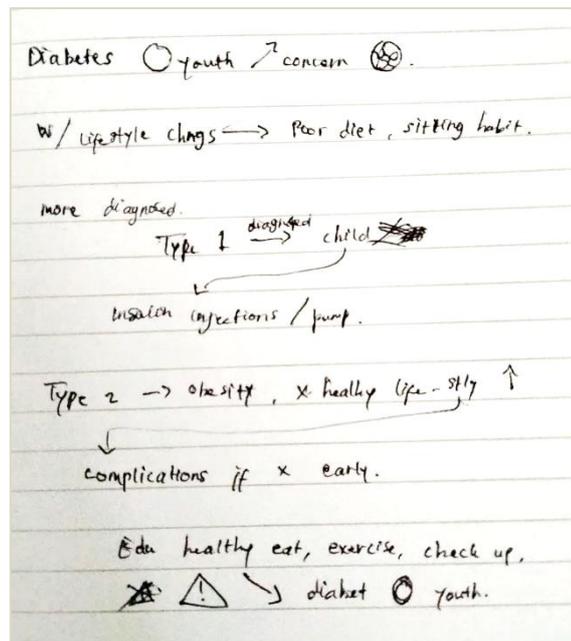


Figure 1. An example of notes in English language

Figure 1 illustrates a student's note-taking approach, where English words are used exclusively for Topic 1. The absence of Indonesian words or mixed-language elements in the notes indicates the student's preference toward direct comprehension and retention in English, which could be influenced by their familiarity with the topic's terminology.

In the light of Indonesian-to-English interpreting, some participants also admitted that the duration of the SL speech appeared to influence their language choice. For instance, one indicated:

"Ketika itu, sebenarnya saya berusaha keras menggunakan full bahasa Inggris supaya ketika menyampaikan hasil terjemahan tidak perlu ada proses menerjemahkan lagi. Itu pun karena speech-nya nggak terlalu panjang. Kalau speech-nya lebih lama, nggak yakin bisa konsisten pakai bahasa Inggris sih." (P2)

[At the time, I was actually trying hard to use only English so that when delivering the translation, there wouldn't be an additional translation process. That was mainly because the speech wasn't too long. If it had been longer, I'm not sure I could have consistently stuck to English.] (P2)

Based on the excerpt above, it can be seen that shorter speeches were perceived as more manageable for the students to take notes or translate directly in English since it involves less cognitive load on memory and processing. Therefore, it enables them to focus on maintaining linguistic accuracy in the target language. Conversely, longer speeches may lead the students to take note in both of the languages as it requires less mental effort and allows for quicker transcription of main ideas.

Additionally, according to P2, there is also a tendency that the use of English in their notes is affected by its role as the target language. In other words, it is due to its perceived efficiency in delivering the interpretation. This suggests that some students may believe that the final output of the task should align with the target language (English). For these students, writing notes directly in English reduces the need for mental translation during the delivery phase, minimizing cognitive effort. However, it is important to note that this perception might not necessarily reflect explicit instructions for the task but rather individual strategic preferences. Despite the need for further investigation, the preference for using target language has been actually mentioned by several previous researchers. For instance, Taylor-Bouladon (2007) argues

“Nowadays, when interpreters read them back in only one language, it is a good idea to write them in the target language, and if there is anything you can't think of as you write, then put the problems in the original language. By the time you come to read it back, your brain will have worked out what it is without you realizing it.” (p. 71).

In the same vein, Dam (2004) pointed out that most authors in the interpreting field recommend using the target language, which is also commonly preferred in actual interpreting practice. However, it is interesting to note that the P2's statement seems inconsistent with the findings in the case of English-to-Indonesian interpreting practice, as it was revealed that the majority of participants also used English, the source language, in their notes. On the one hand, as conveyed by P1 and P4, this is because English tends to have shorter words compared to Indonesian, a language which is characterized by its extensive use of affixation (Sneddon et al., 2012). This morphological feature often results in longer word forms in Indonesian, particularly when expressing grammatical relationships. On the other hand, this tendency may also stem from the fact that they are still not accustomed to word abbreviations as well as the use of symbols, as their notes still tend to be wordy. This aligns with the findings of Emilia et al (2011), observed that student interpreters often tend to write excessively, and they often include every single word uttered by the speaker rather than focusing on the key ideas as suggested by Rozan (2002) and Ginori & Scimone (1995).

Preference for Indonesian Notes

The following figure shows a consistent use of Indonesian language by the student interpreter in the notes. As mentioned earlier, this study found that taking notes entirely in Indonesian language was not widely practiced by the participants. However, it is worth discussed that Indonesian notes were chosen by a slightly higher proportion of students in the Indonesian-to-English direction than in the English-to-Indonesian direction.

