

Negative Transfer in Indonesian Youths' English Grammatical Errors on Threads

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Abstract:

This study aims to describe the profile of young Indonesians who make grammatical errors in their social media posts on Threads, focusing on the phenomenon of negative transfer from the first language (L1) to the second language (L2) as described in Robert Lado's Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis. This study explores how L1 interference affects the respondents' English language production through a qualitative descriptive approach. Research data were obtained from five Threads posts uploaded by the respondents as well as online interviews to deepen the analysis and were then analyzed to identify forms of grammatical errors reflecting negative transfer from L1 to L2. The results indicate that although the respondents had studied English in formal education for approximately six years, fundamental grammatical errors still frequently occurred, suggesting that the influence of the first language remains significant in the process of second-language production, particularly in the context of informal use on social media.

Keywords: L1 interference; profiling; Threads; grammatical errors; Indonesian EFL.

INTRODUCTION

Social media is widely used as a platform for self-expression in the digital era. Social media is regarded as a means of creating content, commenting, seeking inspiration, and expressing feelings. Social media users can easily create and share their work or opinions simply by having a personal account. This makes social media appealing, as every post can be viewed, understood, and commented on by everyone. One of the most popular social media platforms today is Threads. Threads is a digital platform founded in 2023 and has grown rapidly since then. Year-on-year comparison data from "engadget" shows that Threads is growing rapidly, up 37.8% year-on-year (Revilla, 2026). The growth of social media, which reaches users from various countries, makes the use of English increasingly important in digital interactions.

At present, English is considered essential for competing on a global scale; consequently, many young Indonesians use English on digital platforms such as Threads (Dzakira et al., 2025). This is because most social media features are currently in English, and social media users are indirectly compelled to adopt the language used on these platforms. For example, when

discussing social media, many young people today tend to use English terms such as ‘followers’ rather than the Indonesian equivalent ‘pengikut’. The abundance of terms containing English elements on social media indirectly serves as evidence that the use of English on social media is very common (Nafisah and Budiarmo 2020). However, Indonesians’ use of English still frequently contains grammatical errors.

According to Robert Lado’s theory, entitled the “Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis” (Lado, 1957), the main difficulty in learning a second language (L2) stems from the influence of the first language (L1). This theory explains that a person unconsciously tends to transfer the system of their first language when using a second language, whether in terms of vocabulary, sentence patterns or grammatical rules. Lado argues that the greater the difference between the structures of L1 and L2, the greater the likelihood of linguistic errors occurring. These differences can give rise to a phenomenon known as “negative transfer”, whereby speakers apply the rules of their first language to the second language, resulting in forms that do not conform to the grammar of the target language (L2). Therefore, the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis is used to understand how the influence of the first language can be one of the main causes of grammatical errors in the process of learning and using a second language.

In the Indonesian context, this phenomenon becomes even more apparent because Indonesian does not have verb forms that change according to tense or aspect. Verbs such as “makan” are used to express actions that have already taken place, are currently taking place, or are yet to take place. Time markers are usually indicated only through additional words such as “sudah”, “sedang”, or “akan”. Meanwhile, English has a more complex grammatical system because changes in tense must be marked through verb forms and the use of auxiliary verbs, such as eat, ate, eaten, and eating. It is this difference in structure that often leads Indonesian learners to apply Indonesian language patterns to English literally. Consequently, various grammatical errors arise, such as the use of inappropriate verb forms, the omission of auxiliary verbs, or the use of the words “already” and “done” as direct translations of the word “sudah”. This demonstrates that the influence of the first language remains highly dominant in the process of second-language production.

Based on previous research, it can be concluded that grammatical errors are still frequently found among English language users in Indonesia, both in academic contexts and on social

media. However, research specifically describing the profile of grammatical errors made by Indonesian teenagers on Threads remains limited. Furthermore, previous research has not specifically employed Robert Lado's (1957) "Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis" (CAH) as the primary theoretical framework for analysing the influence of Indonesian on the use of English on social media. Therefore, this study aims to describe the profile of grammatical errors still made by Indonesian teenagers on Threads and to analyse the influence of Indonesian language transfer on English usage based on Robert Lado's CAH theory.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Error and Interference Learning in EFL.

Language errors are an integral part of the foreign language learning process, as learners often produce language forms that deviate from the rules of the target language (TL/L2). According to Brown (2000), an error is a systematic deviation from native speaker grammar that reflects the learner's interlanguage competence, whereas a mistake occurs due to performance factors such as fatigue, memory limitations, or lack of focus. In line with this, Ellis (2008) states that errors indicate a learner's lack of mastery of the target language, whilst mistakes or interference occur when the learner actually knows the correct form but inadvertently produces an incorrect one.

