

# Interlanguage Errors in English Textbooks for Junior High School Students in Surakarta

Endang Fauziati  
*Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta*

**Abstract:** The present study deals with the English textbooks for Junior High School students. It is worth studying because they are marked with a significant number of errors both in the area of vocabulary and grammar. This research is to find proof that the English used is still at the level of interlanguage (IL). Theories on Error Analysis (EA) and Interlanguage (IL) have been used to analyze the data which consist of erroneous sentences taken from the reading texts only. The result reveals that the English used in the textbooks is still at the level of IL. The features of systematicity, permeability, and fossilization of an interlanguage also existed in it.

**Key words:** interlanguage errors, English textbooks, junior high school

English textbooks for junior high school students are worth studying since they have a great number of errors which include various linguistic items as well as grammatical elements. Such errors suggest that the writers have not yet fully mastered the rules of the language they have learnt. In general such errors are considered as “an inevitable sign of human fallibility” (Corder, 1981:65), for example, as the consequence of lack of attention or poor memory on the part of the learners or inadequacy of the teachers’ teaching. Anyhow, errors are inevitable in any learning situation, which requires creativity such as in learning a second language. For textbook writers, however, such errors cannot be admitted. They should not occur in English textbooks from which the students learn English.

In 1976 Corder published a seminal article “The Significance of

Learners Errors", in which he proposed that the learner constructed his own version of the grammar of the target language. The outgrowth of his ideas is labeled error analysis. Errors, then, are no longer viewed as mere deviations but rather as a source for studying the process used by the learner in learning the target language. He stated that "Errors are evidence about the nature of the process and of the rules used by the learner at a certain stage in the course (1977: 167)." So if we want to study the learner's language systems, we should find clues to the systems by analyzing the errors he commits.

Selinker (1977) proposes the term "interlanguage" to refer to the language system of the second language learner, a system distinct from both the native as well as the target language. His language system contains elements of both the first language as well as the target language. Its sister terms are "Approximative System" (Nemser, 1977), "Idiosyncratic Dialect" (Corder, 1977), and "Transitional Competence" (Dulay, Burt, and Krashen, 1982). This "dialect" has the significant features usually attached to an IL, namely systematicity, permeability, and fossilization (Adjemian, 1976).

The existing errors show that the textbook writers confront a lot of problems related to vocabulary and grammar in their attempt to express the intended meaning in English. Some words are retained in their native language, and others are literal translations that result in errors because of the mismatching and the existence of superfluous expressions. While the problems on the target language grammar have induced the textbooks writers to commit a wide range of grammatical errors.

The purpose of the present study is two folds: to find the types of errors committed by the textbook writers and to explain how and why those errors occur. This study has yielded two important things. First, it gives us vivid pictures of the common phenomenon which usually occur in foreign language learning. The answers to the questions of what types of errors frequently occur, how and why the errors exist, have led us to a deeper understanding of the process of second or foreign language learning. Second, from a practical point of view, the findings have made us aware to reconsider the use of such English textbooks for classroom resource materials. The fact shows that in most foreign language instructions, teachers and students rely heavily on textbook materials. Both teachers and stu-

dents will make use of any textbooks most often regardless of the quality. The findings of this study imply that nothing else is as important to foreign language educators, especially in the junior high schools in Surakarta, as having good, basic textbooks for their students.

## REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Grauberg (1971) has conducted a study on errors committed by adult foreign language learners. The corpus of his investigation is 193 German foreign language errors. The result of his investigation indicates that errors resulted from first language interference are only one of the types of errors found in syntax, morphology and lexicon of the students' writing in the target language.

Burt (1977) has conducted a study on errors made by adult learners. She has tried to find the types of errors which cause the listeners or readers to misunderstand the message intended by the English foreign language learners. The findings show that errors which significantly hinder communication, in the sense that they cause the listener or reader to misunderstand the message or to consider the sentence incomprehensible, are of certain type, while those that do not hinder communication are of another type. Both types of errors are easily distinguishable.

