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   Isharyanti Ningsih Sulila

Alamat Redaksi
   Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia Fakultas Sastra dan Budaya,
   Universitas Negeri Gorontalo
   Jl. Jend. Sudirman No. 6 Kota Gorontalo, 96128
   Email: jurnalsb@gmail.com
   Telp. (62-435) 821125, Fax. (62-435) 821752

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ENGLISH TENSE MARKING OF INDONESIAN SPEAKERS
AND ITS IMPLICATION TO LANGUAGE TEACHING EDUCATION

Nonny Basalama
Dosen Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris
Fakultas Sastra dan Budaya Universitas Negeri Gorontalo

Abstract

The purpose of the research is to test Indonesian Learners of English for their knowledge and skill of tense marking redundancy in English. As a part of qualitative study, four Indonesian learners were interviewed and tested. This study revealed that there are many different reasons for the use of incorrect English by Indonesian learners. Firstly, there are errors that are the result of a direct translation from an Indonesian context. Errors related to the tendency to use lexical markers are also found in this study and the use of lexical markers makes the speech sound unlike English enough to be considered an error. This study also discovers that the Indonesian tends to frequently express present tense in their speaking. The most interesting reason for errors was interlanguage which seemed to account for most errors in the production test. It is hoped that the results can provide insight to not only in Indonesia context but also to other various contexts in English foreign language learning and teaching.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is trying to cover discussion of the reason why Indonesian speakers of English are often accused of using too many words when they express their thoughts, using repetitions and redundancy. It is argued that the problem happens because Indonesian language does not have grammatical tenses, thus the language marks its tenses lexically. When Indonesians try to apply English rules to their expression they end up using more words than necessary to express themselves.

As a part of a qualitative study, data were obtained from some adult learners. Four Indonesian learners who were living in Australia were interviewed and tested. It was assumed that the learners who were studying would have more exposure to correct English tense marking. Analyzing the way how they use English tense marking, several theories of why Indonesian tends to use more words in their communication is critically reviewed in this article. The issue of first language interference and inter lingual error are also brought into discussion in this part. The participants were interviewed to obtain natural data of the English use as a production test. The participants were also asked to answer a multiple choice test to see if they recognize correct English tense marking. The resulting data has been analyzed for tense marking, and from this analysis an attempt would be made to find reasons of the unique expression of English by Indonesians, and its implication for teaching Indonesian language to the learners, and English foreign language context including in Indonesia.

Some theoretical perspectives are considered useful to be incorporated into discussion such as tense markers in Indonesian language and why redundancy takes place for Indonesian speaker, which those all are highlighted in the following.

Indonesian is a grammatically tense less language. This does not mean that it cannot express tenses. This is done in other ways. The tenses in Indonesian can be shown by some adverbial time markers and key words. There are many languages which share this lack of grammatical tense markers as what has been underlined by Lyons in the following statement; “Malay and Chinese languages do not grammatically distinguish between present and past events or between
present and future events” (Lyons, 1995 p. 312). The Indonesian language in particular distinguishes tenses by using some adverbial times such as: kemarin (yesterday), sekarang (now), besok (tomorrow), setiap hari (everyday) and some key words; telah, (action finished) sedang, (action in progress) and akan (will [future tense]). This implies that in order to stress when the action happen, a lexical marker rather than a grammatical marker is used. This can subsequently brought the understanding that because Indonesian does not have grammatical tenses, the Indonesians tend to use many words to express their feelings and ideas, in spoken and written language. The following examples are drawn to support the argument.

Keluarga Brown sedang bersiap-siap menerima tamu-tamu.

family Brown are ready-ready receive guest-guest

The Browns are getting ready to receive the guests.

John akan belajar Bahasa Indonesia besok.

:John will study language Indonesia tomorrow.

John will study Indonesian tomorrow.

(Danoesoeagendo, 1996, p. 66)

In sentence number 1 and 2, we can see that Indonesian use many more words in their expression than they do in English. There are about eight words in the first sentence and six words in the second sentence. The words in the first sentence, for example the Browns’ is said as keluarga Brown, furthermore the word sedang in Indonesian is a key word which can indicate that the event is in progress, the last words tamu-tamu which in English is only represented by one word ‘guests’. We can also examine this phenomenon through a short conversation (below) and then compare it with English:

- John, apakah Bob ada di rumah?
- John is Bob home?
- Ya, tetapi saya kira dia sedang tidur siang.

