

SYNTACTIC INTERFERENCE OF THE INDONESIAN LANGUAGE IN INTERMEDIATE-LEVEL GERMAN COMPOSITION

¹Rount Maulero, ^{1*}Hayatul Cholsy

¹Language and Literature, Faculty of Cultural Science, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Jl. Bulaksumur, Caturtunggal, Sleman, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author Email: cholsy-h@ugm.ac.id

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Abstract

This study examines the phenomenon of syntactic interference arising from the structural differences between Indonesian (L1) and German (L2) in compositions written by B1-level students. The primary objective was to systematically identify, categorize, and analyze the specific forms of negative transfer. Utilizing the error analysis framework established by Corder and James, the data comprising 21 student compositions, were rigorously classified into systematic errors and incidental mistakes. The analysis revealed 15 distinct types of syntactic interference, predominantly involving critical German structures such as verb conjugation, word order (in both main and subordinate clauses), and the use of prepositions. The most frequently occurring form of negative transfer was observed in German verb conjugation errors. The overwhelming classification of observed instances as errors confirms a deep-seated negative transfer from the mother tongue to the target language system. These findings possess significant educational value, as they precisely map the areas where Indonesian speakers require the most targeted linguistic intervention. The results strongly recommend the integration of a contrastive learning approach and emphasize the urgent need for reinforcement activities that specifically build syntactic awareness in German instruction. This research serves as an evidence-based tool for practitioners, guiding the refinement of curriculum and pedagogical strategies to effectively minimize recurrent interference and enhance the precision of L2 acquisition at the intermediate level.

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INTRODUCTION

In the process of acquiring a foreign language, particularly German, by native Indonesian speakers, language interference is a frequent linguistic phenomenon that deserves in-depth study. Second language acquisition, whether through formal learning or independent efforts, is inseparable from the influence of the first language structure, which tends to be carried over into foreign language production (Syahid, 2015). This interference often gives rise to errors, both in spoken and written forms, particularly in syntactic aspects. Syntax, as a system of regulating the relationships between words and phrases in a sentence, plays a crucial role in conveying meaning accurately (Raymondra & Bukhori, 2021). In this context, the syntactic structure of Indonesian that has been formed in the minds of learners becomes the primary source of errors when constructing sentences in German. Therefore, it is important to further examine how Indonesian syntactic patterns influence the writing abilities of intermediate-level German students.

Language interference is a linguistic phenomenon characterized by the incorporation of elements from one language system into another, resulting in a wide range of syntax, an internal element within a language. Syntax is a branch of linguistics that studies the relationships between words in forming phrases, clauses, and sentences. Each of these elements has a specific syntactic function within a sentence. For example, a phrase can function as a subject, predicate, or object. This syntactic structure is found not only at the sentence level but also at the broader discourse level. German, for example, has a unique syntactic system with distinctive word order patterns (Raymondra & Bukhori, 2021). This differs from the syntactic system of Indonesian. These two languages have very different structures due to their origins from different language families: Indo-European (German) and Austronesian (Indonesian). These structural differences have implications for differences in how to form sentences, use words, and understand texts, including mastering the four language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing, which are highly dependent on vocabulary mastery and understanding the unique grammatical structures of each language (Kokomaking et al., 2023).

German and Indonesian syntax differ (Septianingtrias et al., 2024). In terms of word order, Indonesian allows verbs to be placed in more than just the second position. For example, in the sentence: *“Tonight I eat.”* In this declarative sentence, the adverb of time occupies the first position, followed by the subject, and ends with the predicate, a verb. In German, the predicate or verb must be in the second position, so the sentence in German would be: *“Heute Abend esse ich.”* Based on the sentence order in German, the sentence begins with the adverb of time, followed by the predicate, and ends with the subject.

Several studies have highlighted lexical and syntactic interference in various contexts. Satrio & Aryanto (2025) examined interference in the Japanese film *“Detective Conan: Kurogane no Submarine,”* showing how the mixture of English in Japanese dialogue reflects the influence of globalization. This study highlights how syntactic and lexical deviations arise from exposure to foreign languages in popular media. In the context of German language learning, Makukhina (2024) examined Ukrainian and English interference on German grammar, finding that English influences were more dominant in disrupting German grammar comprehension than Ukrainian, particularly in morphosyntactic aspects such as word order, article use, and case system. While these studies establish the prevalence of L1 interference in L2 learning, comprehensive, in-depth studies specifically focusing on the systematic identification and classification of syntactic errors made by Indonesian B1-level students in complex written German compositions remain limited.

The use of the mother tongue in everyday life sometimes impacts the foreign language used. Often, these linguistic influences result in pronunciation, word usage, or language combinations that tend to create new meanings within the language. This combination of languages leads to language interference. Within the branch of syntactic linguistics, the concept of language interference is an important area of study (Firmansyah, 2021). This undeniable fact also occurs during language learning in the classroom. In German language learning, the use of Indonesian as the mother tongue still dominates, so the tendency for Indonesian language interference to occur in German requires further study. German language learners in Indonesia often make language errors due to the influence of their first language, Indonesian, on their second foreign language, German.