Smithies and Holzknacht (1983) has conducted a study of written English errors committed by the tertiary level students in Papua New Guinea. The result of their analysis shows a wide range of error types, namely the articles (11.37%), prepositions (10.6%), verb (10.50%), noun (7.5%), and spelling, (7.4%).

Wode (1986) has also conducted a study on errors made by second language learners. The findings show that transfer does occur in learners' language. Transfer is developmental, i.e. it is an integral part of how people learn languages. The occurrence of transfer is systematic.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Several more in-depth studies which have given invaluable contributions to the theories in EA. There are three basic stages in EA: recognition, description, and explanation of errors.

The first stage in error analysis is recognition of errors. Among the

many language scholars whose works I have read, Corder (1978, 1981) is the only one who has elaborated the procedure to detect errors. He suggests that errors can be detected by comparing what the learner actually said with what he ought to have said to express what he intended to express. Thus, errors can be identified by comparing original utterances with reconstructed utterances, that is, correct sentences having the meaning intended by the learner.

Corder concludes that we have to consider the sentences produced by learners based on two things: acceptability and appropriacy. Acceptability has something to do with the language code (competence) and appropriacy with the proper use of the code (performance). Sentences are, thus, erroneous if they are unacceptable or inappropriate. However, a sentence may be unacceptable but appropriate, or acceptable but inappropriate, or of course, both unacceptable and inappropriate. All of them are considered erroneous. Only sentences which are both acceptable and appropriate, may be free from errors, as seen in the table 1.

**Table 1. Acceptability and Appropriacy of Sentences**

acceptable	appropriate	free from error
acceptable	inappropriate	erroneous
unacceptable	appropriate	erroneous
unacceptable	inappropriate	erroneous

The second stage deals with classification of errors. Corder simply comments that errors can be classified through a comparison process between the data being the original erroneous utterance and the constructed one, that is the process similar to that of contrastive analysis. He seems to have focused exclusively on one alternative for classifying errors, i.e. error types in terms of linguistic categories.

Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982), however have presented a more complete work on error classification, comparing with that of Corder. They propose several alternatives for error classification. They classify errors in terms of (1) linguistic categories, (2) surface strategy taxonomy, (3) comparative taxonomy, and (4) communicative effect taxonomy (see Dulay, Burt, and Krashen, 1982: 146).

The final stage is explanation of errors. First, Jain (1977) highlights on L1 independent errors. There are several factors causing L1 independ-

ent errors, such as learning strategies, teaching techniques, folklore about L2 (second language), and the age of bilingualism. The latter means the period over which the L2 has been used by the speech community to which the learner belongs.

Stenson (1980) has been attracted to observe errors that correlate with the teaching techniques. If a learner is taking part in formal interaction, some errors will be a direct result of misunderstanding caused by faulty teaching or materials. She gives the term "induced errors", while Selinker (1977) called it "transfer of training errors".

In his works Selinker (1977, 1988) has presented a comprehensive discussion on this matter. He correlates the issues of the sources of errors with the second language learning process. He even proposes a special term to refer to the language system of the second language learner, that is IL.

He has argued that IL is resulted from the learner's attempts to produce the target language norms. In other words, it is the product of the second language learning processes. The five processes he describes are in terms of: (1) Language Transfer, (2) Transfer of Training, (3) Strategies of Second Language Learning, (4) Strategies of Second Language Communication, and (5) Overgeneralization of the Target Language Linguistic Materials.

Adjemian (1976) refines the IL hypothesis and singles out a number of important characteristics of IL: systematicity, permeability, and fossilization.

Systematicity follows from the hypothesis that IL are natural languages. This means that an IL can not be a random collection of entities. It is, however, assumed to be systematic from the start. Like any natural language system, IL seems to obey universal linguistic constrains.