- Yes, but I think he is taking a nap.

The first sentence of the conversation above clearly shows that Indonesians use more words than English. On the other hand, the second sentence has the same number of words; eight words for every sentence, but if we analyze the sentence, we can find that the two words in Indonesian; tidur siang are only represented by English with ‘a nap’. The articles in English make it seem as though there are as many words in the English expression, however, if you just count the subjects, and objects, Indonesians use more words.

When Indonesian learners speak English, they tend to use many words in order to stress meaning. This happens because Indonesians are influenced by their mother tongue. Indonesian uses repetition to apply lexical tense markers to the action of a sentence. First language interference deals with the problems encountered due to the incompatibility of the two languages. This difference will result in the non-native speaker using elements of their mother tongue incorrectly in the second language. Aitken (1992) has discussed of the influence which affected by the learner’s mother tongue as one of the problems occurs in language learning. In accordance with this, Barzegar (2013, p 323) classified this type of error as ‘interlingual error’, which is the error takes place due to the learner’s mother tongue interference. However, this does not mean that all errors are a result of this first language interference, as behaviorists believe, for they could occur for many other reasons such as lack of vocabulary or incomplete education, or the complexity of the target language (Lightbown and Spada 2006).

The other theory which has helped the researcher to better understand her study is the interlanguage hypothesis theory as proposed by Selinker in 1972 (Selinker, 1972; Gas and Selinker, 1994). Selinker proposed that when using a target language the learner follows a system of rules which are different from the native language and the target language (cited in Eckman 1981).
In relation to this theory, this study found that the errors that the participants made in this study analysis could be also linked to the concept of interlanguage. This will be further incorporated in the data analysis and discussion below.

METHODODOLOGY

This study aims to test Indonesian Learners of English for their knowledge and skill of tense marking redundancy in English. There are four Indonesian learners were interviewed and tested of their English use. To ensure a varied background in experience of English, two of the interviewee were studying academically in Australia, and the others two were not studying but had completed an English course. It was assumed that the learners who were studying would have more exposure to correct English tense marking. The purpose of the interview was to gather spontaneous data, the interviewees were asked to talk about their experiences in English learning. Specifically they were asked about their feelings in learning the language. But the focus of analysis lied on understanding of the use of tenses in their expressions and lexical markers.

The test conducted was designed to test the learners' ability to recognize tense and tense marking redundancy in English. The learners were asked to choose possible correct sentences from four different sentences. More than one sentence used correct English and one of the correct sentences would include a redundant lexical marker. As the English way of adding suffixes (e.g. -ing, -ed) to the end of words to indicate past tense can be confusing to English learners, incorrect application of suffixes (e.g. goed instead of went) have been included in the questions as distractions.

For example,
Choose the correct sentence:
   a. Yesterday I went to the shops. (correct grammar, redundant lexical marker)
   b. Yesterday I go to the shops. (incorrect grammar)
   c. I goed to the shops. (distraction)
   d. I went to the shops. (correct grammar, no redundant lexical marker).

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Through the data analysis and interpretation some themes emerged as critical for further discussion including The Use of Lexical Markers and Substitution of Present Tense for Past Tense. They all are discussed in the following.

The Use of Lexical Markers

This study reveals that all the participants tend to use more lexical markers (adverbial times) in their English communication. There are various expressions from the participants indicate the use of these adverbial times such as 'from beginning', 'from time to time', now I come again, which all of
those are not necessary in appropriate English expression.

Substitution of Present Tense for Past Tense

The substitution of present tense for past tense also occurred in the use of English by Indonesian speakers. For example Sunaryo in expression numbers 1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, Parman in numbers 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, Deni in numbers 1-4, 8 and Syamin in numbers 1-5, 7-9. The result shows that the substitution they made of present tense for past tense do not occur all the time in their speaking. This leads to assume that the participants show their cognition of the English tenses and structures. It seems that Indonesian learners tend to use present tense for everything they communicate in English as this might be easier for the learners to simply using lexical markers to stress when the events take place. This could mean that speaking does not allow them time to convert tenses and so they use only the present tense.

Some of the results from the interviews were surprising. I expected that the two English learners who were studying in Australia would have better grammatical tense marking in their spoken English. This was not the case because the results in percentage of grammar correct are as follows:

Deni (non-student, pseudonymous name) 62%
Sunaryo (student, pseudonymous name) 53%
Syamin (student, pseudonymous name) 31%
Parman (student, pseudonymous name) 26%

The recognition tests followed the same general pattern except that Parman's recognition skills were better than Syamin's.

