

INTERLANGUAGE ANALYSIS OF INDONESIAN YOUNG LEARNER'S ENGLISH ACQUISITION

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Abstract: *The current trend of ELT in Indonesia is to learn English at young age. Young learners are perceived as more successful language learners compared to those learning English in their adulthood. This article aims at analyzing interlanguage variations of Indonesian young learners, serving as evidence of their English acquisition. The findings showed that Indonesian young learners of English have not been able to produce tense-marking verb, and omit some grammatical morphemes such as -s ending in simple present tense, and -s ending in possessive. The interlanguage variations are influenced by L1 transfer, overgeneralization and simplification. It is expected that the findings contribute to better comprehension of Indonesian learners' English acquisition.*

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INTRODUCTION

Globalization has strengthened the role of English as lingua franca. With the exception of English-speaking countries, English is generally the first or either the most popular foreign language, such as German and French (Ammon, 2011) as well as Scandinavia, Belgium and the Netherlands (Hoffmann, 2000). English also enhances the transfer of knowledge; it is the language of textbooks and academic literature (Ghofur, 2017). Finally, English has become the language of high technology. Gadgets and software, that become inseparable parts of academic life, uses the language as their user interface.

Realizing the importance of English, the government established a decree granted permission of teaching English to schools in Indonesia. The teaching of English reached its peak ever since the establishment of the 1994 Curriculum. Based on the curriculum, the aim of the national development had shifted into the improvement of the human resources capacity by paying close attention to English language teaching (Department of Education and Culture, 1993). The change was gladly welcomed by scholars, educational practitioners and by society. It was the sought-after subject causing schools and universities offered more hours for English among other subjects (Dept. of Education and Culture, 1993).

Based on the 1994 Curriculum, English was a compulsory subject to learn in junior high school, senior high school and university; whereas in the level of primary school, English was a local content. It meant English was an elective subject in elementary school, not a compulsory one. However, despite of the Ministerial decree, the majority of

elementary schools in Indonesia have been teaching English to their students. The common assumption that young learners are far more successful language learners rather than learners begin to learn a new language in their adolescence became the consideration. As a consequence, Indonesian young learners are becoming bilingual or even multilingual. They speak their mother tongue, which usually is one of Indonesia's local languages, *Bahasa Indonesia*, the national language and English.

Studies have shown that childhood bilingualism plays an important role in children's literacy. Bialystok argues that possessing more than one language competence and the experience of learning to read in two languages, sometimes with different writing system, enhance the acquisition of literacy skills (Bialystok, n.d.). Being bilingual also improves children reading ability, vocabulary acquisition and oral language proficiency (Adams, 1990; Bialystok, n.d.; Cahyono, n.d.; *The Effects of Vocabulary Instruction: A Model-Based Meta-Analysis - Steven A. Stahl, Marilyn M. Fairbanks, 1986, n.d.*).

Another studies shown that examined second language article acquisition by analyzing the spoken interlanguage of speakers of five different native languages, three with no article system (Chinese, Japanese, and Russian) and two with article systems (Spanish and German). Informal interviews of four speakers of each language at successive levels of interlanguage provided data for a pseudolongitudinal analysis of article usage for each of the five languages represented. The interlanguage level was determined primarily by negation criteria. Findings show that subjects whose first languages contained article systems differed markedly in English article acquisition from those whose first languages did not contain such a system, indicating that English article usage, particularly at the beginning levels, is clearly influenced by the first language (Master, 1988).

Being bilingual at relatively young age can result in negative cognitive effects as well; there is a possibility that they lost their ability to speak their first language (Cummins, 1976; Fillmore, 1991; Taeschner, 1986). There is some thought that children who learn a second language too quickly (before the age of 5), have really replaced the first language (L1) with the second language (L2)(Bialystok & Hakuta, 1995). Many researchers believe that there is little benefit and potential harm in introducing a second language at a very young age unless caregivers are careful to maintain both languages as equally important and valuable(McLaughlin, 1984).