This study addresses a critical gap in the existing literature by providing a systematic, fine-grained error analysis of complex Indonesian-German syntactic interference, particularly focusing on the structural deviations found in the verb-final positions of subordinate clauses and complex sentence structures, aspects often untouched by broader comparative studies. The focus on B1-level compositions, written as preparation for CEFR standard exams, provides data with high ecological validity, directly applicable to current Indonesian curricula.

Several factors can cause language interference, namely: 1) The use of two languages by speakers, 2) Lack of commitment in using a second language, 3) Limited vocabulary in the language being studied, 4) Elimination of rarely used vocabulary, 5) The need to find synonyms, 6) The influence of status and language style, and 7) Habits carried over from the mother tongue (Kokomaking et al., 2023). This research aims to analyze the influence of Indonesian syntax in German writings produced by intermediate-level students. Based on the identified gaps and the critical structural differences between the two languages, this research seeks to answer the question of what specific forms of Indonesian syntactic interference are present in the German written compositions produced by intermediate (B1)-level students. The writings are in the form of free essays in a formal electronic letter/email format written by students at level B1. This essay is given as a preparation medium for a simulation exam at level B1 based on the Common European Frame of Reference for Languages (*CEFR*) standards. With the support of various studies related to *CEFR*, it is hoped that the Indonesian government, as the party designing the curriculum, can pay more attention to the importance of the reference framework in language learning. This is expected to encourage various parties in Indonesia, including the government, educational institutions, experts, and teachers, to collaborate in adapting and implementing *the CEFR*, taking into account Indonesian culture and educational goals, or even to formulate and design a new language learning reference framework (Robbani et al., 2023).

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This research employs a descriptive method with a qualitative approach. The descriptive methodology, as defined by Sugiyono (2010), is utilized to systematically describe and analyze research findings without aiming for broad generalization, focusing instead on in-depth contextual interpretation. The qualitative approach was specifically chosen because the study's primary goal is to identify, classify, and interpret the underlying linguistic reasons for syntactic interference. Unlike a quantitative approach, which focuses on frequency counts and statistical correlation, the qualitative method allows for a detailed linguistic analysis of the structures of the errors (*what* the error is) and the probable source (*why* the error occurred due to L1 influence), which is essential for error analysis. This methodological choice supports the goal of providing actionable pedagogical insights rather than merely reporting numerical trends (Salehi & Bahrami, 2018).

Research Population

The subjects of this study were 21 students enrolled in the 4th semester of the German Language Education study program at the State University of Malang. These students were purposefully selected as they were actively participating in an intensive German language exam preparation course at Level B1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Data collection was conducted through direct observation instruments in the classroom, which was carried out on 23 March 2025. The results of electronic mail/email compositions were collected as data sources. Students were asked to write an essay with a minimum of 80 words, in accordance with the German language exam standards at level B1. In the question instructions, students were asked to provide several information, including: apologizing for not being able to attend the course, providing reasons for the situation, and requesting that homework be collected on Saturday.

Instruments

The data sources were clauses and sentences in student-composed texts containing Indonesian syntactic interference. The data were collected as part of preparation for the German language exam at level B1. The data collection technique used purposive sampling, which involves self-determining the research subjects to be selected based on specific considerations.

Purposive sampling is a non-random sampling method. Researchers intentionally select individuals or groups who meet certain criteria relevant to the research objectives. hope to provide appropriate information to answer research problems (Lenaini, 2021) . The data sources were clauses and sentences in student-composed texts containing evidence of Indonesian syntactic interference. The data were collected through an observational instrument: a free-essay assignment written in a formal electronic letter/email format, designed to simulate a written task from a standardized B1 German language exam.

Students were required to write a composition with a minimum of 80 words, fulfilling specific communicative functions (e.g., apologizing for absence, providing a reason, and requesting a homework submission extension). The essays were written under timed conditions (45 minutes, reflecting standard exam constraints) to generate spontaneous production data and minimize self-correction, thereby capturing natural L1 transfer tendencies. The use of purposive sampling involved intentionally selecting these specific compositions for analysis, as they meet the criterion of being authentic B1-level German writing produced by Indonesian speakers. To ensure the accuracy and reliability of the error identification and classification, inter-rater reliability was applied. A German native speaker or an expert in German linguistics, besides the main researcher, was utilized to independently review and classify a subset of the identified errors. This process of expert consultation (triangulation) helped validate the correct German structure and confirm the diagnosis of the errors as genuine syntactic deviations rather than simple performance mistakes.

Data Analysis

The data obtained were then analyzed in line with James & Corder's (1981) theory of *errors* and *mistakes*. During the research phase, the data sources were carefully read and analyzed based on German and Indonesian syntax to identify any syntactic interference from Indonesian. The analysis was conducted based on the written text, which was then recorded and compiled to be presented in a table format. Each piece of data are numbered to facilitate analysis and coding. Furthermore, the interfering sentences represent sentences in German compositions influenced by Indonesian. In this section, the sentences are left in their error-prone state to identify the form of interference they contain. In the sentence structure sections of both Indonesian and German, the meaning and structure of sentences that previously experienced interference are revised in accordance with Indonesian and German syntactic rules.

