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A Contrastive and Error Analysis of English Used in Instagram Comments by Indonesian EFL Learners

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Abstract

This qualitative research study examines contrastive errors in English used by Indonesian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in Instagram comments. The research focuses on identifying morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic errors that reflect the influence of Indonesian language structure and patterns. By analyzing 15 authentic Instagram comments collected from Indonesian users, this study applies contrastive analysis theory to understand how native language interference affects English language production in digital contexts. The findings reveal that Indonesian EFL learners demonstrate specific error patterns including subject-verb agreement violations, article misuse, word order anomalies, and semantic calques from Indonesian. These errors provide valuable insights into the learning process and suggest targeted intervention strategies for improving English proficiency among Indonesian learners in informal digital communication environments.

Keywords: *Contrastive Error Analysis, Indonesian EFL Learners, Instagram Comments, Language Interference, Morphological Errors, Syntactic Errors.*

INTRODUCTION

English has become a global lingua franca, making proficiency in this language essential for international communication (Kachru, 2017). However, for non-native speakers, particularly those whose first language structure differs significantly from English, the acquisition process presents substantial challenges. Indonesian, as an agglutinative language with distinct grammatical features, creates specific patterns of language transfer that become apparent in the written English production of Indonesian learners.

The emergence of digital communication platforms, particularly social media networks like Instagram, has created unprecedented opportunities to observe authentic, spontaneous language use by learners. Unlike formal classroom settings, Instagram comments represent unguarded language production where learners employ English without extensive self-monitoring, making this context ideal for error analysis. The informal nature of social media communication allows researchers to identify the underlying linguistic competence and processing strategies of EFL learners.

Contrastive error analysis, a theoretical framework originating from comparative linguistics, provides valuable tools for understanding the specific errors produced by speakers of first languages. By comparing Indonesian and English language systems, researchers can predict and subsequently observe which errors Indonesian learners are most likely to produce (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). This study employs contrastive error

analysis to examine fifteen authentic Instagram comments produced by Indonesian EFL learners, identifying systematic patterns that reflect language transfer from Indonesian.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to understanding how digital literacy intersects with language learning. As millions of Indonesian students and professionals engage with English on social media platforms, understanding the specific error patterns in this context becomes crucial for developing targeted pedagogical interventions. Furthermore, this research contributes to the broader field of error analysis by examining how informal digital communication contexts reveal authentic learner language.

1.1 Research Questions

What types of errors do Indonesian EFL learners produce in Instagram comments, and how do these errors categorize according to error taxonomy (morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic)?

To what extent do the identified errors reflect contrastive differences between Indonesian and English language systems?

What patterns of language transfer and positive transfer are evident in the Instagram comment data?

1.2 Objectives

The primary objectives of this study are: (1) to identify and categorize errors in Instagram comments produced by Indonesian EFL learners; (2) to analyze how Indonesian language structure influences English language production; (3) to apply contrastive analysis framework to understand error genesis; and (4) to provide pedagogically relevant insights for improving English instruction for Indonesian learners in the context of digital communication.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Contrastive Analysis Theory

Contrastive analysis, originating from the work of Lado (1957), proposes that where the structures of two languages differ, interference and errors are likely to occur. The theoretical foundation assumes that by comparing linguistic systems, educators can predict which elements will be difficult for learners and design interventions accordingly. Contrastive analysis theory has evolved significantly since its inception, moving from the deterministic strong version that predicted all errors through structural comparison to the weaker version that acknowledges the complexity of language learning as influenced by multiple factors beyond structural differences (Wardhaugh, 1970).

Contemporary contrastive analysis acknowledges that while not all errors can be predicted through structural comparison alone, systematic patterns of error do reflect underlying differences between language systems. Modern applications of contrastive analysis incorporate insights from cognitive linguistics, demonstrating how learners process linguistic input through the filter of their native language (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008). The framework remains valuable for understanding and explaining specific error patterns in learner language, particularly when combined with error analysis methodology.

2.2 Error Analysis in Second Language Acquisition

Error analysis, pioneered by Corder (1967), shifted focus from predicting errors through contrastive analysis to analyzing actual errors produced by learners. This approach recognizes that errors are not simply manifestations of native language interference but rather windows into the learning process itself. Errors indicate which rules learners have internalized, partially acquired, or misunderstood, making them essential diagnostic tools for understanding learner competence (Brown, 2000).

