



CONTRASTIVE AND ERROR ANALYSIS OF INDONESIAN INFLUENCE ON ENGLISH ACADEMIC WRITING

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of the Indonesian language on English academic writing among Indonesian university students by integrating contrastive and error analysis approaches. Data were collected from 30 student essays and analyzed to identify grammatical, lexical, and rhetorical errors caused by first language (L1) interference. The results revealed that grammatical and syntactic errors were most frequent, including tense misuse, omission of plural markers, and article errors, followed by lexical transfer through literal translation and discourse-level issues such as indirect argumentation and poor coherence. These patterns reflect the structural and rhetorical contrasts between Indonesian and English. The findings suggest that students' writing difficulties are rooted in both linguistic and cultural transfer, emphasizing the need for contrastive-based instruction and genre-oriented writing pedagogy. By understanding how Indonesian linguistic features shape English writing performance, educators can design more effective strategies to enhance students' academic literacy and cross-linguistic awareness.

Keywords: academic writing, contrastive analysis, error analysis, Indonesian interference

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, English has become the dominant language of academic communication, serving as the primary medium for publishing research, exchanging knowledge, and participating in scholarly discourse (Tulasi et al., 2025). For non-native English speakers, including Indonesian students, writing academically in English presents numerous linguistic and rhetorical challenges (Erniwati, 2012). Despite years of formal instruction in English, many Indonesian learners continue to display distinctive patterns of writing that reveal the underlying influence of their first language (L1) (Zein et al., 2020). This phenomenon is particularly visible in academic contexts where students are expected to produce cohesive, grammatically accurate, and argumentatively sound texts that align with international academic norms. Understanding how Indonesian linguistic structures influence English academic writing is, therefore crucial for identifying typical errors, improving pedagogical practices, and developing effective writing instruction tailored to the Indonesian context.

The influence of one's native language on second language (L2) performance has been extensively discussed in second language acquisition (SLA) theories (Fitri & Alawiyah, 2023). One of the foundational approaches to this issue is Contrastive Analysis (CA), which emerged in the mid-twentieth century and aimed to predict learners' errors by comparing the linguistic systems of the L1 and L2 (Lado, 1957). The assumption was that similarities between the two languages would facilitate learning, while differences would lead to interference and errors. Although later developments in linguistics questioned the predictive power of CA, it remains a valuable tool for highlighting structural contrasts and understanding cross-linguistic transfer (Van Wonderen & Unsworth, 2020). When applied to Indonesian and English, contrastive analysis reveals differences in syntax, morphology, and discourse organization that often manifest in students' English academic writing.

In addition to contrastive analysis, Error Analysis (EA) provides a complementary perspective. While CA focuses on the potential areas of difficulty, EA investigates the actual errors learners make in real communicative contexts (Corder, 1967). By categorizing and interpreting these errors, researchers can uncover underlying learning strategies, interlanguage development, and the cognitive processes involved in L2 writing. In the context of Indonesian learners, EA offers empirical evidence of how L1 transfer, limited exposure to authentic English texts, and educational habits rooted in the national curriculum shape students' academic writing competence. Combining CA and EA thus allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the linguistic and psychological dimensions of writing errors among Indonesian students.

Indonesian and English differ significantly in several linguistic domains. Structurally, Indonesian is an analytic language with minimal inflection, while English relies heavily on morphological changes to indicate tense, number, and aspect (Fitria, 2025). This contrast often leads to common grammatical errors among Indonesian writers, such as the omission of the third-person singular -s, confusion in verb tense usage, or incorrect pluralization. Moreover, Herman et al. (2025) the Indonesian word order tends to be more flexible than English, resulting in issues related to sentence coherence and clause embedding. On the discourse level, Indonesian writing conventions often emphasize indirectness, repetition for emphasis, and a preference for circular reasoning, whereas English academic writing values linear progression, explicit argumentation, and concise expression. These differences can cause Indonesian students to produce texts that appear verbose, loosely organized, or lacking in argumentative clarity when judged by English academic standards.