Critical period hypothesis also supports the teaching English to young learners. The hypothesis claims that there is a period during which language acquisition is easy and complete; the capacity to achieve full language competence seems to gradually decline as the increase in age. There has been a long discussion on what age young learners should begin to learn a second language. Ellis states 6 (six) is the crucial age to acquire native-like pronunciation (Ellis, 1989). It is supported by Krashen claiming that that in imitating the target language orally, the younger the learner, the more successful they would be (Krashen, 1982). Howatts (1991) also argues that the best way to start teaching foreign

languages for young learners is when they are in the third year of primary education (or about 9 years old) to avoid sharp discrepancies between existing educational practices and necessary changes in the future.

At the opposite, Ellis (2005) proposed a theory stating that the older the learner, the more successful the process of language acquisition. This is because the older learners are more efficient in planning their learning process. The linguistic parts which are mastered better by older learners are morphological and syntactical features of the target language.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Interlanguage Theories

In the process of acquiring a second language (L2), language learners are producing a language system called “interlanguage.” The term “interlanguage” is coined for the first time by Selinker referring to a systematic knowledge of a second language which is independent of both learner’s L1 and L2. In the production of interlanguage, rules from both L1 and L2 linguistic systems in order to produce sentences in L2 (Ellis, 1997). The emergence of interlanguage is influenced by three factors, L1 interference, overgeneralization and simplification. L1 interference, the most common source of interlanguage variations (Brown & Wen, 1994; Ellis, 1986; Lightbown & Spada, 2006) , occurs when learners borrow pattern from the mother tongue and directly use the pattern for target language production. Overgeneralization refers to the process of applying the extension of some general rule to items not covered by this rule in the target language. Gitasaki explains that the way a speaker applies certain rules of the target language in the wrong context is the evidence of overgeneralization. Simplification refers to the process of applying the linguistic rule of the target language in which the learner will seek to ease the burden of learning in various ways (Gitasaki, 2006). Widdowson mentions omitting grammatical or prepositional elements in target language production is the example of simplification (Babawarun, 2006).

Ellis mentions 3 (three) characteristics of interlanguage, namely systematic, dynamic and permeable (Ellis, 1986). Interlanguage is systematic because L2 learners do not formulate their interlanguage production randomly. Learners’ interlanguage prediction can be predicted, and therefore it is still possible to detect the rule-based nature of the production. Secondly, interlanguage is dynamic which means it changes constantly in accordance to learner’s learning process. As new rule is introduced, learners will slowly reconstruct their built-in schemata, trying to relate it to previous knowledge they have learned (Babawarun, 2006; Luna, 2010). In other words, interlanguage is the result of internal cognitive processes taking place during learners’ process of L2 acquisition. Finally, interlanguage is permeable in the sense that rules that constitute the learners knowledge at one stage are not fixed. In many respects this is a general feature of

natural language, which evolves over time in ways not different from the developments that take place in the learner's first language or mother tongue.

Natural Order Hypothesis

The nature of learners' language that changes from time to time, in the researcher's perspective, leads to the birth of "natural order hypothesis." Natural order hypothesis is among Krashen's five hypotheses which constitute major claims and assumptions about L2 acquisition. Natural order hypothesis states that the acquisition of grammatical structures proceeds in a predictable order (Saville, 2006). Observations of children learning English as a first or second language indicated that certain grammatical morphemes were acquired before others.

Brown as cited in Saville-Troike provided the first information on English acquisition based on the findings of his study using children learning English as their first one (Saville, 2006). Dullay & Burt conducted the same study unless the participants are non-native English speakers (Dulay et al., 1982).

Table 1 describes the order of English acquisition based on the findings of the experts' study.

Table 1 English L1 and L2 Morpheme Acquisition Order

	English as L1 (Brown, 1973)	English as L2 (Dullay & Burt, 1974)
1	Progressive <i>-ing</i>	Articles <i>a/ the</i>
2	Plural <i>-s</i>	Copula <i>be</i>
3	Past irregular	Progressive <i>-ing</i>
4	Possessive <i>-s</i>	Plural <i>-s</i>
5	Articles <i>a/ the</i>	Auxiliary <i>be</i>
6	Past regular <i>-ed</i>	Past regular <i>-ed</i>
7	Third person <i>-s</i>	Past irregular
8	Copula <i>be</i>	Possessive <i>-s</i>
9	Auxiliary <i>be</i>	Third person <i>-s</i>

Larsen-Freeman (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Long, 1991) the setting where English is taught influence the order of English acquisition.