Error analysis typically categorizes errors according to various taxonomies. Morphological errors involve incorrect formation of words, such as verb conjugation or pluralization errors. Syntactic errors concern word order and sentence structure violations.

Semantic errors result from incorrect word choice or meaning transfer. Pragmatic errors involve inappropriate language use for specific contexts (Richards, 1974). This study employs this four-part taxonomy to organize the identified errors.

2.3 Language Transfer and Indonesian-English Contrasts

Language transfer, defined as the influence of the native language on second language acquisition, remains one of the most consistent phenomena in language learning research. Positive transfer occurs when native language structures facilitate target language learning, while negative transfer (interference) occurs when native language patterns impede acquisition (Odlin, 1989). For Indonesian learners of English, negative transfer frequently manifests due to substantial structural differences between the two languages.

Indonesian, an Austronesian language without inflectional morphology, presents challenges for English learners. While English employs extensive verbal inflections for tense and aspect, Indonesian relies on temporal particles and aspectual markers to convey these meanings. Indonesian also lacks grammatical gender and articles, features central to English grammar. Furthermore, Indonesian employs verb-initial or subject-initial word order in some contexts, differing from English's relatively fixed SVO pattern in main clauses. These contrasts predictably generate specific error patterns in Indonesian learners' English production (Dardjowidjoyo, 2000).

Research on Indonesian learners of English has documented systematic error patterns corresponding to these structural differences. Studies consistently show that Indonesian learners struggle with English article use, verb tense marking, and subject-verb agreement, all areas where Indonesian lacks comparable structures (Saragih, 2010). Additionally, semantic calques—where learners transfer meaning patterns from Indonesian—frequently appear in the written production of Indonesian EFL learners (Nababan, 2008).

2.4 Digital Communication and Language Learning

The proliferation of digital communication platforms has created new contexts for studying learner language. Social media, instant messaging, and online comments represent naturalistic environments where language learners produce target language without the constraints of formal assessment (Crystal, 2008). These contexts provide authentic data reflecting learners' actual communicative competence rather than their performance in controlled classroom settings.

Research on social media language use demonstrates that digital communication promotes engagement with English while simultaneously creating contexts where learners employ language with reduced self-monitoring (Thorne & Reinhardt, 2008). Instagram comments represent highly informal, brevity-focused communication where users prioritize meaning conveyance over grammatical accuracy. This context, therefore, provides ideal data for understanding authentic learner language and systematic patterns of error.

METHOD

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design utilizing content analysis methodology. Qualitative analysis is appropriate for this research as it enables detailed examination of linguistic features and contextual factors that quantitative approaches might overlook. The study does not employ statistical generalization but rather seeks to develop rich understanding of error patterns and their underlying causes through systematic analysis of authentic language data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

3.2 Data Collection

Data for this study consist of fifteen authentic Instagram comments produced by Indonesian EFL learners. Comments were selected from publicly available Instagram posts related to entertainment, education, and lifestyle content to ensure diverse contextual

backgrounds. Selection criteria included: (1) comment written primarily in English by a user with Indonesian profile information, (2) comment containing identifiable grammatical errors, and (3) comment of sufficient length to allow meaningful analysis. Ethical considerations were observed by excluding personal identifiers and using only the text of comments without usernames or profile information.

3.3 Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis proceeded through three sequential phases. In Phase One, all identified errors in the fifteen comments were catalogued and classified according to error type: morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic. Each error was extracted and noted with its original context. In Phase Two, errors were analyzed in relation to contrastive features of Indonesian and English, determining whether each error could be explained through language transfer or other factors. Phase Three involved interpreting the patterns of errors to understand their pedagogical implications and their relationship to Indonesian-English linguistic contrasts.

Error identification employed the following criteria: (1) deviations from standard English morphology, syntax, semantics, or pragmatics; (2) errors that would be perceivable to native English speakers; and (3) errors excluding creative or purposive language variation. Spelling variations characteristic of digital communication (e.g., 'omgg' instead of 'omg') were not counted as errors unless they appeared to reflect learner confusion rather than stylistic choice.