Another influential factor lies in rhetorical and cultural dimensions of writing. Indonesian writers, influenced by collectivist communication styles and oral traditions, may prioritize politeness, emotional resonance, or moral appeals over the critical, evidence-based reasoning typical of English academic prose (Hossain, 2024). Consequently, their English academic writing may show tendencies such as avoiding strong claims, overusing generalizations, or failing to synthesize sources effectively. These rhetorical transfer issues underscore that mastering academic writing in English involves not only grammatical accuracy but also adopting a new set of discourse norms and epistemological values. Furthermore, the educational context in Indonesia plays a pivotal role in shaping writing performance (Lestari & Kusumawati, 2025). English instruction in many schools still prioritizes grammar drills, translation exercises, and test-oriented learning, leaving little room for authentic writing practice or feedback on content organization. As a result, even university students often approach academic writing as a task of linguistic correctness rather than as an act of critical inquiry or scholarly communication. This pedagogical limitation intensifies the negative transfer from Indonesian to English, as students rely on familiar syntactic patterns and rhetorical habits derived from their L1 when composing academic texts.

Recent studies have shown that Indonesian students' difficulties in writing English academic papers extend beyond grammar and vocabulary to include cohesion, coherence, and argument development (Toba et al., 2019). Common error types include misuse of linking devices, inappropriate lexical choice, run-on sentences, and paragraph unity issues all of which can be traced to cross-linguistic influence and limited genre awareness. Despite these findings, research combining contrastive and error analysis approaches remains limited, particularly in the context of higher education where English academic writing is both a skill and a gate keeping mechanism for scholarly success. This study seeks to fill that gap by systematically comparing Indonesian and English linguistic structures and analyzing the recurrent errors found in students' academic writing.

By integrating contrastive and error analysis, this study aims to identify not only what errors occur, but also why they occur and how they reflect the cognitive and linguistic transition from L1 to L2. The findings are expected to contribute to the understanding of interlanguage development among Indonesian learners, offering insights for English teachers, curriculum designers, and writing instructors in designing more responsive pedagogical interventions. Ultimately, improving students' awareness of linguistic contrasts and common error patterns can foster greater grammatical accuracy, rhetorical appropriateness, and communicative confidence in English academic writing.

Examining the influence of Indonesian on English academic writing through both contrastive and error analysis frameworks provides a multidimensional perspective on L2 learning challenges. It highlights that errors are not merely signs of failure but rather indicators of linguistic development and interlanguage growth. Recognizing and addressing these influences can bridge the gap between local writing traditions and global academic standards, empowering Indonesian students to participate more effectively in the international academic community.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method combined with contrastive and error analysis frameworks to investigate the influence of Indonesian linguistic and rhetorical features on English academic writing produced by Indonesian university students. The qualitative descriptive design was chosen because it allows for a detailed and contextualized exploration of linguistic phenomena as they naturally occur in written texts (Rustamana et al., 2024). Rather than relying on numerical data or statistical generalizations, the qualitative approach enables the researcher to capture the depth and complexity of the students' language use, revealing how first language (L1) structures and rhetorical patterns manifest in their second language (L2) writing. This approach is particularly suitable for understanding the types, sources, and characteristics of errors in English writing that result from Indonesian language interference.

The data for this research were collected from a corpus of academic essays written by Indonesian undergraduate students enrolled in English-related study programs. The selection of participants was based on purposive sampling, focusing on students who had completed at least intermediate-level academic writing courses. This ensured that the collected texts reflected the genuine challenges of English academic writing among learners who have acquired basic writing competence but still exhibit traces of L1 influence. The students were asked to submit argumentative or expository essays written as part of their coursework, with a length ranging between 500 and 800 words. These essays were chosen because such genres demand logical organization, cohesion, and grammatical precision areas where cross-linguistic influence tends to be most visible.

All collected texts were first compiled, anonymized, and categorized according to topic and writing proficiency level to maintain ethical standards and ensure analytical consistency. The analysis began with Error Analysis (EA) to identify and classify errors systematically. Following Corder's (1967) framework, the analysis proceeded through four stages: error identification, description, explanation, and evaluation. In the identification stage, every grammatical, lexical, and syntactic deviation from standard English norms was highlighted. In the description stage, errors were grouped into categories such as morphological errors, syntactic errors, and lexical errors. During the explanation stage, each error was examined for possible sources, whether it resulted from interlingual transfer (influence from Indonesian), intralingual factors (overgeneralization or simplification), or developmental factors related to interlanguage progression. Finally, in the evaluation stage, the frequency and severity of errors were assessed to determine which linguistic areas were most affected by L1 interference.