Table 2 describes Larsen-Freeman's order of acquisition when English is taught in natural and classroom setting.

Table 2 Order of Acquisition in Two Learning Situation

	Natural Setting	Classroom Setting
1	Progressive <i>-ing</i>	Copula <i>be</i>
2	Copula <i>be</i>	Auxiliary <i>be</i>
3	Articles <i>a/ the</i>	Third person singular
4	Auxiliary <i>be</i>	Progressive <i>-ing</i>
5	Short plural	Regular past
6	Past regular <i>-ed</i>	Irregular past
7	Third person <i>-s</i>	Articles <i>a/ the</i>
8	Irregular past	Long plural
9	Long plural	Short plural
10	Possessive <i>-s</i>	Possessive <i>-s</i>

Studies on English acquisition of young learners are abundant; these type of studies focus on which linguistic features that young learners acquire first and which ones later. Participants of such studies are young learners whose first language is English (Guo, 2009; Paradis, 2011) as well as bilingual speakers of English (Cheng et al., 2011; Paradis, 2011; Silburn, 2011). However, studies investigating Indonesian learners' English acquisition are scarcely found. If there is any, they involved adult learners as the participants (Octaberlina, 2013) or Indonesian young learners in an English speaking country (Cahyono, n.d.).

METHOD

Interlanguage variations of Indonesian young learners were represented through the subjects' spoken utterances in English. There are to aims at providing empirical data on English acquisition of Indonesian young learners. It is designed to address the following questions

1. To what extent do Indonesian young learners learning English in the Indonesian context produce interlanguage variations?
2. What factors that influence the emergence of interlanguage variations of Indonesian young learners learning English in Indonesian context?

Based on the research question above then the method applied was descriptive qualitative. Interviews were conducted to obtain the necessary data for the study. With two Indonesian English young learners were selected as the subjects for the study. These two were selected as they represented the characteristics of Indonesian English young learners. In other words, purposive sampling was employed to determine the subjects of the study. The subjects had been learning English since kindergarten (the average age of Indonesian kindergarten was four). At their elementary school, they were taught English three times a week at school. As an addition, they joined English courses outside school hours once a week and spoke English occasionally at home with their parents. The first

subject was an eight-year-old elementary school student, while the other was ten years old. They were the second grader and fourth grader of elementary school respectively. That meant the first subject had learned English for 4 (four) years and the second subject 6 (six) years.

Interviews were selected as means of data collection since the study was not limited to the investigation of particular grammatical functions. The researcher acted as the interviewer and threw some questions about “what”, “how” and “why” to the subjects. The question being asked revolved around the subjects’ daily activities, schools and friends. The subjects were interviewed individually; each interview lasted for approximately 1 (one) hour. Video recording was a medium to capture the young learners’ English utterances during the interviews. The data from the interviews were analyzed using qualitative approach. In the data analysis, the data were first transcribed and specific labels were given into each of the utterances. The labels were based based on Ellis’s surface description of interlanguage variations. In this case she stated that learners’ interlanguage is classified into (1) omission of grammatical morpheme, (2) double-marking, (3) regularization, (4) archiform, (5) randomization, and (6) misordering. As an addition, the researcher was counting the percentages of each of the six types of interlanguage variations (Ellis, 1997).

The following step is to analyze the causes of the interlanguage variations produced by Indonesian young learners. The basis of the analysis is Ellis’s process of linguistic variations. They are L1 interference (borrowing patterns from the mother tongue), overgeneralization (extending patterns from the target language) and simplification (expressing meanings using the words and grammar which are already known) (Ellis, 1994).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The findings of the study concerning to the types of interlanguage variations of Indonesian young learners are presented using Dullays’ “surface strategy” that classifies interlanguage variations into 6 (six) categories (Dulay et al., 1982).

Table 3 presents the interlanguage variations committed by the participants of the study.