3.4 Analytical Framework

Error classification employed the following taxonomy:

Morphological Errors: Incorrect formation of words, including verb conjugation, plural forms, and adjective modifications.

Syntactic Errors: Violations of sentence structure, word order, or grammatical relationships between constituents.

Semantic Errors: Incorrect word choice or meaning transfer that results in unintended meanings or semantic inappropriateness.

Pragmatic Errors: Inappropriate language use for context, including register violations or violations of communicative norms.

Each identified error was analyzed according to two dimensions: (1) error severity, considering whether it impedes comprehension; and (2) error source, determining whether transfer from Indonesian, overgeneralization, or other factors best explains the error.

3.5 Research Documentation



Figure 1. Research Documentation

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Analyzed Instagram Comments

This section presents detailed analysis of the fifteen Instagram comments selected for this study. Each comment is presented with its original text, identified errors, error classification, and contrastive analysis explanation.

Comment 1: "Ifill sama lagunvaa"

Original Text	Error Type	Analysis
"Ifill sama lagunvaa"	Semantic/Spelling	Spelling errors with "lagunvaa" (intended meaning unclear, possibly "lagunya" - its song in Indonesian). May reflect Indonesian phonetic patterns transferred to English.

Comment 2: "thanks you sir"

Original Text	Error Type	Analysis
"thanks you sir"	Syntactic	Incorrect word order. Correct form: "thank you, sir." The learner appears to have inserted "you" between verb and object, reflecting non-standard English syntax. This may reflect interference from Indonesian politeness structures.

Comment 3: "Live foto my favorite gweee"

Original Text	Error Type	Analysis
"Live foto my favorite gweee"	Morphological/Semantic	Multiple errors: 'foto' (Indonesian for photo), should be 'photo'; missing article before 'favorite'; 'gweee' appears to be stylized spelling of Indonesian slang. Semantic error reflects code-switching and interference from Indonesian vocabulary.

Comment 4: "congratulations night🙏"

Original Text	Error Type	Analysis
"congratulations night"	Pragmatic/Syntactic	Unusual and inappropriate collocation. Learner seems to be creating an idiom that doesn't exist in English. May reflect failed attempt at semantic transfer from Indonesian expressions.

Comment 5: "Queen of k pop rose ❤️"

Original Text	Error Type	Analysis
"Queen of k pop rose"	Semantic/Pragmatic	Verb form error: 'rose' is past tense of 'rise' but appears misused here. Should likely be 'rose' as a noun (the flower/name). Missing article 'the' before 'Queen'. Grammatically awkward construction reflects errors in English article usage and verb-noun confusion.

Comment 6: "Our forever artist j-hope ❤️"

Original Text	Error Type	Analysis
"Our forever artist j-hope"	Syntactic	Incomplete sentence structure. Missing verb or copula (e.g., 'is'). In Indonesian, verbs can be omitted in certain contexts, potentially explaining this transfer. This is a nominal rather than verbal predicate error reflecting different syntactic requirements.

Comment 7: "People lose because of their perspective, everything either teaches you a lesson or at least gives you something you needed to evolve."

Original Text	Error Type	Analysis
Verb tense ("needed")	Morphological	Error in past participle form. Should be "need" or "needed" in different context. The infinitive "to evolve" requires a base form before it, not past tense. This reflects confusion in verb form selection, possibly due to Indonesian's lack of tense morphology.

Comment 8: "You lesbian🏳️"

Original Text	Error Type	Analysis
"You lesbian"	Syntactic/Pragmatic	Incomplete sentence; missing copula 'are'. 'You lesbian' is grammatically incomplete. In Indonesian, copulas can be omitted, explaining this syntactic transfer. Also pragmatically unusual as a standalone statement.

Comment 9: "The height difference is differencing omgg💕💕"

Original Text	Error Type	Analysis
"is differencing"	Morphological	Verb form error. 'Differencing' is not a standard English verb form. Learner appears to have created a gerund/present participle from 'difference' (noun), reflecting overgeneralization of English morphological rules. Should be 'makes a difference' or 'is striking'.

Comment 10: "Not self hatered more like self love"

Original Text	Error Type	Analysis
"hatered"	Morphological	Spelling/morphological error. Should be 'hatred' (noun) not 'hatered' (attempted past tense). Learner confused noun and verb forms. Missing copula 'is' between subject and complement, again reflecting Indonesian structure.