Theoretical Framework

In compiling this research, the researcher used the theory of language errors by James and Corder (1981). According to them, two factors cause language errors: errors originating from the language itself or the target language (*intra-lingual*), and errors caused by the influence of the first language or external factors from outside the language (*inter-lingual*) (Qalbi et al., 2022) . Language errors can be grouped into four categories: (1) omission of language elements in sentences (*omission*), (2) addition of language elements in sentences (*addition*), (3) inaccuracy of word formation in sentences (*misformation*), and (4) inaccuracy of word order in sentences (*misordering*). First, the data is collected in a table based on the type of interference, whether it includes *omission*, *addition*, *misformation*, or *misordering*. After that, the data is grouped again into *errors* and *mistakes*. Next, the data is presented descriptively, with an explanation of the interference found in the sentence and suggestions for improvement for the sentence.

The concept of Error Analysis was first introduced by Corder (1967) as a systematic approach used by language teachers and researchers to trace errors in students' language production. This process includes collecting language data, identifying error types, in-depth descriptions of these types, classifying them by category and cause, and evaluating the impact of errors on students' comprehension. The ultimate goal is to answer one crucial question: what

have students truly understood, and where do they misunderstand? With this approach, teachers can not only point out that a construction is incorrect but also provide feedback that shapes students' understanding of language rules more accurately (Corder, 1974).

One of the early milestones in this study was Richards' (1971) research, which explored language errors from learners with diverse mother tongue backgrounds, including Japanese, Chinese, French, Polish, and Indian and West African languages. Richards' findings included errors in the use of key structures such as verbs, prepositions, articles, and interrogative sentences (Heydari & Bagheri, 2012). He identified three main sources of errors: interference error, intralingual errors, and developmental errors.

Interference Error occurs when rules from the mother tongue “infiltrate” the target language. For example, a German learner might say “*Ich habe keine Buch*” when they should actually say “*Ich habe kein Buch.*” This error occurs due to the influence of other language structures that are incorrectly applied to German. Intralingual Errors arise from an immature understanding of the language system being studied. For example, “*Ich fahren ins Kino*” illustrates the incorrect application of verb conjugation, when the correct form is “*Ich fahre ins Kino.*” Meanwhile, the developmental errors relate to the hypotheses students form when trying to understand a new language based on limited experience. Sentences like “*Ich will gehen zum Arzt*” are examples of this error, where the sentence structure doesn't conform to the accepted rule, which is “*Ich will zum Arzt gehen.*”

Furthermore, James (1998) describes Error Analysis as an attempt to understand the dynamics and consequences of inappropriate language use. Sharma (1980) emphasizes the crucial role of this analysis in supporting remedial learning, namely as a bridge between error and improvement. With this analysis, teaching programs can not only identify students' weaknesses but also celebrate successes in the language learning process.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

Based on the rigorous error analysis of the 21 German compositions, the study successfully identified and categorized the specific forms of Indonesian syntactic interference, directly addressing the research questions. The findings confirmed that Indonesian L1 exerts a noticeable negative transfer onto the German L2 production of B1-level learners. The observed interlingual errors were systematically classified, primarily falling under the categories of Misformation (morphosyntactic errors) and Misordering (syntactic errors). A total of 15 distinct data sets containing clear syntactic interference were identified and grouped into three primary categories: Verb Conjugation Errors, Word Order Deviations, and Prepositional Additions.

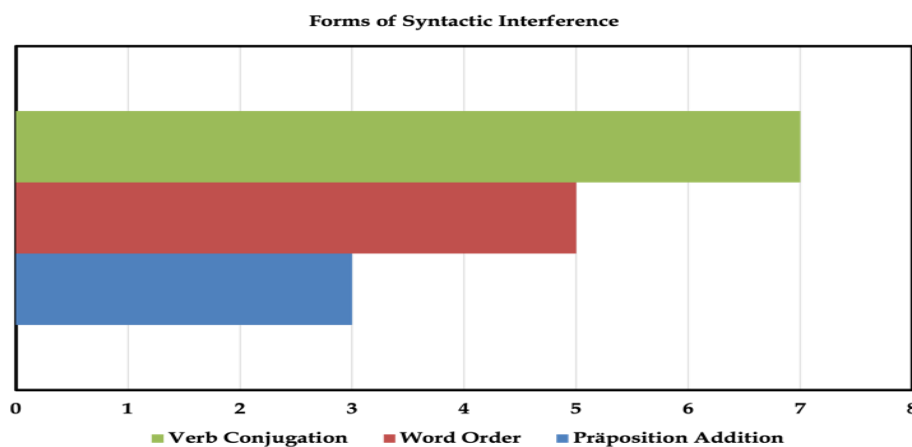


Figure 1. Forms of Interference in German Essays

The analysis revealed that Verb Conjugation Interference was the most frequent form of negative transfer, occupying the highest position with 7 data sets. This finding is highly significant and directly answers the objective of identifying the most frequent interference form. The dominance of this error is directly linked to the fundamental contrast between German (a highly inflected language requiring verb adjustment for person, number, and tense) and Indonesian (an uninflected language). Learners frequently revert to the simple, uninflected structure of their L1, confirming a strong case of negative transfer impacting German inflectional morphology.