The second property of IL is permeability of the developing grammar. It refers to "the susceptibility of IL to infiltration by first language and target language rules or forms" (Yip, 1995:12). It is in accord with the statement given by Adjemian (1976:21) that "IL systems are dynamic in character. The systems are thought to be by their nature incomplete and in the state of flux." The structures of the IL can be invaded or infiltrated by the L1 of the learner.

The third property of IL is fossilization. It is "the persistence of pla-

teaus of non-target like competence in the interlanguage" (Selinker, 1988:92). When its permeability is lost, the features of an IL become subject to fossilization. A learner is expected to progress further along the learning continuum, so that his competence moves closer and closer to the target language system and contains fewer and fewer errors. Some errors, however, never disappear for good.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on a library research in which the data consist of erroneous sentences taken from seven English textbooks for Junior High School Students. To limit this study, I have collected the erroneous sentences from the reading texts in those textbooks only. There are 225 erroneous sentences that can be accumulated. They are listed and used as the data.

The data analysis has been carried out through the following steps. First, the accumulated data are classified in terms of linguistic categories and comparative taxonomy. Second, each type of errors is calculated to find out the total number and frequency of each type of errors. Finally, the sources or causes of errors are discussed.

### DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis of the data is presented in two major parts. The first part deals with vocabulary and the second grammar.

### ERRORS ON VOCABULARY

The data show a significant number of errors on vocabulary which include (1) misuse of vocabulary or special expression that can be traced back to the textbook writers' first language (L1) and (2) use of wrong vocabulary that cannot be traced back to their first language. The former involves (1) the use of Indonesian lexical items, (2) the mismatch of lexical system between Indonesian as the native language and English as the second language, (3) the superfluous expression, and (4) the modified Indonesian words, such as in:

- (1) The *wayang kulit* performance needs a screen, [...].
- (2) It rained day after day, the weather felt cold.  
*cuaca terasa*
- (3) According to your opinion, how people here live?  
*Menurut pendapatmu*
- (4) We classify them as furniture, clothes [...]electronica and vehicles.  
*elektronika*

Next, vocabulary that cannot be traced back to their L1 covers (1) the misuse of vocabulary because of the similarity in form, (2) the misuse of vocabulary because the similarity in meaning, and (3) the occurrence of wordiness such as in:

- (1) [...]to the stationary and bought school utensils.  
*stationery*
- (2) They are also interested in following sport [...].  
*taking part*
- (3) Mr. Lukman is old,[...]he is retired on a pension.  
*retired/pension*

### ERRORS ON GRAMMAR

The analysis shows a wide range of error linguistic categories which include (1) tenses, (2) affixation, (3) preposition, (4) article, (5) pronoun, (6) conjunction, (7) omission of object, (8) clause redundancy, (9) passive voice, (10) adjunct, modifier, and quantifier, and (11) parallel construction. There are very few errors which only emerge once throughout the texts studied; they are categorized as (12) miscellaneous errors.

- (1) [...] we may imagine as if we are in a big city.  
*were*
- (2) Violations against the rules should be punished.  
*Violators*
- (3) Most women are skilled in weaving pandan mats.  
*skillful*
- (4) We have English teacher mathematic teacher [...].  
*mathematics*

- (5) If they obey the rules because they are afraid to the punishment [...].  
*of*
- (6) Mr. Sutomo said "thank for God".  
*thank God*
- (7) So we are at school about six and half hours.  
*for about*
- (8) [...] I like to read the books in the library.  
*books*
- (9) People in Jakarta are very busy, so we can't [...].  
*they*
- (10) My mother loves gardening, on the other hand my sister likes  
*and/whereas*  
reading very much.
- (11) The clever cat will catch easily but [...].  
*catch the rat*
- (12) Mother wakes up early before every one wakes up.  
*wakes up early before every one else*
- (13) The festival was taken part by popular dancers.  
*Popular dancers took part in the festival.*
- (14) \*The Indonesian government's campaign to popularize  
Bahasa Indonesia at present can [...].  
*At present, the Indonesian government's campaign to  
popularize Indonesian Language*
- (15) Then Indonesia produces a lot of products for  
domestic use as well as to be exported.  
*domestic use as well as for export*
- (16) They bought a wool trousers, a cotton {...}.  
*a pair of woolen trousers*