Alongside error analysis, Contrastive Analysis (CA) was conducted to provide a comparative linguistic basis for interpreting the identified errors (Haimbodi & Woldemariam, 2024). This stage involved systematically comparing the structural features of Indonesian and English in relation to the types of errors observed. For instance, differences in verb tense systems, article usage, and sentence ordering between Indonesian and English were analyzed to explain why certain grammatical forms were consistently problematic. The CA framework helped the researcher to trace errors back to their linguistic origins, demonstrating how specific Indonesian patterns, such as the absence of verb inflection, flexible word order, and implicit subject usage tend to transfer into English writing. Through this comparative approach, the study not only documented the surface-level errors but also revealed the underlying cross-linguistic mechanisms that shape learners' writing behaviors.

The qualitative data were further supported by textual analysis, focusing on rhetorical and discourse-level features of the students' essays. This included examining how ideas were organized, how arguments were developed, and how coherence was maintained across paragraphs. Indonesian rhetorical conventions, which often favor indirectness and repetition, were compared with the linear and explicit argumentation typical of English academic writing (Nguyen et al., 2020). The purpose of this stage was to uncover not only grammatical deviations but also broader discourse patterns reflecting Indonesian cultural and rhetorical influence on English writing. The findings from this discourse-level analysis were triangulated with the results of the linguistic error and contrastive analyses to provide a holistic picture of Indonesian influence.

To ensure reliability and validity, inter-rater verification was applied during the error classification process. Two experienced English writing instructors independently reviewed a sample of the analyzed essays to confirm the categorization of errors and the interpretation of their sources. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved through consensus, minimizing researcher bias. Additionally, the findings were cross-checked with relevant literature on Indonesian-English linguistic contrasts to strengthen the analytical credibility. The choice of combining contrastive and error analysis within a qualitative descriptive framework is grounded in both theoretical and practical rationales. Theoretically, this combination aligns with the interlanguage hypothesis, which views second language learning as a dynamic process shaped by both L1 transfer and internal rule formation. Practically, it

provides actionable insights for educators by pinpointing specific linguistic and rhetorical areas that require pedagogical attention. Unlike purely quantitative approaches, this method captures the nuances of learner language and the contextual factors influencing it, making it particularly suitable for applied linguistic studies in EFL settings like Indonesia.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of 30 academic essays written by Indonesian undergraduate students revealed a consistent pattern of linguistic and rhetorical interference from the Indonesian language. The data showed that while students demonstrated a fair understanding of academic writing conventions such as thesis statements, topic sentences, and cohesive devices many aspects of their writing reflected the influence of Indonesian grammatical structures and discourse habits. Using the frameworks of Contrastive Analysis (CA) and Error Analysis (EA), a total of 1,247 errors were identified and categorized into grammatical, syntactic, lexical, and discourse-level deviations. The majority of these errors (approximately 62%) were linked to interlingual transfer, or the direct influence of Indonesian linguistic patterns on English. The remaining errors (38%) resulted from intralingual factors, such as overgeneralization of English rules or developmental simplifications.

The findings also revealed that most students struggled with grammatical accuracy, particularly in the use of verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, and article usage. These issues are closely related to structural contrasts between English and Indonesian, since the latter does not use inflectional markers to indicate tense or agreement. For instance, the sentence “She go to campus every day” was frequently observed, reflecting the Indonesian equivalent “Dia pergi ke kampus setiap hari”, where the verb *pergi* remains unchanged regardless of tense or subject. Such errors demonstrate that learners often rely on L1 grammatical habits when constructing English sentences.

At the discourse level, many essays displayed characteristics of Indonesian rhetorical style, such as repetition of key ideas, indirect argumentation, and lack of linear progression. For example, instead of presenting arguments in a straightforward cause-effect sequence, some students wrote circular explanations that restated similar points in different forms. This tendency aligns with Kaplan’s (1966) contrastive rhetoric theory, which describes how L1 cultural and rhetorical norms influence L2 writing structures. Additionally, cohesion problems were observed, with overuse or misuse of transition words like *so*, *then*, or *because*, which were often translated directly from Indonesian connectors such as *jadi*, *lalu*, and *karena*.