Table 3 Indonesian Young Learners’ Interlanguage Variations

Interlanguage Variations	Types	Examples	%
Omission of grammatical morpheme	Omission of preposition	Mas Ardi point me	2.8%
	Omission of -s in possessive	Dio parentsmbak Sindy	3.8%

		parents	
	Omission of auxiliary in negative form of simple present tense	Why you not... I not finish not burping again	11.5%
	Omission of tobe	I not...	3.3%
	Omission of -s ending in simple present tense	If boy play with me, she always disturb me. Mas Ardi say good	15.4%
Double marking	Using singular article (a) with plural noun	a small ants makes a toys	3.5%
Regularization	Using verb 1 (infinitive) to describe past events.	Because Daddy go to bank, and I wait mbak Bella. I play with Aida, Sandy, Alia, and Aida. I dream last night... it's a bit scary	38.5%

Table 3 Indonesian Young Learners' Interlanguage Variations (continued)

Archiform	Using verb-ing to describe activity	What did you do today? Playing Did you drink your milk? Drinking milk and carrot	11.5%
	Using subject pronoun to replace object pronoun	Those make I'm scary	3%
Random Alternation	Using Adv to replace Adj	This is just a dream. Not really. She is very kindly	3.8%
Misordering	Wrong order of Adj and N to form N-phrase	jacket black	2.9%

Based on the table, it can be inferred that Indonesian young learners have not comprehended the concept of English tenses. Interlanguage variations related to tenses get the largest percentage of them compared to other types of interlanguage variations. It is evident in the constant use of Verb 1 (infinitive) to describe past activities. Another evidence is the omission of -s ending in simple present tense. The omission of auxiliary (do/does/did) in negative and interrogative sentence also reveals the young learners

difficulty in understanding tenses. At last, the use of Verb-ing to in short answer to describe an activity also indicates the absence of knowledge of tenses. They are not aware that verb needs to change based on different types of tenses they use.

Another phenomenon is that the young learners have not had adequate comprehension about articles, more particularly article "a." In the recordings, the participants were able to use article "the" accurately. They used it to refer to specific nouns and noun phrases. Different thing occurs with article "a." They used it with specific nouns, similar to "the," however article "a" is consistently paired with plural nouns. The subjects did not pair article "a" with singular noun throughout the recording.

The following issue to discuss is to find out what factors contributing to Indonesian young learners interlanguage variations. There are three factors that affect the production of interlanguage variations, L1 interference, overgeneralization and simplification. Table 4 explains the causes of each of the types of Indonesian young learners' interlanguage variations.

Table 4 Factors Contributing to Indonesian Young Learners Interlanguage

L1 Interference	Using verb 1 (infinitive) to describe past events. Wrong order of Adj and N to form N-phrase Using Adv to replace Adj Using subject pronoun to replace object pronoun
Overgeneralization	Using verb-ing to describe activity Using singular article (a) with plural noun
Simplification	Omission of preposition Omission of -s in possessive Omission of auxiliary in negative form of simple present tense Omission of tobe Omission of -s ending in simple present tense

1. L1 Interference

Transferring the grammatical concepts from L1 to L2 utterances can result in negative transfer whenever L1 rules do not fit into those in L2. In the case of present study, negative transfer phenomena occur in past tense and the formulation of noun phrase (N-phrase). Indonesian language, the young learners L1, does not acquire tenses. As the consequence, verb does not change its format along with the change of tenses. Unlike English, time signal is the only indicator that determines the time when an action

takes place in Indonesian. The young learners did exactly that; they did not change the form of the verb into verb 2 to discuss their daily routines. To indicate the time the activities took place, they used certain time signals such as *dari dulu* (a long time ago), *tadi pagi* (this morning), *liburan yang lalu* (last holiday).

The young learners also adopted L1 rules to put adjective (Adj) and noun (N) in order to form noun phrase (N-phrase). In English, adjective precedes noun in forming noun phrase. At the opposite, noun is positioned before adjective to form noun phrase in Indonesian language (e.g. dangerous virus versus virus yang berbahaya).

2. Overgeneralization

Overgeneralization occurs when language learners apply certain rules of the target language in the wrong context (Gitasaki, 2006). In the present study, the young learners consistently applied the rule of present continuous tense to describe actions; they used Verb-ing (V-ing) whenever they described their routines or were asked to retell their past experiences. This is quite an interesting phenomenon since V-ing to describe actions is only used in short answer, for example:

Q: Did you play at school today?