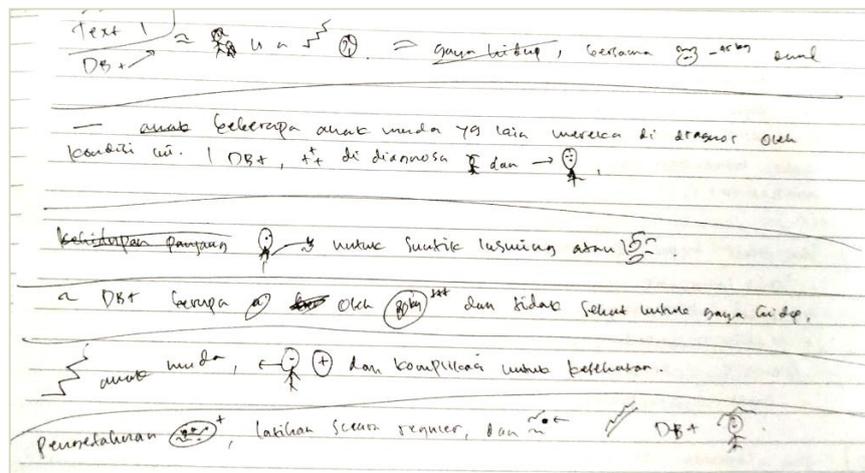


Figure 2. An example of notes in Indonesian language

P3 noted:

“Kebetulan saya yang menggunakan full bahasa Indonesia pas mau interpreting ke bahasa Inggris. Itu karena saya masih belum terbiasa menerjemahkan ke bahasa Inggris dalam waktu yang secepat itu. Jadi saya pikir yang penting kontennya ketangkep dulu aja.” (P3)

[I happened to use full Indonesian when interpreting into English. That’s because I’m still not used to translating into English in such a short amount of time. So, I thought that the most important thing was to capture the content first.] (P3)

The statement reflects a strategic decision in managing the cognitive demands of consecutive interpreting. Basically, using full Indonesian language when interpreting into English indicates a focus on content accuracy rather than immediate linguistic conversion. This approach aligns with the principle that interpreters prioritize capturing the core message during the note-taking phase, especially when they face time constraints or linguistic challenges.

The decision to take notes in the source language highlights the dual challenges of cognitive load and language proficiency. For novice interpreters, the mental effort required to both comprehend and translate simultaneously can be overwhelming. As the participant noted, their limited ability to swiftly translate into English prompted them to prioritize content retention over immediate language conversion. This finding supports recent studies (e.g., Adler, 2023; Bóna & Bakti, 2020), which have expanded Gile's Effort Model, emphasizing how interpreters manage cognitive load through strategies like source-language note-taking. These findings confirm that cognitive proficiency and task complexity significantly influence interpreters' strategic choices.

Additionally, this choice underscores the developmental stage of EFL students in interpreter training. While taking notes in English may enhance proficiency and streamline the interpreting process in the long run, early-stage interpreters may benefit from using

their native language to ensure accuracy and confidence. This practice can serve as a transitional strategy. It allows students to gradually build their capacity for efficient target-language note-taking as their proficiency improves.

Furthermore, the participant's perspective leads to the importance of adaptability in interpreting strategies. In real-world situations, interpreters often adjust their note-taking methods based on factors such as speech length, complexity, and their own comfort level with the language pair. Educators can use these insights to design exercises that sequentially challenge students to move from source-language note-taking to more target-language-oriented approaches, fostering both skill development and linguistic confidence.

Preference for Mixed Languages

The following is an example of notes containing mixed languages.

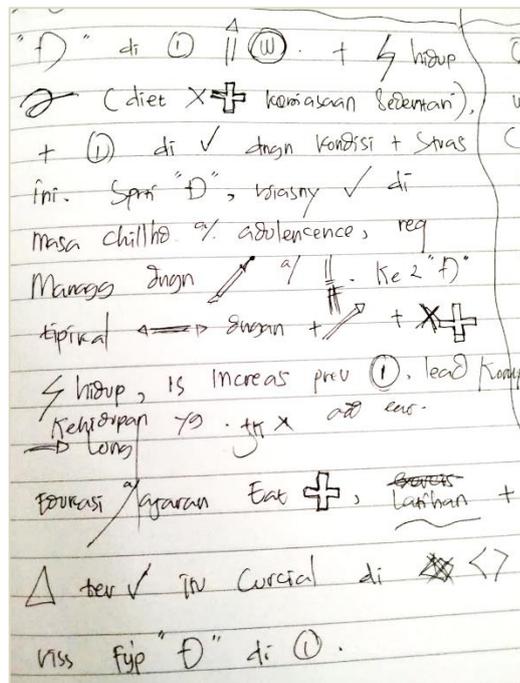


Figure 3. An example of notes in mixed languages

Based on Figure 3, it can be seen that the student used both English and Indonesian words in their notes. Examples of English words include 'chillhd' (childhood), 'eat', and 'increas' (increase). Meanwhile, Indonesian words such as 'hidup' (life), 'sprti' (shortened form of *seperti*, meaning 'like'), and 'itu' (that) were also present, indicating a mixed-language note-taking approach.