Following verb conjugation, Word Order Deviations were identified in 5 data sets. These errors primarily involved violations of the mandatory German word order rules, such as the V2 rule in main clauses and the verb-final rule in subordinate clauses. This structural competition between the L1's SVO flexibility and the strict German rules indicates that the abstract syntactic structure of German remains a challenge for intermediate learners. Lastly, Prepositional Addition interference was noted in 3 data sets, often resulting from the direct, literal translation of Indonesian phrases without accounting for German verbs that govern case directly or require different prepositions.

Discussion

Word Order Interference in Sentences

One of the most common forms of syntactic interference in the writing of intermediate German learners is word order interference. This phenomenon occurs when the syntactic patterns of Indonesian, as a first language, are transferred directly into German sentence constructions, which have a much stricter and more regular word order system (Odlin, 1989; Ringbom, 2007). Indonesian generally adheres to a relatively free Subject–Predicate–Object–Adverb (SPOK) pattern, while German has the rule of *Verb-zweite-Stellung (V2)* in main sentences and *Verb-end-Stellung* in subordinate sentences (Helbig & Buscha, 2013).

This fundamental difference often causes confusion for learners who are still at the interlanguage stage, where the first and second language systems interact and influence each other (Selinker, 1972; Ellis, 2008). In this context, learners often produce sentences that are semantically understandable, but grammatically inconsistent with German norms. For example, sentences like “*weil ich gehe jeden Tag*” should be “*weil ich jeden Tag gehe*”, or “*Ich gehe oft in Markt*” should be “*Ich gehe oft auf den Markt.*” These errors illustrate the application of the Indonesian language pattern of placing the verb after the subject, without considering the rules of verb position in German (Dahl & Koptjevskaja-Tamm, 2001).

Furthermore, this phenomenon also demonstrates how negative transfer plays a role in the process of foreign language acquisition. Negative transfer occurs when the structure of the first language inappropriately influences the production of the second language (Weinreich, 1953; Gass & Selinker, 2008). In the case of German learners, word order interference indicates that their syntactic thinking patterns are still heavily influenced by the Indonesian language system. Analysis of the form, frequency, and patterns of these word order errors can provide important insights into the extent to which the structure of the mother tongue influences German sentence construction and the development of learners' syntactic competence at the intermediate level (James, 1998).

In Indonesian sentences, the subject is generally placed first, preceding the predicate, followed by the predicate before the object. In German, the object or subject does not always have to be first, but can also be placed before or after the predicate. Syntactic rules in German state that the predicate is placed second, as in declarative sentences (*Aussagesatz*). In German, verbs *are* conjugated based on person, number, tense, type of verb, and mood (Syahid & Hadi, 2019). There are at least five data of word order interference in sentences out of a total of fifteen data. This interference occurs in the placement of the subject after the adverb and followed by the predicate after the subject. The predicate in this case is a verb placed after the

subject that was previously contained an adverb of time. In the first data there is interference that occurs due to the presence of the adverb of time “*am Mittwoch ich bin nicht in den Sprachkurs gekommen*”, this sentence shows an incorrect predicate order because in German, the order of the predicate should be after the position of the adverb of time, so unlike in Indonesian, the predicate is placed after the subject. The sentence also contains the past perfect tense / *Perfekt* which requires the use of two types of verbs. However, the position of the predicate should be after the adverb “*am Mittwoch.*”

Based on the data findings, there is interference in the order of word types in German, which follows the order of word types in Indonesian. In this sentence, it can be seen that after the adverb “*in den nächsten Mittwoch*” is followed by a direct subject and continued with a predicate. This is the same as the order in Indonesian. When there is a time adverb, it is followed by the subject and predicate. This is different from the order in German, so the correct one is “*In den nächsten Mittwoch kann ich nicht in den Kurs kommen, ...*” The predicate is in second position after the adverb and is followed by the subject after it. In this sentence, there is also the use of the modal verb “*konnen*”. The predicate is a sentence element that has a fixed position and functions as a center for other elements in the main sentence (declarative sentence). In German language rules, verbs can be recognized based on their position in the sentence, namely verbs placed in second position, verbs placed at the beginning of the sentence, and verbs at the end of the sentence (Syahid & Hadi, 2019).

The word order interference in this data demonstrates the influence of Indonesian sentence structure on German sentence construction. As seen in two of the five samples, speakers consistently use the adverb–subject–predicate order, following the Indonesian pattern, rather than the German pattern that requires the main verb to be in second position in declarative sentences (*V2-Stellung*). This indicates cross-linguistic syntactic transfer, which is common among second language (L2) learners (Odlin, 1989). In German, a time adverb can precede a sentence, but this requires the second position in the sentence to be filled by the main verb or auxiliary verb. As explained by Helbig & Buscha (2001), the position of the verb in the main sentence must not shift to third or higher positions due to the placement of the subject after the time adverb. Therefore, a structure such as “*am Mittwoch ich bin...*” is a structural error that distorts the basic rules of German word order.