In learning English as a foreign language, Indonesian learners often encounter grammatical difficulties due to structural differences between Indonesian and English. This phenomenon can be explained through the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), which discusses the transfer of the first language (L1) system into the target language (L2). Similarities in structure between languages facilitate the learning process, whereas differences have the potential to cause errors or interference. Since Indonesian lacks a tense system and verb forms as found in English, Indonesian learners often transfer Indonesian grammatical patterns when writing in English.

Several previous studies have examined the grammatical errors made by Indonesian EFL learners. A study conducted by Salma Mu'min Shiddiq (2023) examined lexical and grammatical errors in Indonesian-to-English translation texts produced by Indonesian students as EFL learners. The results of the study showed that grammatical errors were more prevalent than lexical errors, with omissions being the most frequently found type of error.

Grammatical Errors in Social Media Context.

Another study conducted by Angela M. Sihotang (2021) examined grammatical errors in English-language posts on Facebook and Instagram. The study found that omissions, misformations, misordering and additions were the most frequently occurring types of errors, with omissions being the most prevalent. Omission occurs when an important element in the structure of an English sentence, such as auxiliary verbs, articles, or tense markers, is omitted, resulting in a sentence form that does not conform to the rules of English grammar. Meanwhile, misformation occurs when users employ an incorrect word form or structure, misordering arises from the inappropriate placement of sentence elements, and addition occurs due to the inclusion of grammatical elements that are not actually required.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to describe the profile of young Indonesians who still make grammatical errors when using English on Threads. The qualitative descriptive method was chosen because this study focuses on gaining an in-depth understanding of linguistic phenomena through data in the form of words, social media posts and interview findings. According to Bogdan and Taylor (2008), qualitative research is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people, as well as observed behaviour. This approach is considered suitable for analysing the phenomenon of grammatical errors influenced by the transfer from the first language (L1) to the second language (L2) based on Robert Lado's (1957) Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis.

Data collection was carried out by searching for posts on Threads using specific keywords such as "already" and "done" to find posts suspected of containing grammatical errors due to the influence of Indonesian. From the search results, the researchers randomly selected posts that showed patterns of grammatical errors, then contacted the account owners via direct message to ask for their consent to participate as research respondents.

After obtaining consent, the researchers conducted semi-structured online interviews to gather information about the respondents' backgrounds, such as their education, the language used in their daily lives, their habits regarding the use of or exposure to English, their use of subtitles when watching English-language films, and their interest in the English language. The research

data, comprising posts and interview results, was then analysed in several stages: identifying grammatical errors, comparing Indonesian and English language structures, and interpreting the influence of first language (L1) transfer on second language (L2) use. Data analysis was conducted using Robert Lado's Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis to examine the influence of the first language on the occurrence of grammatical errors in the use of English in respondents' posts on Threads (Lado, 1957).

To uphold research ethics, respondents' identities have been anonymised using initials to protect their privacy and the confidentiality of their personal data. The information obtained from respondents remains consistent with the original data; however, their personal identities are not directly disclosed to safeguard their confidentiality, thereby ensuring that respondents feel safer and more at ease throughout the research process. Furthermore, all participation was voluntary, following an explanation to respondents regarding the research objectives, data collection procedures, and the use of research data. Respondents' consent was obtained prior to the interviews, ensuring that this research respects their rights, comfort, and freedom to participate.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following table shows the profile of respondents who made grammatical errors when using English on Threads. This profile includes age, educational background, everyday language use, level of exposure to English, and habits regarding the use of English in daily life and on social media.

Table 1. Analysis of Grammatical Errors and Respondents' Profiles

Data	Education	English Interest	Specific a Found	Dat	Linguistic Analysis (Lado's Theory)
Z; y.o	20 University; History	5/5	"I doneee today,	eat 3	Negative transfer of Indonesian "sudah".

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N; y.o	19	University: Data Science	2/5	"I already eat this pasta but still very hungry"	Omission of auxiliary "have".
K; y.o	19	University: Law	4/5	"Can somebody tell me how to removed a paint stain from a clothes? I already wash it 1829293times but it wont come off??"	Literal translation of the Indonesian aspect marker.
R; y.o	19	University: Arabic Literature	3/5	"I have learning editing, and its so frustrating"	Confusion of perfect and continuous aspects.
O; y.o	18	University; English Literature	5/5	"bruuhhh im done the assignment im going to sleep now 😴"	Lexical transfer using "done" as a verb.