Comment 11: "kasi understand biar people* know"

Original Text	Error Type	Analysis
"kasi understand biar people know"	Semantic/Syntactic	Use of Indonesian words 'kasi' (give) and 'biar' (so/let) with English. This is code-switching rather than pure English. Grammatically incomplete sentence lacking clear subject-verb structure. Reflects heavy interference from Indonesian.

Comment 12: "Btw the way🚀"

Original Text	Error Type	Analysis
"Btw the way"	Semantic/Pragmatic	Redundancy error. 'Btw' is abbreviation for 'by the way,' so writing both is redundant. Shows misunderstanding of English abbreviation conventions or meaning transfer issues.

Comment 13: "she's holding to not geol geol as usual😂 congrats jenn, happily ever after🥰"

Original Text	Error Type	Analysis
"geol geol"	Semantic/Lexical	'Geol geol' appears to be Indonesian slang (playful movement or flirtation), not English. This is code-switching rather than English error. Shows mixing of Indonesian and English in same utterance.

Comment 14: "cocwittt😂😂😂"

Original Text	Error Type	Analysis
"cocwittt"	Orthographic/Stylistic	Non-standard spelling, possibly 'cocky' or Indonesian slang 'cokk.' May represent stylistic choice for digital communication rather than true error. Ambiguous whether it reflects language learning issue or intentional creative spelling.

Comment 15: "God favourite child💕💕"

Original Text	Error Type	Analysis
"God favourite child"	Syntactic/Spelling	British spelling 'favourite' instead of American 'favorite' (not necessarily an error, depending on variety). More significantly, missing article 'a' before 'child' and missing copula 'is'. Should be 'God's favorite child' or 'a favorite child of God.'

4.2 Summary of Error Patterns

Analysis of the fifteen Instagram comments reveals systematic patterns of error consistent with contrastive analysis predictions. The following table summarizes error types across all comments:

Error Type	Frequency	Percentage	Primary Cause
Syntactic	8	38%	Copula omission
Morphological	6	28%	Verb form confusion
Semantic	4	19%	Code-switching/vocabulary
Pragmatic	2	10%	Context/register misunderstanding

Discussion

Syntactic Errors: Copula Omission

The most prevalent error category in this study involves syntactic errors, particularly the omission of copulas (am, is, are, was, were). Eight of the twenty-one identified errors (38%) involve copula omission or related syntactic violations. This pattern aligns precisely with contrastive analysis predictions, as Indonesian does not require overt copulas in nominal predicate sentences. In Indonesian, sentences such as 'Kami baik' (We good) are grammatically correct without a copula, reflecting a fundamental structural difference between Indonesian and English.

Examples from the data include 'You lesbian' (Comment 8), 'Our forever artist j-hope' (Comment 6), and 'God favourite child' (Comment 15), all of which require English copulas ('are,' 'is,' 'is') that do not exist in Indonesian equivalents. This error pattern demonstrates negative transfer, wherein the absence of a required element in Indonesian creates confusion about the requirement for English copulas. The frequency of this error pattern provides strong support for contrastive analysis theory, as it suggests learners are applying Indonesian grammatical rules to English.

Morphological Errors: Verb Form Confusion

The second-most prevalent error category involves morphological errors, particularly verb form confusion. Six errors (28%) involve incorrect selection or formation of verb forms. Examples include 'differencing' (Comment 9), which appears to be an overgeneralized gerund form created from the noun 'difference,' and 'hatered' (Comment 10), which conflates the noun 'hatred' with a past tense verb form.

These morphological errors reflect the limited inflectional morphology in Indonesian. Indonesian verbs do not conjugate for person, number, or tense but instead rely on particles and adverbials to convey temporal and modal information. Consequently, Indonesian learners may struggle with English verb morphology, either omitting required inflections or overgeneralizing morphological patterns. The error 'needed to evolve' (Comment 7) exemplifies overgeneralization, where the learner applied past tense morphology in a context requiring base form, suggesting incomplete acquisition of English tense morphology rules.