This interference case becomes more complex when it involves the construction of the *perfect* (past tense) and modal verbs. For example, in a *perfect* sentence like “*bin ich gekommen*”, the auxiliary verb *bin* should be placed in second position and the second participle (*partizip II*), *gekommen*, at the end of the sentence. Likewise, modal verbs like *kann* should be placed in the second position and followed by *an infinitive* at the end. Ignorance of the duality of verb positions in *perfect* and modal verbs is the main cause of this structural error (Durrell, 2011). This word order error not only impacts the grammaticality of the sentence but can also cause ambiguity or confusion in understanding by native German speakers (Kimambo, 2025). These errors generally do not completely impede communication but give the impression of “foreign” and less natural language use, especially in formal contexts (Bardovi & Harlig, 2000).

Interference in the Use of Verb Conjugation

In addition to word order, prominent interference in the compositions of intermediate German learners also occurs in the use of verb conjugation. These errors are rooted in significant morphological differences between Indonesian and German. Indonesian does not recognize verb conjugation based on subject, tense, or aspect; while German has a complex conjugation system, involving changes in verb form according to person, number, tense, and mood (Helbig & Buscha, 2013; Dudenredaktion, 2016).

The absence of a conjugation system in Indonesian causes learners to frequently apply negative transfer by using the base form of the verb without adjusting it to the appropriate

subject or tense (Odlin, 1989). For example, forms such as “*Ich gehen*” appear instead of “*Ich gehe*” or “*Er spielen Fußball*” instead of “*Er spielt Fußball.*” These errors indicate that learners have not fully internalized the morphological change patterns of verbs in German, especially in the relationship between subject and predicate.

According to interlanguage theory (Selinker, 1972), errors such as these reflect the intermediate language system formed during the acquisition process. In this stage, learners create a temporary linguistic system influenced by both their first language and second language input (Ellis, 2008). In the context of German learners in Indonesia, this morphological interference can be understood as a result of the typological differences between the two languages: isolative Indonesian and flexive German (Comrie, 1989; Bybee, 2015).

In addition, verb conjugation errors often arise due to *overgeneralization*, which is the application of the correct rule to the wrong context. For example, learners may learn that many regular verbs end in *-t* in the third person singular (*er spielt, sie arbeitet*), and then generalize this pattern to irregular verbs, such as “*er geht*” becoming “*er gehtet*”. This phenomenon is in line with the view that the process of second language acquisition involves hypothetical strategies and rule adjustments based on the input received (Lightbown & Spada, 2013; Gass & Selinker, 2008).

Analysis of verb conjugation errors is important because it is directly related to the development of learners' grammatical competence (Soltani et al., 2020). The frequency and pattern of conjugation errors can be indicators of the level of mastery of German verbal morphology and the extent to which learners have successfully adapted to the target grammatical system. Therefore, a deeper understanding of these forms of interference can contribute to the design of more effective learning strategies, particularly in teaching German grammar and verb conjugation to Indonesian speakers (James, 1998; Ringbom, 2007).

In German, verb conjugation is based on the use of personal pronouns and tense. German tenses begin with *Futur* (future tense), *Präsens* (present tense), *Präteritum* (past tense), *Perfekt* (perfect tense), and *Plusquamperfekt* (past perfect tense). Verbs in German use the infinitive ending in *-en* or *-n*. For example, *essen* (eat), *chatten* (exchange messages), *besichtigen* (visit), *lernen* (study), and *fernsehen* (watch TV). In German, verbs are a class of words that are conjugated based on person, number, tense, verb type, and mood. This can be seen in verb endings. Based on data analysis, at least seven forms of interference in the use of verb conjugations were found in student essays.

The present study showed that there are several interferences in the use of verb conjugations. In the first data, there is interference in the subject “*ich*” which means I, and the conjugation of the verb “*entschuldigen*” which should be “*entschuldige*” because the use of the subject “*ich*” must be followed by a verb conjugation ending in *-e*. This also occurs in the second data with the conjugation of the verb “*können*” which means can in German. The correct conjugation of the verb is “*kann*” because it uses the subject “*ich*” or I. Related to modal verbs, there is interference in the use of the conjugation of the verb “*dürfen*” which means “may” in Indonesian. “*Dürfen*” is included in the modal verb whose conjugation with the subject “*ich*” should be “*darf.*”

Based on the fourth data, there is interference in the verb conjugation of the word “*haben*” with the subject “*ich*”. The conjugation should follow the rules for the subject “*ich*” to become “*habe*”. This is related to the fifth data, the subject “*meine Mutter*” which means my mother in Indonesian. The use of the conjugation “*haben*” in the subject is not correct, because the subject “*meine Mutter*” should be conjugated with the verb “*hat*”, because the subject is a third person singular feminine or in German is called “*sie.*” Conjugation is the process of changing the form of a verb, whether it is a main verb, auxiliary verb, or modal verb, which is adjusted to the subject (Kokomaking et al., 2023).