Description of Respondent Data

The first respondent, Z, is 20 years old and comes from Surabaya. In daily life, he uses Indonesian and Javanese. He is currently studying for a Bachelor's degree in History at a university in East Java. The respondent has never taken English language courses outside formal education and rarely studies English independently. His exposure to English is relatively low as he seldom consumes English-language content or reads English texts on social media. When watching English-language films, he prefers to use Indonesian subtitles. Nevertheless, the respondent quite often uses English in captions or comments on social media. When using English, he admits that he often translates from Indonesian first before writing. The respondent also feels a lack of confidence in his English grammar skills, but has a keen interest in learning English.

The second respondent, N, is 19 years old and comes from Sidoarjo. In daily life, he uses Indonesian and Javanese. He is currently studying for a Bachelor's degree in Data Science at a university in East Java. The respondent has never taken English language courses outside formal education and rarely studies English independently. His exposure to English is moderate, as he occasionally consumes English-language content via social media and reads English texts in novels or on social media. When watching English-language films, he prefers

to use Indonesian subtitles. His use of English in daily life is also still limited and is more frequently used in the context of academic assignments or specific social media platforms. The respondent admits that he still often translates from Indonesian into English first when writing and feels that his English grammar skills are not yet very good.

The third respondent, K, is 19 years old and comes from Sidoarjo. In daily life, they use Indonesian. They are currently studying for a Bachelor's degree in Law at a university in East Java. The respondent has never taken an English language course outside of formal education, but occasionally studies English independently. Their exposure to English is relatively high, particularly through music and social media. When watching English-language films, the respondent prefers to use Indonesian subtitles. Although they rarely use English in everyday conversation, the respondent is quite active in using English in captions and comments on Threads. When using English, the respondent admits to still often translating from Indonesian first and feels a lack of confidence in their English grammar.

The fourth respondent, R, is 19 years old and comes from Ternate. In daily life, they use Indonesian and the Ternate regional language. They are currently studying for a Bachelor's degree in Arabic Literature at a university in Central Java. The respondent has never taken an English language course outside of formal education, but occasionally studies English independently. The respondent's exposure to English is classified as low to moderate, as they only occasionally consume English-language content via social media and watch films with Indonesian subtitles. In daily life, the respondent's use of English is very limited and is generally only used for specific academic purposes. The respondent admits to frequently translating from Indonesian into English before writing or speaking and feels a lack of confidence in their English grammar skills.

The fifth respondent, O, is 18 years old and comes from Gresik. In daily life, he uses Indonesian. He is currently studying for a Bachelor's degree in English Literature at a university in East Java. The respondent has never taken English language courses outside of formal education, but occasionally studies English independently. He consumes English-language content quite frequently, particularly music, social media and international football news. He has also started getting into the habit of watching English-language films with English subtitles as a way to practise his language skills. In daily life, his use of English is still limited

to academic contexts, social media, or specific forms of communication. Despite having significant exposure to and a strong interest in English, the respondent admits that he still often translates things into Indonesian first before using English and still feels a lack of confidence in his English grammar skills.

Discussion

The data shows that all respondents have experience of learning English through formal education, but the majority have never taken English language courses outside of school or university. Most respondents also still use Indonesian as their primary language in daily life and tend to use Indonesian subtitles when watching English-language films.

The interview results also indicate that the majority of respondents still have a habit of translating from Indonesian into English before writing or speaking in English. This habit suggests that the respondents' English language production is still heavily influenced by the structure of their first language (L1). These findings support Robert Lado's Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, which states that structural differences between the first and second languages can lead to 'negative transfer'.

Interestingly, some respondents still made grammatical errors despite having a fairly high level of interest in and exposure to English. Respondent O, for example, is an English Literature student and consumes English-language content quite frequently, yet still produced phrases such as "I'm done with the assignment". This suggests that a high level of interest in English does not necessarily translate into grammatical accuracy.

CONCLUSION(S)

This study shows that grammatical errors in the use of English in Threads posts are influenced not only by a lack of understanding of grammar but also by the influence of the first language (L1) on the production of the second language (L2). Based on the respondents' profiles, the majority use Indonesian as their primary language in daily life and still have a habit of translating from Indonesian into English before writing or speaking. Furthermore, the majority of respondents have never taken English language courses outside formal education and gain most of their exposure to English through social media, music, films and the internet.

The research findings also indicate that a high level of interest in or exposure to English is not always accompanied by grammatical accuracy. Some respondents who use English quite actively and frequently consume English-language content still make grammatical errors, suggesting the presence of 'negative transfer' from Indonesian to English. This finding supports Robert Lado's Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, which states that structural differences between a first language and a second language can cause interference in the use of the second language. Therefore, this study demonstrates that user profiles, language usage habits, and exposure to English are linked to the occurrence of grammatical errors in the use of English on social media platforms such as Threads.

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