A: Playing!

Q: What did you play at school?

A: Playing with my friends.

Q: Pardon me?

A: I play with my friends in the go home time

Another case of overgeneralization takes place when the young learners use indefinite article "a" with plural nouns. They consistently paired "a" with plural nouns (e.g. a toys, a small ants, etc). The young learners made utterances with both indefinite article "a" and definite article "the." However, they got it right in using article "the" since "the" can be paired with both singular and plural nouns. There is a possibility that the young learners treated article "the" similar to indefinite article "a." Since "the" can be paired with either singular or plural nouns, they thought "a" can also be paired with either one of them. The misconception leads to the production of interlanguage variations committed by the young learners.

3. Simplification

Omission of morpheme is the strategy that language learners use to simplify their utterances. In the study, the young learners simplified their utterances omitting prepositions, -s ending in possessive, auxiliary in negative form of simple present tense, to-be and -s ending in simple present tense.

The omission of preposition is likely caused by the absence of knowledge about prepositions. Indonesian young learners have not learned what preposition is as well as its

function in a sentence and therefore did not use prepositions in their utterances. Furthermore, omitting -s ending in possessive can be traced back to the pairing of possessive adjective and noun to form possessive. The -s ending does not appear when possessive adjective and noun; on the other hand, one should put -s ending to indicate possession if the noun is paired with noun (e.g. my friends versus my sister's friend).

Simple present tense with its different components may need some time for the young learners to grasp thoroughly. Thus, they missed some of its components; those are -s ending in simple present tense and auxiliary in negative form of simple present tense. Not having concept of tenses in their L1 leads to the situation which the young learners assume that components of certain tenses would not change meaning. Take -s ending in *she point me* as an example. The young learners thought they have got their message across of who is doing which activity; -s ending or without -s ending would not make any difference. The data serve as empirical evidence that English tenses is quite a troublesome concepts for ESL and EFL learners.

Discussion

Studies of which focus are interlanguage variations of English learners have been conducted in Asia (Al-Ansari, 2001; Al-Hazmi & Schofield, 2007; Bataineh, 2005; Chen, 2002; Espada-Gustilo, 2009; Nayan & Jusoff, 2009) and Indonesia (Octaberlina, 2013). Asian EFL learners produced interlanguage variations in a number of grammatical aspects, for instance subject-verb agreement, pluralization, articles and tenses (past tense, -s ending in simple present tense, to-be in continuous tense).

The findings of the study indicate that the young learners have not comprehended the concept of verb change along with different uses of tenses, shown by the percentage of interlanguage variations about Verb 2 in past tense. Indonesian learners' difficulty with past tense was discussed in Yuningsih study that took Indonesian senior high school students as the participants (Yuningsih, 2007). The findings reveal that Indonesian learners had problems with past tense usage.

Difficulties to use verbs that mark the grammatical feature tense accurately have also been discussed by Paradis. He claimed tense-marking morphemes, such as third-person singular (-s) on the habitual present, regular past-tense (-ed) and irregular as well as copula and auxiliary) is acquired relatively late compared to other grammatical morphemes such as the nominal morpheme plural (-s) and the aspectual verbal morpheme (-ing) (Paradis, 2010). The data of the study support the claim since interlanguage variations related to past tense, omission of -s endings in present tense, and omission of to-be are the interlanguage variations with high percentages.

The young learners' constant use of Verb-ing to indicate an action is in accordance to the order of English acquisition proposed by (Brown & Wen, 1994) and (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). These two argue that the first morpheme learners acquire is progressive-

ing. Brown's study took native speakers of English as the participants, meanwhile the present study chooses Indonesian young learners that consider English as their foreign language. The fact that both studies have similar results indicates that mother tongue (L1) does not influence the order of acquisition.

Pienemann & Hikanson propose five stages of hierarchy of processing skill in English acquisition. Based on the findings, Indonesian young learners are in between the first and second stage (Saville, 2006). The first stage or lemma/ word access is characterized by acquiring words but they do not yet carry any grammatical information. The young learners can acquire verbs, nouns and adjectives correctly; however, they have not produced verbs marking tenses yet. The second stage is category procedure where lexical items are categorized and grammatical information may be added (i.e. number and gender to nouns and tense to verb). The young learners have produced sentences that combine number and nouns as well as gender and nouns.