The use of conjugation in the first person pronoun, namely “*ich*”, which means I, must conjugate the verb with the ending /-e/ or /-e/. For example, “*ich habe*” which means “I have” or “*ich kann*” which means “I can”. This is the same as the use of the first person plural pronoun such as “*wir*” which means “we or us”. For example, “*wir gehen ins Kino*” which means “we go to the cinema”, the verb is conjugated with the ending /-en/. In addition to the first person pronoun, there is also the second person pronoun, namely “*du*” which means you. When using the singular conjugation, it must end with /-st/. For example, “*du gehst in den Park*” which means “you go to the park.” This also occurs with the use of the subject “*ihr*” or you, which requires the conjugation of the ending /-t/. For example, “*ihr geht in den Supermarkt*” which means “you go to the supermarket”.

For third person singular pronouns such as “*er, sie, and es*” which mean “he is male, she is female, and it is neutral” have verb conjugations with the ending /-t/. For example, the sentence “*sie geht in die Schule*” means “she is a girl going to school.” However, for third-person plural pronouns such as “*sie*” or they, the verb conjugation becomes the ending /-en/. For example, the sentence “*sie gehen in die Bibliothek*” means “they go to the library.” The role of conjugation in German is very important in determining the meaning of a sentence, so if there is a verb conjugation that differs from the rules in the table above, the meaning of the sentence may be wrong or mistaken, it is necessary to pay attention again to avoid mistakes in the use of verb conjugation in German.

Interference of Addition of Preposition

Another form of interference that frequently appears in intermediate learners' German compositions is the addition of unnecessary prepositions. This error occurs due to the direct influence of the Indonesian syntactic system, which treats prepositions more loosely and is not always strictly tied to specific case patterns or syntactic structures (Kridalaksana, 2008; Sneddon, 2010). In Indonesian, prepositions such as *di, ke, and dari* can stand alone without changing the form of the noun that follows them. In contrast, German has a complex system of prepositional reactions, where each preposition requires a specific case (accusative, dative, or genitive) and not all verbs require prepositional companions (Helbig & Buscha, 2013; Dudenredaktion, 2016).

As a result, learners often add excessive prepositions in German sentences as a form of negative transfer from Indonesian. For example, sentences such as “*Ich warte auf den Bus*” which are correct, are often misused as “*Ich warte auf auf den Bus*” or “*Ich gehe zu in die Schule*” as a result of the tendency to insert the preposition *zu* or *in* because in Indonesian verbs such as “*go to school*” always contain the preposition *ke*. This phenomenon illustrates lexico-syntactic interference, where learners try to adapt the meaning of spatial or directional relationships from Indonesian into German, but with an inappropriate structure (Odlin, 1989; James, 1998).

From an interlanguage perspective (Selinker, 1972), prepositional addition errors can be understood as learners' attempts to “bridge the grammatical gap” between two language systems. When learners have not yet fully mastered the reaction patterns of verbs and prepositions in German, they tend to add elements deemed necessary to clarify meaning relationships, as in their mother tongue (Gass & Selinker, 2008). For example, in Indonesian, semantic relationships such as direction (*to school*), place (*at home*), or origin (*from the office*) are always expressed explicitly, whereas in German these relationships are often implied through the verb or case used.

This phenomenon of adding prepositions also indicates the existence of a compensatory communication strategy (Ellis, 2008), namely a strategy where learners add language elements to ensure the message can be understood, even though it violates grammatical rules. In the context of foreign language learning, this kind of error is important to pay attention to because it indicates the stage of syntactic development of learners and also serves as a basis for

designing appropriate pedagogical interventions, for example, through contrastive exercises between Indonesian and German prepositional structures (Bybee, 2015; Ringbom, 2007).

There are at least three pieces of data from the fifteen pieces of writing found. Prepositions connect nouns to other words that appear before them. In German, some verbs already have their own prepositions. This means there's no need to add new prepositions for some of them. Below are some examples of interference with the addition of prepositions found in simple student essays. Interference with prepositional addition is one of the most common forms of syntactic deviation found in the writing of intermediate German learners. This error occurs when learners unconsciously add prepositions that are unnecessary in German structures, due to the influence of the grammatical system of Indonesian as a first language (L1). In Indonesian, semantic relationships between sentence elements are often expressed through explicit prepositions such as *to*, *for*, *in*, *to*, or *from* without changing the form of the following noun (Sneddon, 2010; Kridalaksana, 2008). Consequently, when learners transfer these meanings into German, they tend to add prepositions that are considered to have a direct equivalent meaning, without considering their actual grammatical function in the target language (Odlin, 1989).