Similar to the Indonesian language, the use of mixed languages in the EFL students' note-taking practices were rarely found in this study. This could be influenced by several factors. First, due to their limited learning time, the students might have been accustomed

to adopt a single-language approach in their practices. Students are likely thinking of the benefits of consistent language use. Additionally, writing in two languages might slow down the note-taking process particularly if students are unsure about when to switch languages or how to represent specific terms in each language. In other words, the use of mixed-language notes may require advanced skills, such as knowing when and how to switch languages effectively. Since these techniques might not be explicitly taught or practiced in their training, students may naturally gravitate towards a single-language approach.

Furthermore, the use of mixed languages is also related to the use of a third language, which was only found once as can be seen in the following figure.

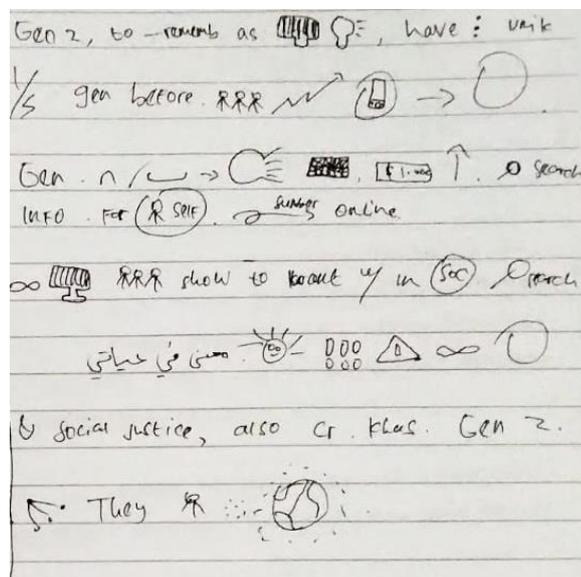


Figure 4. An example of the use of a third language

According to Dam (2004), the use of a third language is a relatively common practice. This is also in line with Jones (1998), stating that interpreters might try to take notes in whatever manner suits them best for convenience. They may even choose to use words from a third language, either because those words are shorter and easier to write or because the interpreter has spent significant time in the culture of that language. As can be seen, the third language appearing in the note is Arabic. A question that arises is: why Arabic? One possible explanation is that many students at this university previously attended Islamic schools when they were in the primary and/or secondary level. Moreover, they took Introduction to Arabic courses during their early semesters, as the university operates under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. To clarify, the source utterance was 'arti yang mendalam dalam kehidupan mereka' 'deep meaning in their lives', and the student noted 'معنى في حياتي' 'meaning in life'.

Taken together, this study highlights key patterns in how Indonesian EFL students approach note-taking in consecutive interpreting, revealing a complex interplay between language proficiency and cognitive load. The predominant preference for English-only notes aligns with previous studies (e.g., Szabó, 2006), suggesting that students favor the target language as it reduces the cognitive burden during interpretation. However, the occasional use of Indonesian, particularly when faced with challenges such as unfamiliar terminology or complex sentences, reflects the cognitive load interpreters face when balancing multiple tasks (Gile, 2009). Interestingly, mixed-language note-taking was observed, albeit in limited cases, where students strategically switched languages for efficiency, supporting the notion that interpreters adapt their strategies to the specific demands of the task (Błaszczuk & Hanusiak, 2010). These findings suggest that language choice in note-taking is not merely a preference but a strategic decision influenced by cognitive load, language proficiency, and task demands. It underscores the need for interpreter training programs to cultivate both linguistic proficiency and cognitive flexibility, enabling interpreters to adjust their strategies based on the complexity of the interpreting task.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the language preferences of Indonesian EFL students in note-taking during consecutive interpreting practices. The findings reveal a significant tendency to use English, regardless of the interpreting direction. This preference is linked to several factors, including the perceived efficiency of English for cognitive processing, familiarity with English terminologies, and the shorter word length compared to Indonesian. While a minority of students used mixed languages or Indonesian, the overall tendency towards English indicates its crucial role in improving their interpreting performance.

Moreover, this study underscores the importance of considering language choice as a strategic tool in interpreter training. By adapting teaching methodologies to strengthen students' proficiency in English, educators can better support their cognitive and linguistic development in interpreting practices. Future research could further explore the implications of using mixed languages and investigate additional factors influencing language preferences in diverse educational settings. To mitigate biases related to academic background and gain a more nuanced understanding, future studies are encouraged to include participants from non-English programs to broaden the scope of findings.

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