Semantic Errors: Code-Switching and Vocabulary Transfer

Semantic errors account for four errors (19%) in the data, primarily involving code-switching and vocabulary transfer from Indonesian. Comments 3, 11, and 13 demonstrate direct insertion of Indonesian words ('foto,' 'kasi,' 'biar,' 'geol geol') or Indonesian-influenced spellings into English utterances. This pattern reflects the learners' reliance on Indonesian to fill vocabulary gaps or to achieve communicative goals when English resources appear insufficient.

Code-switching represents a sophisticated communicative strategy rather than a pure language error. However, the frequency of code-switching in these comments suggests learners' limited English vocabulary in specific semantic domains. The insertion of 'foto' (Indonesian for photo) rather than English 'photo' and the use of Indonesian hedging particles ('biar') indicate domain-specific vocabulary deficiencies. Additionally, the use of Indonesian slang terms ('geol geol') reflects cultural specificity and demonstrates that learners often resort to their first language when English lacks equivalent expressions for specific cultural or colloquial meanings.

Pragmatic Errors and Register Violations

Two pragmatic errors (10%) appear in the data, involving inappropriate language use or unusual collocations. 'Congratulations night' (Comment 4) creates an unusual and semantically inappropriate collocation, while 'Btw the way' (Comment 12) demonstrates redundancy reflecting misunderstanding of abbreviation conventions. These errors suggest

not merely grammatical confusion but also incomplete pragmatic competence and unfamiliarity with English idioms and collocational patterns.

Implications of Error Patterns

The error patterns identified in this study provide empirical support for contrastive analysis theory while also revealing the complexity of language transfer phenomena. The preponderance of syntactic errors involving copula omission demonstrates that structural differences between Indonesian and English directly influence learner error production. However, the diversity of error types and sources suggests that language transfer operates alongside other factors, including overgeneralization of target language rules, vocabulary limitations, and incomplete pragmatic knowledge.

The informal context of Instagram comments appears to amplify visible errors by reducing monitoring and increasing spontaneity. Learners produce language with minimal self-correction, allowing systematic errors reflecting underlying competence to emerge. This finding supports Krashen's Monitor Theory, which predicts that spontaneous speech reveals learned competence, while monitored speech may mask underlying errors through conscious correction.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative study examined fifteen authentic Instagram comments produced by Indonesian EFL learners, identifying and analyzing errors through the lens of contrastive analysis theory. The analysis revealed systematic patterns of error consistent with contrastive predictions, particularly in syntactic structures involving copula omission and morphological structures involving verb forms. These findings provide empirical support for contrastive analysis as a framework for understanding and explaining language learner errors.

The most significant finding concerns the frequency of copula omission errors, which directly reflects the structural difference between Indonesian (which lacks overt copulas in nominal predicates) and English (which requires them). This pattern demonstrates how negative transfer of native language structures predictably generates specific error types in target language production. The prevalence of morphological errors further illustrates how Indonesian learners struggle with English verbal morphology, given Indonesian's reliance on particles rather than inflections for temporal and modal distinctions.

Beyond confirming contrastive analysis predictions, this study reveals the multifaceted nature of language transfer. While structural differences account for many errors, learners also employ code-switching as a communicative strategy to overcome lexical deficiencies. Additionally, errors sometimes reflect overgeneralization of target language rules or pragmatic misunderstandings rather than pure negative transfer. These findings suggest that comprehensive language instruction for Indonesian learners should address not only grammar but also pragmatic competence and communicative strategies.

The informal context of Instagram comments provides valuable insights into authentic learner language. Unlike formal test settings, Instagram comments reveal spontaneous language production with minimal monitoring, allowing systematic errors and learning patterns to emerge clearly. This context demonstrates the value of examining social media as a site for understanding language acquisition processes. Future research might examine whether explicit instruction targeting the identified error patterns would improve learner performance in digital communication contexts, contributing to more effective pedagogy for Indonesian EFL learners.

In conclusion, contrastive error analysis remains a valuable framework for understanding Indonesian learners' English production. The systematic patterns identified in this study, particularly the prevalence of copula omission and morphological errors, demonstrate the persistent influence of native language structure on target language acquisition. By understanding these patterns, educators can develop targeted interventions

addressing the specific challenges faced by Indonesian EFL learners, ultimately improving communicative competence in both formal and informal digital contexts.

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