Additionally, the findings show two examples of interference that clearly illustrate this phenomenon. In the first data, the sentence "*Ich entschuldigen mich zu Ihnen*" is the result of a literal translation from the Indonesian "*I apologize to you.*" Learners appear to assume that every expression that contains a direction or recipient of an action in Indonesian must be accompanied by an equivalent preposition in German. Therefore, the preposition *zu* is used inappropriately to represent the meaning "to." However, in German grammar, the verb *sich entschuldigen* is a reflexive verb that idiomatically requires the preposition *bei* to indicate to whom the apology is addressed (Helbig & Buscha, 2013).

The incorrect use of the preposition *zu* causes the sentence to be idiomatic and semantically confusing. In German semantics, *zu* usually indicates a concrete direction or goal, as in the sentence "*Ich gehe zu meiner Freundin*" (I go to my girlfriend). Meanwhile, in the context of an apology, the relationship in question is interpersonal, not spatial. Therefore, the appropriate preposition is *bei*, as in the sentence "*Ich entschuldige mich bei Ihnen.*" This form indicates the social relationship between the speaker and the recipient of the apology. Thus, this interference indicates a conceptual difference in the representation of relational meaning between Indonesian and German (Comrie, 1989). The second example in Table 5, "*Ich erkläre für Sie,*" shows a similar tendency. This sentence is a direct translation of "*I explain to you.*" Learners seem to assume that the preposition *für*, as the equivalent of "for," can be used to indicate the recipient of an action. However, in German, the verb *erklären* is a verb that requires an indirect object in the dative case without using a preposition. Therefore, the correct form is "*Ich erkläre Ihnen,*" where *Ihnen* is the dative form of *Sie*. This structure is not only more economical but also conforms to the argumentation pattern of verbs in German.

The prepositional addition errors in the two examples above can be explained through the concept of negative transfer, which is the application of the rules or customs of a first language to a second language with inappropriate results (Odlin, 1989; Ringbom, 2007). In this case, the learner applies the semantic rules of Indonesian that require the explicit expression of the relationship between participants with prepositions such as "to" or "for," while German often realizes this relationship through grammatical case changes. This phenomenon shows that the learner has not fully understood the relationship between verb reactions (*Verbvalenz*) and grammatical cases, which is an important aspect of German language structure (Helbig & Buscha, 2013).

From the perspective of interlanguage theory (Selinker, 1972), this prepositional interference reflects the developmental stage of the learner's language system. At this stage, the learner's internal linguistic system is intermediate between the first language and the target

language, so that forms such as “*Ich erkläre für Sie*” are considered “logical” within the Indonesian language framework, even though they do not conform to German grammar. This interlanguage is dynamic and will develop with increasing exposure to authentic input and explicit correction from the teacher (Ellis, 2008; Gass & Selinker, 2008).

Furthermore, the phenomenon of adding prepositions also indicates the existence of a compensatory communication strategy (Brown, 2007). In situations where learners are unsure of the correct structure, they add linguistic elements (such as prepositions) to ensure the message remains comprehensible to the listener. This strategy is pragmatic, with learners sacrificing grammatical correctness for the sake of comprehensibility. This reinforces the view that interference is not always a sign of linguistic incompetence, but rather an adaptive strategy in the process of second language acquisition. Pedagogically, the analysis of prepositional addition interference has important implications for teaching German to Indonesian speakers. Teachers need to emphasize the differences between the Indonesian prepositional system and the German case system through a contrastive approach and context-based exercises. Furthermore, corpus-based instruction and analysis of actual errors, as in Table 5, can help learners realize that not all relational meanings in Indonesian can be translated directly into German prepositional forms. Thus, understanding this phenomenon not only improves syntactic accuracy but also enhances learners' metalinguistic awareness, helping them avoid negative transfer at a higher level.

Error and Mistake

Based on the results of the previous data analysis, it was found that the students made several errors in the use of German that were influenced by the syntactic structure of the Indonesian language. This phenomenon indicates a form of interference that can be classified into two main categories, namely *errors* and *mistakes*, referring to the classification proposed by Corder (in Syahid & Hadi, 2019). *Errors* refer to errors that arise due to violations of the grammatical system or rules of the target language, while *mistakes* are unintentional errors, usually occurring due to carelessness or errors in choosing the right words or constructions in a particular context.

Several types of interference classified as *errors* in this study include errors in word order (syntactic sequence) in sentences, omissions of important elements in sentence structure such as subjects, verbs, reflexive pronouns, or conjunctions, and the addition of unnecessary elements, such as prepositions. Furthermore, verb conjugation errors also fall into this category, as they indicate ignorance or systematic deviation from German language rules. Meanwhile, *mistakes* refer more to errors that occur due to inappropriate word or phrase selection, without intending to violate grammatical rules. In the context of this study, errors such as the use of verbs that are inappropriate in meaning or context, errors in choosing conjunctions or adverbs, and the use of inappropriate prepositions all fall into the category of *mistakes*. These errors are often incidental and do not always indicate a lack of in-depth mastery of language structure.