Deni (non-student) 100%
Sunaryo (student) 100%
Parman (student) 80%
Syamin (non-student) 45%

The above results indicate that only Deni is close to mastery of tense marking in English as he obtained 62% for the production test and 100% for the recognition test, while the other three performed poorly in the production test and seemed to be in the process of emergence. However, since Sunaryo and Parman score highly for the recognition test we might assume that the mistakes in the production test were due to nervousness - their being under pressure to speak at the time. Syamin does not score well in either test, so it could be said that he is definitely still in the process of learning the language.

There could individual and social reasons for the unexpected results. It becomes clear when I examine Deni's background why his English is so good. He worked as a Hotel Manager in Indonesia, a position which might require him to speak English with native speaking guests. This would give him a reason to become familiar with the language before he started his English course in Australia. He also brings the story into the present so it is right according to the context, which might be why he got better mark in the spontaneous data. Sunaryo was an English teacher in Indonesia who is studying for his Ph.D. in Anthropology in Australia. His experience with English helps him score well in both tests. Parman was a chemistry teacher in Indonesia who is studying for a Ph.D. in Education. His grammar is good but he has trouble applying tense in context, hence his low score in the production test and high score in the recognition test. It seems that when he is not under pressure to do it quickly like in speaking, he does well. Syamin has had no contact with English before coming to Australia and is not exposed to English in an academic environment. When more is known about the interviewees' background it becomes clear why the results were surprising.

In all cases tense marking in the production test was not as good as tense recognition. They are still influenced by their mother tongue, Indonesian, which is a grammatically tenseless language, and tends to mark tense lexically. But it does not mean that Indonesian language cannot be distinguished linguistically between present and past events or between present and future events (Lyons, 1995, pp 312). The problem is that when
they are asked to express themselves verbally in English, there is no time to wonder about tense markers as they feel they must speak as quickly as they can. The interviewees who have a good knowledge of English should result less lexical marking. Thus, if they have the knowledge, they will be able to make their sentences shorter, and use grammatical tense marking. Because Indonesian tend to use many words and tenseless language, they distinguish the various events grammatically or could be because the complexity of the English language itself.

There is a theory which could explain why tense recognition was better than the use of tense in the production test. In Krashen's acquisition-learning hypothesis (1985) there are two ways to learn a language, one is to acquire it in meaningful interaction, the other is to learn it by learning its rules such as in a classroom setting (Krashen, 1981; 1982). Further to that, Krashen says that only language that is acquired is available for natural, fluent communication (Krashen cited in Lightbown and Spada, 1994, pp. 26). The learners that were examined could have learned English more than acquired English which would explain why tense recognition was better than the use of tense in the production test. The samples of natural data obtained and analyzed from the four participants highlighted in the following table

### Table 1
**Data Classification and Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sunaryo</th>
<th>Expression</th>
<th>Obligatory Context</th>
<th>Lexical Markers</th>
<th>Correct Grammar</th>
<th>Incorrect Grammar</th>
<th>Should Be</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Okay, thank you, I think. It is very nice experience with me here.</td>
<td>Present thought about the past.</td>
<td>think to have</td>
<td>was have</td>
<td>bad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>So since the first time I came or arrived in Australia.</td>
<td>Past events</td>
<td>since came arrived couldn’t be plan was planned</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>So I think that the Almighty God has already decided, where to go and He knows actually the best place to go, to study.</td>
<td>Present thought about past</td>
<td>already has decided</td>
<td>knows</td>
<td>knew</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>So, ah, flying from Jakarta, right by Garuda Indonesia, a very very huge airplane, Garuda Indonesia, so it was very very interesting journey you know to go to Australia with a couple of friends.</td>
<td>Past</td>
<td>was go flying flew</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>So on the plane, okay. I feel that since to go or to leave our home town is a very nice experience actually, to find another kind of knowledge, or experience, different from we have in our home town</td>
<td>Past</td>
<td>feel to have felt</td>
<td>was had</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>But the problem that I had is present and then I wished to present</td>
<td>had</td>
<td>have</td>
<td>had</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>so I am also thinking about my wife, I am also thinking about my two children, I believe that not only I myself missed them but they also miss me very much.</td>
<td>present</td>
<td>I am believe</td>
<td>missed</td>
<td>miss</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>During the first six months actually it is very difficult to adjust with a new environment</td>
<td>past</td>
<td>during</td>
<td>is</td>
<td>was</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>although Australia is very different from Indonesia, I like it very much but sometimes as you know I have to think about my family, I have to think about my two children in my home town, so sometimes I missed them very much.</td>
<td>Past</td>
<td>as I like</td>
<td>I have thought</td>
<td>was liked</td>
<td>of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Past and present</th>
<th>how already settled</th>
<th>I am already settled</th>
<th>I have already settled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>But now I am already, I am already settle to live in Australia And then I have no problem with the weather here, although it is spring, although it is winter or summer, no problem for me.</td>
<td>Past</td>
<td>present</td>
<td>is not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I am not very cold when it is in winter and it is not extremely hot when it is in summer.</td>
<td>past</td>
<td>is not</td>
<td>when it is</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Deni