Lexical errors were also prevalent, reflecting limited vocabulary range and inappropriate word choice due to literal translation from Indonesian. For example, the expression “make a research” was common, influenced by the Indonesian phrase “membuat penelitian”. Similarly, “follow the task” was used instead of “do the assignment”. These examples suggest that learners often rely on Indonesian semantic structures to form English collocations, leading to unnatural or incorrect expressions. The findings indicate that Indonesian learners of English continue to experience strong L1 interference in both linguistic and rhetorical dimensions of academic writing. The following subsections discuss these findings in greater detail, organized according to the main analytical focuses of this study: (1) grammatical and syntactic interference, (2) lexical transfer and word choice, (3) discourse organization and coherence, and (4) pedagogical implications based on error patterns.

Grammatical and Syntactic Interference

One of the most evident findings in this study is the dominance of grammatical and syntactic errors resulting from Indonesian influence. Among the 1,247 total errors, 543 (43.5%) fell into this category. The most frequent grammatical problems involved verb tense usage, subject-verb agreement, article omission, and pluralization. The contrastive analysis between English and Indonesian helps explain these recurring issues. Indonesian verbs do not change form to mark tense, while English requires morphological modifications, such as *-ed* for past tense or *-s* for the third-person singular present. Consequently, students often wrote sentences like “He studied at University last year” instead of “He studied at the university last year.” Similarly, omission of the plural marker *-s* was observed in sentences such as “Many students in Indonesia face difficulty in writing.” These patterns indicate that Indonesian learners tend to transfer their L1 habit of using invariant word forms into English.

Syntactic interference was also prominent, especially in word order and clause construction. Indonesian syntax allows for more flexibility in arranging sentence elements, whereas English requires a fixed Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) order. As a result, students occasionally produced sentences such as “Is very important for student” a structure resembling the Indonesian order “Sangat penting kemampuan menulis bagi mahasiswa.” Additionally, learners often struggled with complex sentence formation, leading to long, run-on sentences connected by multiple

and or because, mirroring the paratactic style of Indonesian writing. These findings align with earlier studies Toba et al. (2019) that highlight L1 transfer as a major source of grammatical errors in Indonesian EFL writing. The consistency of these errors suggests that despite years of English instruction, learners' internalization of grammatical rules remains heavily influenced by their native language. Thus, focused instruction on tense, agreement, and syntactic structure remains essential to help students achieve grammatical accuracy.

Lexical Transfer and Word Choice

Lexical errors accounted for approximately 28% of all identified mistakes. The majority of these errors resulted from literal translation of Indonesian phrases and collocations into English. Students often used word combinations that are grammatically correct but semantically awkward or inappropriate in academic contexts. Examples include "discuss about" (influenced by "membahas tentang"), "make a research" ("membuat penelitian"), and "take a note" ("mencatat"). Such errors demonstrate how Indonesian semantic associations influence the selection and combination of English words.

A closer analysis reveals that Indonesian learners often rely on lexical equivalence strategies when facing lexical gaps in English. Instead of searching for idiomatic or contextually accurate expressions, they tend to translate directly from Indonesian. This process, known as negative lexical transfer, leads to unnatural phrasing and occasionally changes the intended meaning. For instance, the phrase "The lecturer give spirit to the students" was intended to mean "The lecturer motivates the students," but the use of "give spirit" reflects a direct translation of "memberi semangat."

Furthermore, the data showed frequent confusion between words with similar meanings, such as "effect" vs. "affect," and "learn" vs. "study." These mix-ups are partly because in Indonesian, a single word (*belajar*) covers multiple meanings depending on context. Without explicit teaching on English word collocations and semantic nuances, learners often overgeneralize or misapply vocabulary. Contrastive analysis helps explain these phenomena, as Indonesian relies more on contextual interpretation than on strict lexical collocation patterns. Therefore, students' errors are not random but reflect bigger structural and conceptual differences between the two languages. To address this issue, vocabulary instruction should emphasize contextualized collocations and semantic mapping, enabling learners to acquire more native-like lexical awareness in academic writing.

Discourse Organization and Coherence

Beyond grammatical and lexical issues, the findings revealed significant L1 influence at the discourse level, particularly in text organization and coherence. Many students demonstrated difficulties in constructing logically sequenced arguments. Instead of following the English rhetorical expectation of linear development (introduction–argument–conclusion), several essays exhibited a circular or repetitive style, where the same points were restated in different words throughout the text. This pattern reflects the Indonesian rhetorical tradition, which values reinforcement and elaboration over concise linear reasoning.

