

Indonesian Heritage Language Learners' Grammar

Indonesian heritage language learners who learn Indonesian in the US colleges come to class with some degree of proficiency in Indonesian. They differ from individual to individual with regards to their experience with the language. They have different exposures to Indonesian. Some maintain the use of Indonesian at home but some abandon the language very early in their lives. Some spent their formative years in Indonesia, and some even had educational experience in the country. Because of these the Indonesian heritage language learners' linguistic ability vary greatly. Studies about heritage language acquisition show that age of arrivals and the intense exposure to the dominant language has effect on the acquisition and attainment of the heritage language (Montrul 2002, Polinski 1997, and Polinski and Kagan 2007). Many end up with grammar deficiency or incomplete grammar in the heritage language even though they maintain the use of the language until their adult lives.

This paper studies the adult grammar of Indonesian heritage language learners. By comparing the writings of the Indonesian heritage language learners with different age of onset of bilingualism and conducting error analysis on the learners' sentences, this paper aims to investigate whether the heritage language learners' grammar have patterns of errors that can be explained from a linguistic point of view or whether the learners grammar deficiency is simply random.

The following are the examples of the learners' sentences from their short essays on the benefits of studying at big colleges.

1. Saya pikir murit lebih **keuntungan** kalau belajar di universitas yang besar.
(*Heritage Learner (HL): born and grew up in the US*)
2. Selama saya belajar di sekolah ini banyak sekali keuntungan yang **saya bisa pakai** untuk selama hidup (*HL: age of arrival - 9 years old*)
3. Banyak sekali keuntungan yang bisa didapat dari universitas-universitas tersebut,... (*HL: age of arrival - 15 years old*).
4. Dalam menempuh ilmu di universitas yang besar, saya dapat memperoleh keuntungan-keuntungan yang menarik. (*Native speaker: high school in Indonesia*)

Heritage learner (HL) # 1 who never experiences any schooling in Indonesia has a problem with spelling (*murit* as supposed to *murid*) and mistakenly treats an NP + derivational suffixes 'keuntungan' as an AP. HL #2 who studied up to third grade in Indonesia has a problem forming a first person passive by failing to inverse the auxiliary 'bisa,' while HL #3 who came after more years of schooling in Indonesia produces a perfect third person passive.

Those examples definitely show that the more exposure the learners have towards the heritage language, the higher their grammar proficiency is, which has been confirmed by many studies. However, the corpus error analysis of the Indonesian heritage language learners' writings will provide detailed observations and deeper understanding of what their adult grammar looks like.