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Expression</th>
<th>Obligatoriness</th>
<th>Lexical Marker</th>
<th>Correct Grammar</th>
<th>Incorrect Grammar</th>
<th>Should Be</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I was there in 1991 and I find that it is a very hard time for me to adjust with the situation in Australia.</td>
<td>Past</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>was</td>
<td>was</td>
<td>was</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>If you compare with the Indonesian situation especially for the culture, I got the culture shock at the time, after few months later I don't use it</td>
<td>present</td>
<td>thought about past</td>
<td>don't use</td>
<td>wasn't used</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>My experience at the time I was working at a restaurant and then it's very hard for me to change behavior because I was worked in Indonesia as hotel manager and then become to a chef in Australia.</td>
<td>present</td>
<td>at the time</td>
<td>was worked</td>
<td>it's become because</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Cooking, yes very difficult. It doesn't matter is life. ha. ha that's life.</td>
<td>present</td>
<td>doesn't</td>
<td>can</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>For me the lot of experience. I think some advantage to learn umm... because not many people know in Indonesia... umm so many things I can learn here.</td>
<td>present</td>
<td>think</td>
<td>can</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>And now I come again it Australia, umm as usual also from beginning from month to month I got the culture shock.</td>
<td>Past</td>
<td>now from beginning, from month to month</td>
<td>some get</td>
<td>some got</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|   | 7 | Ya... now I will be used to wish and I hope that can improve my ability, so looking surrounding Australia. | present | now used | will be | an |
|   | 8 | That my experience... can see though I can saw that Australian people more free to express something to us, if you say something no, or say yes or no, it's different with. | Past and then present | say | can see | more free |
|   | 9 | To express yes or no like Australia especially for us is very hard, but Indonesian people can think to take the advantage of the express like Australian. | present | s | s |
|   | 10 | Yes' is straight forward and no' is straight forward also, but it is not easy for Indonesian people to set behavior like that. | present | s | s |

### Parman

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Expression</th>
<th>Obligator y Context</th>
<th>Lexica l Marke rs</th>
<th>Correct Grammar</th>
<th>Incorrect Grammar</th>
<th>Should Be</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>If you ask me my experience to come to Australia,</td>
<td>Present, explains can't remember</td>
<td>to come in</td>
<td>couldn't</td>
<td>coming to</td>
<td>can't</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Oh yes I think basically we have similar feeling at the beginning, when I just arrived here so I am so happy because that's one of my dream. To study overseas, right.

3. So I just everything for me so wonderful, so I have no problem because everything that I saw just exciting, right.

4. But after few month eh I don't know how to explain that, a lot of thing just make me uncomfortable.

5. I try to think about the thing why, say for instance, in dealing with my study, my background is chemistry I am a chemistry teacher.

6. and I am doing eh... I am continue my study in another... actually I am dealing with my chemistry area.

7. but this one is more advanced and more specific area, school of chemistry... so in term of knowledge that I have, before I came here eh just so different

8. I have to say just not enough to follow eh to follow the lecture or all of the subject in chemistry area.

9. and on the other hand I really have a problem with with linguist and as you know I am not an English teacher and that time my English so, I can say that is horrible, it is not enough.