#### ERROR CLASSIFICATION BASED ON COMPARATIVE TAXONOMY

Classification of errors in a comparative taxonomy is based on "comparison between the structure of second language errors and certain other types of construction" (Dulay, Burt, and Krashen 1982). In this study, the writer compares the textbook writers' errors in English with their Indonesian equivalents. This comparison has yielded three major categories in this taxonomy: (1) interlingual errors, (2) developmental er-

rors, and (3) others.

Table 1. Classification of Errors

No.	Linguistic Category Taxonomy Vocabulary/Grammar	Comparative taxonomy		
		Inter Lingual	Developmental	Other
<b>I. Vocabulary that can be traced to L1</b>				
1	Indo. Words/Phrases	37	-	-
2	Mismatch of Lexical System	24	-	-
3	Superfluous Expression	5	-	-
4	Modified Indonesian words	4	-	-
<b>II. Vocabulary that cannot be traced to L1</b>				
5	Similarity in Form	-	4	-
6	Similarity in Meaning	-	29	-
7	Wordiness	-	11	-
<b>III. Grammar</b>				
1	Tenses	-	2	1
2	Affixation	-	6	3
3	Preposition			
	Wrong Preposition	3	13	-
	Addition of Preposition	1	3	-
	Omission of Preposition	1	3	-
4	Article			
	Addition of Article	-	5	-
	Omission of Article	3	-	-
5	Pronoun	4	4	-
6	Conjunction			
	Wrong Conjunction	6	1	-
	Addition of Conjunction	6	1	-
7	Object	-	5	-
8	Redundancy	5	4	2
9	Passive Voice	16	-	-
10	Adjunct and Modifier	4	1	-
11	Parallel Construction	-	5	-
12	Miscellaneous	3	-	-
<b>Total</b>		122	97	6

## FREQUENCY OF ERRORS

The analysis shows a wider range of error categories. This means that the percentage varies. The highest percentage is recorded for vocabulary (50.52%) which includes the use of Indonesian words and abbreviations (16.45%), the mismatch of lexical system (10.67%), superfluous expressions (2.22%), use of Indonesian words which are slightly modified (1.78%), false friends in form (1.78%), false friends which are similar in meaning (12.89%), and wordiness (4.89%).

The next most significant errors are recorded for preposition (10.67%), passive voice (7.11%), conjunction (6.23%), redundancy (4.89%), affixation, pronoun, and article (3.56%). The next highest percentage is adjunct and modifier (2.22%), object (2.22%), parallel construction (2.22%), tenses (1.34%) and errors which are categorized as miscellaneous (1.34%).

Table 2. Frequency of Errors

Linguistic Category (Vocabulary & Grammar)	Interlingual	Develop- mental	Others	Sum	%
<b>Vocabulary</b>					
Indo. Words/Phrases	37	-	-	37	16.45
Mismatch of Lexical System	24	-	-	24	10.67
Superfluous Expression	5	-	-	5	2.22
Modified Indonesian words	4	-	-	4	1.78
Similarity in Form	-	4	-	4	1.78
Similarity in meaning	-	30	-	29	12.89
Wordiness	-	11	-	11	4.89
<b>Grammar</b>					
Preposition	1	23	-	24	10.67
Passive Voice	16	-	-	16	7.11
Conjunction	13	1	-	14	6.23
Redundancy	5	4	2	11	4.89
Affixation	-	6	3	9	4
Pronoun	4	4	-	8	3.56
Article	3	5	-	8	3.56
Adjunct and Modifier	4	-	-	4	1.7
Object	5	-	-	5	2.22
Parallel Construction	-	5	-	5	2.22
Tenses	-	2	1	3	1.34
Miscellaneous	3	-	-	3	1.34
<b>Total</b>	122	97	6	225	100%

Having described the errors linguistically, I will proceed to present the sources of errors. This activity involves both the fields of linguistics and psycholinguistics (Corder, 1981). This would state the way in which the textbook writers deviate from the rules of the target language, and why they disregard or break the rules.