The findings of the study also reveal L1 interference, overgeneralization and simplification as factors contributing to Indonesian young learners' interlanguage variations as what is proposed by experts (Burt et al., 1982; Ellis, 1994, 1997; James, 1998)

L1 interference is a normal phenomenon in L2 acquisition, claiming "all learners of second languages subconsciously transfer grammatical properties of their first language to the second language (Cook, 2013; Lessard-Clouston, 2017; McLaughlin, 1984)." L1 interference, as anticipated by the experts, becomes the major contribution toward the production of interlanguage variations in some interlanguage variations studies conducted in Asia. Jing, Tindall and Nisbet study that investigates Chinese EFL ability in using plural form accurately shows that L1 interference is the biggest contributor of the subjects' errors beside lack of knowledge and overgeneralizations (Ibrahim, 2006). Another study which reveals the negative tendency of L1 interference toward L2 acquisition is conducted Nayan and Jusoff (Nayan & Jusoff, 2009). It focuses on the ability of Malaysian writers regarding their problems with subject-verb agreement in their writing. One of the findings shows that L1 interference becomes one of the aspects responsible of the interlanguage variations in subject-verb agreement.

The following cause is overgeneralization that causes the least types of Indonesian young learners' interlanguage variations but the one with the highest percentage. A study by Jing, Tindall and Nisbet (2006)'s study posit the fact that overgeneralization is the main cause of students' erroneous production in pluralization (Ibrahim, 2006). In the present study, overgeneralization contributes to young learners' interlanguage variations in past tense and indefinite article "a." The fact that overgeneralization is an influential factor in bilingual young learners is presented by Baldawi & Saidat (2011). Their study that investigates the interlanguage variations of an Arabic child is in line with the findings of the study in terms that both study pinpoint overgeneralization as the cause of

interlanguage variations of L2 learners. The findings of the study state that interference is not likely to appear when a child is learning L2 because children in their critical period of language acquisition have little information about the language. Therefore, they are unable to make comparison and contrast between L1 and L2. What they intelligently do is customize their brains to meet all the differences between two or more different languages (overgeneralization).

Ellis mentions that one of the characteristics of interlanguage is the removal of L2 variables to make the IL more efficient (Ellis, 1997). The findings of the study show that Indonesian young learners remove preposition, -s in possessive, and auxiliary in negative form of simple present tense as well as to-be in negative form of present continuous. The omission of these features, for Indonesian English learners, may not be significantly influential to meaning. In other words, their utterances are still well-comprehended to their interlocutor.

Kleifgen conducts a study of which purpose is tracking the potential cause of simplification of interlanguage variations; whether or not input has an influence toward them. Simplified input is the type of input used especially for L2 children or L2 learners at beginner level. Such kind of input is perceived more comprehensible for L2 children. Her study reveal that native English-speaking teacher of L2 children makes some simplification in their utterances, namely deleting auxiliary in interrogative form of simple present tense, definite and indefinite article as well as -s ending in simple present tense (Saville, 2006).

Krashen argues that exposure to comprehensible language input is in itself sufficient to trigger acquisition. He further explains comprehensible language input as one that is slightly above learner's proficiency level (Richards & Renandya, 2002). Correlation between input and L2 mastery has also been discussed extensively. Yet, one thing teachers should pay attention toward the input they would give is that input should be structurally and grammatically accurate. Learners, especially young learners, take input for granted and internalize any inputs they achieve, especially when it is done repeatedly (Lucas, 2008). It is, indeed, true that as their L2 competence increases learners are able to have better monitor that they are more likely producing grammatically accurate L2 utterances. Yet, there still is a possibility that the learners are going to carry the simplified input, known as fossilization

CONCLUSION

Indonesian young learners' utterances provide us evidence of their stages of L2 acquisition, which grammatical components they have acquired and which ones they have not. Analysis of interlanguage variations benefits language teachers to identify which factors that hinder young learners' L2 acquisition. All in all, the study is a reflection toward

the teaching of English to young learners in Indonesia in particular and language learners in general.

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