10. luckily I can pass the ELT's interview or in present tense: I could could's not be so good.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Expression</th>
<th>Obligatory Context</th>
<th>Lexical Markers</th>
<th>Correct Grammar</th>
<th>Incorrect Grammar</th>
<th>Should Be</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>On the first time I came to Australia in 1992, my English seems to be very bad.</td>
<td>Past</td>
<td>came is is was was</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The make of everything is difficult because I don't know how to say it.</td>
<td>Past</td>
<td>I don't make I don't ...very dark I didn't was very dark</td>
<td>I don't</td>
<td>I won't</td>
<td>I think</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>But for the second month oh I have a chance for the course, the English course that ...uhm I mean I really happy about that.</td>
<td>Past, the second month</td>
<td>I mean 1 a chance I really have a chance I was really</td>
<td>I have a chance I was really</td>
<td>I have a chance I was really</td>
<td>I have a chance I was really</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>But the study language for me that's very difficult</td>
<td>Past</td>
<td>that's need I am not</td>
<td>that's needed I was not</td>
<td>that's needed I was not</td>
<td>that's needed I was not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The first thing I can do is to support my wife and the second thing is for my sons...</td>
<td>Past to present</td>
<td>the first thing I can get it</td>
<td>I am can be is</td>
<td>I am was</td>
<td>I am was</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>And for me may be I want to look after the activity may be the use of language for my country, there are many positive things better than our country, this mean if I am umm a business of ourselves and the employment my country it many thing for me.</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>want to look</td>
<td>I am</td>
<td>is useful</td>
<td>is useful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>In the first time I get job in the first time I mean get call ask</td>
<td>Past in the first time I mean</td>
<td>get call ask</td>
<td>get called asked</td>
<td>get called asked</td>
<td>get called asked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>And the first time I get job in the first time I get job in the first time I mean</td>
<td>Past and then the first time I mean</td>
<td>clean cleaned</td>
<td>clean cleaned</td>
<td>clean cleaned</td>
<td>clean cleaned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>This experience for me that time I very happy, then actually I work casual.</td>
<td>Past</td>
<td>that time</td>
<td>I very</td>
<td>I was very</td>
<td>I was very</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>This weather is make very very trouble for me, very different</td>
<td>Present</td>
<td>is make makes</td>
<td>makes</td>
<td>makes</td>
<td>makes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Further to the discussion. Several limitations of this study would be pinpointed through this paper. First, the test and analysis could have been improved by more preparation beforehand. More specific knowledge about the learner’s background in English would have been useful in order to assess their level of competency. It also would have been useful to have had a detailed list of grammatical tense errors and lexical markers to look for in the production test. This would have made the results for the production test more accurate and consistent.

The other aspect that needs to be further considered is it was difficult finding errors of tense marking when each learner had such a different style of English. These different styles also made it difficult to decide who used too many words in spoken English. Testing learners of English who speak other languages would have made it clear whether the problem of repetition and redundancy was unique to Indonesians. A judgment test could have been given as well as the recognition test to support the conclusions of the other tests as the judgment tests the ability to correct grammar as well as recognize it. The last one is in regard to sample size which is to gain definitive results. Despite the limitations above, I believe this study has facilitated a pilot study. The results obtained from this study indicate that the subject warrants further investigation.

**CONCLUSION**

Although this study needs more evidence to support why Indonesian speakers of English are often accused of using too many words, using repetition and redundancy, when they express their thoughts, this study revealed that there are many different reasons for the use of incorrect English by Indonesian learners.

Firstly, there are errors that are the result of a direct translation from an Indonesian context. Secondly, there are errors related to the tendency to use lexical markers. The use of lexical markers makes the speech sound unlike English enough to be considered an error. Thirdly, the Indonesian tends to frequently expresses present tense in their speaking. The most interesting reason for errors was interlanguage which seemed to account for most errors in the production test. In interlanguage the Indonesian leaves out both grammatical and lexical tense markers meaning that tense is often lost in speech. When tense is taken out of a dialogue, often the focus for the action is lost, this makes it difficult for English listeners to understand. While this report does not prove that interlanguage without tense is the cause of many misunderstandings and errors, it is evident from the production tests that it is a possible cause. Further testing of this theory could give more evidence to support this claim. It is hoped the results can give insights for language teachers in understanding more about the diversity of their learners and latter influence the ways how language approach their grammar teaching, and the contribution can be also extended to broader communities needs and knowledge enhancing language learning and teaching, and more specifically teaching English in foreign language classroom where problems arising are quite complex and dynamic.

**REFERENCES**

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