In general, the errors seem to have three main characteristics. First, there are errors which bear a strong resemblance to the characteristics of the L1. The second denotes errors which resemble to the TL. Finally, there are very few errors which resemble to neither L1 nor TL. The three phenomena have led me to conclude that they are triggered by four major sources: (1) strategy of L2 communication, (2) language transfer, (3) overgeneralization of TL linguistic materials, and (4) psychological and external pressure. Consider these examples.

- (1) The *wayang kulit* performance needs, [...] (Code switch to L1)
- (2) L1: Menurut pendapatmu bagaimana orang-orang [...] IL: According to your opinion how do people [...]?
- (3) IL: [...] besides that he does not need [...]. L2: [...] beside that he does not need [...].
- (4) Everyone should sport to make *our* body healthy.

In conclusion, the sources or causes of errors made by the textbook writers in this study can be summarized below. First, errors that reflect the rules, forms, or vocabulary item of the textbook writers' first language, might be triggered by several factors such as:

1. They are forced to communicate things beyond their target language mastery (external pressure);
2. They consciously use strategy of word-for-word translation; They switch into their native language in either unmodified or slightly modified in order to be able to convey cultural-bound ideas (communicative strategy);
3. They try to reduce their learning burden by relying themselves to what they have already known, mother tongue, (transfer strategy) and
4. They use over extension of analogy that they misuse vocabulary items which share semantic feature.

Second, errors which cannot be traced back to their first language might have been resulted from the following factors:

1. It is obvious that the textbook writers' linguistic knowledge of the TL is insufficient;
2. The acquired vocabulary and grammatical rules are quite limited;
3. In coping with the inherent complexity of the target language, they rely on what they have already known about the TL (overgeneralization);
4. They incompletely apply the rules of the TL they have already mastered;
5. They are careless especially when writing long and complex sentences; and
6. They seem to be forced to express meanings beyond their linguistic knowledge.

## CONCLUSION

In this investigation, I have accumulated 225 sentences containing errors. In terms of linguistic categories, there are two major linguistic elements affected by errors: vocabulary and grammar. Vocabulary errors, which include seven categories, constitute the major errors found throughout the texts (50.52%). Grammatical errors include twelve different categories with various percentages. The highest percentage has been recorded for preposition (10.67%) and the lowest is for partitive (0.45%), (see miscellaneous errors).

Next, based on comparative taxonomy, the errors can be classified into three major classifications. The constructions which resemble to the first language are grouped into interlingual errors (54.22%). Other constructions, having similar characteristics to the target language (English), are categorized as developmental errors (43.12%). Finally, the constructions which do not resemble to both the first language as well as the target language are categorized as others (2.66%).

The present study has also presented the logical explanations of the sources of the errors. They are explainable through the underlying strategies the textbook writers have utilized when they learned the language. The analysis has revealed that there are basically four sources of errors: strategy of second language communication, language transfer, overgen-

eralization, and psychological and external pressure.

In essence, I can draw a conclusion that (1) the textbook writers have been most confronted with problems on vocabulary, especially in finding adequate equivalents for the key words. (2) They certainly have got difficulties in translating Indonesian cultural-bound words into English. In addition, they did not notice several words which seemed to be adequate equivalents but turned out to be false friends. And to make things worst, they have got inadequate capability in translation skills that they use literal translation when expressing the intended meanings. (3) The writers' language system is neither that of first nor the target language. Their language system contains elements of both the L1 and TL, it is still at the particular level similar to that of the learners. Using Selinker's term, it is a fossilized interlanguage with three major features: systematicity, permeability, and fossilization.

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