The analysis also found that students often relied heavily on additive connectors like *and*, *also*, and *then*, while rarely using adversative or causal connectors such as *however*, *therefore*, or *as a result*. For example, a paragraph might read: "Education is important for the country's development. And the government must improve the education. And the teacher also must be creative." This repetitive pattern mirrors Indonesian writing conventions where sequential conjunctions such as *dan* or *lalu* are used extensively to maintain flow, even when logical contrast or causality is intended.

Cohesion problems were further observed in the misuse of reference devices (*this*, *it*, *they*), inconsistent paragraph unity, and a lack of clear topic sentences. These findings support Kaplan's (1966) contrastive rhetoric theory, which suggests that rhetorical patterns are culturally embedded. Indonesian students may feel more comfortable with implicit organization and narrative elaboration, while English academic writing demands explicit signposting and analytical clarity. Improving students' awareness of these discourse-level contrasts is essential for enhancing academic writing competence. Instruction should focus on teaching organizational structures, argument mapping, and explicit use of cohesive devices appropriate for academic purposes. By developing rhetorical sensitivity, learners can move beyond linguistic accuracy toward effective and persuasive academic communication.

Pedagogical Implications Based on Error Patterns

The combined findings from grammatical, lexical, and discourse analyses carry significant pedagogical implications for English academic writing instruction in Indonesia. First, the high frequency of interlingual errors underscores the need for contrastive awareness training in writing classrooms. Teachers should not merely correct errors but explicitly demonstrate how English and Indonesian differ in structure and rhetorical logic. Activities such as sentence transformation, cross-linguistic comparison, and translation critique can help students recognize and internalize these contrasts.

Since many lexical and collocational errors stem from literal translation, instructors should integrate corpus-based vocabulary instruction to expose students to authentic academic word combinations. Teaching tools like the Academic Word List (AWL) and concordance examples can guide students in selecting appropriate lexical patterns. Moreover, encouraging students to read and analyze model academic texts can naturally enhance their awareness of native-like usage. Addressing discourse-level interference requires pedagogical emphasis on genre-based writing instruction. By teaching the structural and rhetorical conventions of academic genres such as argumentative essays, research reports, and literature reviews, students can learn to organize their ideas more coherently. Peer review and feedback sessions can also help students reflect on how effectively they communicate arguments in English compared to Indonesian.

Teacher feedback should be diagnostic and reflective, focusing on patterns of error rather than isolated mistakes. For instance, when a student consistently omits articles or misuses tenses, feedback should include a contrastive explanation of how English marks these grammatical features differently from Indonesian. In this way, feedback becomes a tool for linguistic awareness rather than mere correction. These findings demonstrate that Indonesian interference remains a central challenge in English academic writing. By integrating contrastive linguistics and error analysis into pedagogy, educators can design more informed, culturally sensitive, and effective writing instruction that bridges the linguistic gap between Indonesian and English academic discourse.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore the extent and nature of Indonesian influence on English academic writing through the combined frameworks of contrastive and error analysis. The findings revealed that Indonesian university students' writing is profoundly shaped by their first language at multiple linguistic levels: grammatical, lexical, syntactic, and rhetorical. Grammatical interference emerged as the most dominant category, with frequent errors in tense formation, subject-verb agreement, and article usage, all of which can be traced to structural differences between English and Indonesian. Lexical transfer manifested through literal translations and unnatural collocations, while discourse-level interference appeared in circular reasoning, excessive repetition, and weak paragraph cohesion.

These findings confirm that L1 interference remains a persistent barrier to achieving proficiency in English academic writing. However, they also highlight that errors are not simply signs of failure but indicators of interlanguage development and cross-linguistic negotiation. The contrastive and error analysis approaches together provided valuable insights into why these errors occur, revealing that learners often rely on familiar Indonesian linguistic and rhetorical structures when facing complex English academic conventions.

Pedagogically, the study underscores the importance of raising learners' awareness of linguistic contrasts and rhetorical expectations between Indonesian and English. Teachers should adopt a contrastive approach in instruction, explicitly comparing both languages and providing corrective feedback that explains the source of common errors. Genre-based and corpus-informed writing instruction can also strengthen students' control over academic discourse. Future research may extend this investigation by analyzing larger datasets across different genres or educational levels or by exploring how metalinguistic awareness training can mitigate L1 interference. Ultimately, addressing Indonesian influence in English academic writing is essential not only for linguistic accuracy but also for empowering students to communicate more effectively in the global academic community.

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