Understanding the difference between *errors* and *mistakes* is crucial in the foreign language learning process because they require different corrective approaches (Al-khresheh, 2024). *Errors* require long-term attention and a strengthened understanding of grammatical concepts, while *mistakes* can be corrected through increased vigilance or repeated practice in various contexts. The theory proposed by Corder and supported by Halle (1953) explains that *errors* arise from a lack of understanding of the rules of the target language. This is particularly relevant in the context of students who still use Indonesian syntactic patterns when writing in German. This phenomenon demonstrates that the direct transfer of structures from the mother tongue to a foreign language tends to trigger *errors*.

One of the most prominent *errors* in this study was a disruption in word order and the addition of unnecessary syntactic elements. For example, the use of prepositions that do not match the demands of verbs in German or the placement of sentence elements that deviate from

the standard structure in the target language. On the other hand, the category *errors* found in this study are more contextual in nature. Students tend to make mistakes in choosing words or expressions that match the meaning they want to convey, even though the structure may not be completely wrong. This reflects the pragmatic and semantic challenges of foreign language acquisition, which often cannot be resolved solely through memorization of grammatical rules.

Corder (1981) and Brown (2007) emphasize that error analysis *has* high pedagogical value because it can help teachers understand problematic areas in second language learning and identify students' linguistic needs. By distinguishing between *errors* and *mistakes*, language teachers can design appropriate remedial strategies: systematic errors need to be corrected through explicit teaching and focused practice, while performative errors are adequately addressed with mild corrective feedback.

Therefore, in this syntactic interference study, classifying *errors* and *mistakes* is an important step in assessing the extent of the influence of Indonesian on the development of learners' German language systems. This analysis not only reveals the level of grammatical competence but also provides insight into learners' cognitive processes in building their interlanguage toward a more stable, native-like target language system (Selinker, 1972; Ellis, 2008).

Pedagogical Implication

The findings, which underscore the dominance of verb conjugation errors and word order deviations resulting from Indonesian syntactic interference, carry substantial pedagogical implications that must fundamentally influence German language instruction for Indonesian learners. Since the errors were classified as systematic *Errors* rather than *Mistakes*, the teaching approach should shift from remedial correction to proactive contrastive instruction, explicitly highlighting the structural conflicts between L1 (uninflected verbs, flexible word order) and L2 (inflected verbs, V2/verb-final rules).

This necessitates curriculum revision to integrate dedicated modules that focus on the German inflectional system and complex sentence structures, moving the finite verb to the final position in subordinate clauses. By systematically raising syntactic awareness, showing *why* the Indonesian structure is incorrect in German teachers can equip learners with the metalinguistic knowledge required to self-monitor and minimize negative transfer. However, this study is limited by its focus on a single proficiency level (B1) and its reliance solely on written composition data. Therefore, future research is highly recommended to explore syntactic interference at different proficiency levels (A2 or B2) and across diverse language skills (e.g., spoken German), potentially utilizing a mixed-methods approach to triangulate written errors with oral production data. Furthermore, investigating the efficacy of specific pedagogical interventions, such as the use of Focus on Form (FonF) techniques targeting V2 rule adherence, would provide valuable data on how effectively syntactic interference can be mitigated in the classroom setting.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis results, this study confirms that negative syntactic interference from Indonesian (L1) is a significant and systematic barrier in the written German production of B1-level students. The most dominant form of interference identified was verb conjugation errors (7 cases), followed by word order errors (5 cases), and preposition usage errors (3 cases). Verb conjugation errors indicate that learners still face profound difficulties in internalizing the German flexive morphology system, especially in achieving consistent subject-verb agreement. Meanwhile, word order errors reflect the inappropriate application of the mandatory *Verb-zweite-Stellung* (V2) and *Verbletzstellung* (verb-final) rules, stemming from the transfer of Indonesian's more flexible SVO patterns. Errors in the use of prepositions, both in the form of additions and omissions, further illustrate that learners still interpret semantic relationships

through the non-case-based, freer semantic patterns of Indonesian rather than the strict German case governance.

Based on these findings, specific, actionable pedagogical interventions are strongly recommended for language instructors: the adoption of a Contrastive Analysis approach to explicitly compare L1 and L2 structures, the implementation of intensive, drill-based practice (such as sentence reconstruction tasks) to reinforce the German inflectional system and V2/verb-final rules, and the emphasis on metalinguistic awareness to help students recognize *why* L1 structures fail in German. Furthermore, to strengthen future academic discourse, research should be expanded to investigate syntactic interference in learners at other proficiency levels (e.g., A2 or B2) and across oral production data, as well as conducting action research to empirically test the efficacy of these proposed contrastive teaching strategies, or applying this methodology to other language pairs with similar structural discrepancies.

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INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Participation in this study was fully voluntary. Before joining, participants were informed about the study's purpose, procedures, possible risks, and benefits. Their identities were kept confidential, and their information was used only for research purposes. Participants could withdraw at any time without penalty. Continued participation indicated their informed consent.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data used in this study are not publicly available because of privacy concerns and ethical responsibilities to protect participant confidentiality. However, access may be requested for reasonable research purposes, such as verification or further analysis. Any data sharing must first receive approval from the appropriate institutional ethics review board.

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