

Indonesian Learner Language at the Early Stages of Acquisition

This paper looks at a few strategies employed by Indonesian learners in acquiring the target language. One of the strategies includes language transfers which often occur in the early stages of learning. L1 transfer occurs in the production of L2 because language learners heavily rely on L1 language system as a source. L1 transfer used to be regarded as a negative transfer that inhibits language acquisition. Nowadays, however; applied linguists have argued that language transfers are a necessary process in language acquisition. Language transfer is a part of learner language that provides insights into learners' acquisition process that influences their production of the language. Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) consider learner language "a source of data for investigating what learners know and can do with an L2" (p.359).

Using error analysis and corpus approaches to analyze Indonesian learner language, this paper attempts to provide insights into Indonesian learner language at lexical and grammatical levels. Besides language transfers, the analysis also identifies several other strategies such as overgeneralization and over use of certain linguistic forms such as *itu* and *yang* in the speech and written productions of Indonesian language learners at the beginning and intermediate levels.

The following are the examples of the strategies mentioned above.

1) Language transfers:

a. L1 transfer (English grammatical/lexical system as a source):

e.g. *Saya biasanya **kurang sibuk** hari Sabtu.* 'I am **less busy** on Saturday.'

*Saya **melakukan** teka-teki silang.* 'I **do** crossword puzzles.'

b. Another language learned before the target language (L2/Spanish transfer to L3/Indonesian)

e.g. A consistent use of the preposition 'di' as a possessive marker by an English speaking learner whose L2 is Spanish in producing a noun phrase such as *rumah **di** tante saya* 'my aunt's house.

This example shows the influence of Spanish *de* that indicates a possession in a noun phrase such as *el zapato **de** Juan* 'the shoe of John.'

2) Interlanguage (a production of L2 with a language system that belongs neither to L1/English nor L2/Indonesian)

e.g. The last part of this sentence is neither an active/passive voice in English, but it may show an unsuccessful attempt to use an Indonesian passive voice:

*Saya tidak pernah mau menjadi doktor gigi, meskipun kadang-kadang orang tua saya masih mau saya menjadi doktor supaya **kantornya saya bisa mengambil alih!*** '...so that I can take over his clinic.'

3) Overgeneralization

e.g. Having learned an NP *rumah makan*, a learner applies the same form of modifier in the following: *Waktu saya pulang, saya mampir di **toko makan** untuk membeli makanan.* '...at a grocery store to buy some food.'

Learner language is not only a great resource for understanding learners' language acquisition process but it also provides pedagogical implications to classroom teaching.