



Interlanguage Errors in Learning Arabic as a Foreign Language: A Morphological, Syntactic, and Lexical Analysis of University Students' Translation

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Abstract

Empirical research on inter language development among Arabic-as-a-foreign-language (AFL) learners in Indonesian higher education remains scarce. This study investigates inter language phenomena among fourth- and sixth-semester students through translation error analysis, contributing empirical evidence from this underexplored institutional context. Adopting a descriptive qualitative design grounded in Corder's (1982) error analysis framework and Selinker's (1972) inter language theory, the data comprised Indonesian-to-Arabic translation texts produced by 34 purposively selected students at STAIN Mandailing Natal. Errors were identified, described, and classified by linguistic aspect and inter language source through a five-step procedure. The findings show that learners have reached an intermediate inter language stage, marked by adequate receptive vocabulary and a basic command of Arabic morphology and simple sentence structures, yet apply these competencies inconsistently in complex rules, exceptions, and authentic Arabic style (uslub). Of 21 errors across 16 sentences, inter lingual transfer was the most dominant source (11; 52%), followed by simplification and overgeneralization (5 each; 24%), distributed across morphological, syntactic, and lexical dimensions. These results carry direct pedagogical implications: contrastive analysis, targeted drilling on morphological exceptions, and inter language-informed sequencing are recommended to guide learners toward greater accuracy. The study advances AFL pedagogy in Indonesia through context-specific, empirically grounded evidence.

Keywords: inter language; Arabic as a foreign language; error analysis; interlingual transfer; Indonesian higher education

المُلخَص

تُعَدُّ الدراسات التجريبية حول تطوُّر اللغة البينية لدى متعلِّمي اللغة العربية كلغة أجنبية في مؤسسات التعليم العالي الإندونيسية شحيحةً حتى الآن. تبحث هذه الدراسة في ظاهرة اللغة البينية لدى طلاب الفصولين الرابع والسادس عبر تحليل أخطاء الترجمة، مُقَدِّمةً أدلةً تجريبيةً من هذا السياق المؤسسي قليل البحث. اعتمد منهجٌ وصفيٌ نوعيٌ مستندٌ إلى إطار تحليل الأخطاء لكوردر (١٩٨٢) ونظرية اللغة البينية لسيلينكر (١٩٧٢). وتكوَّنت البيانات من نصوصٍ مترجمةٍ من الإندونيسية إلى العربية أنجزها ٣٤ طالبًا اختيروا قصديًّا في جامعة STAIN منداثلينج ناتال، وحُلِّلت الأخطاء وصُنِّفت بحسب الجانب اللغوي ومصدر اللغة البينية وفق إجراءٍ خماسي الخطوات. تُبيِّن النتائج أن المتعلمين بلغوا مرحلةً متوسطةً تتسم بمفرداتٍ استقباليةٍ مناسبةٍ وإلمامٍ أساسيٍّ بالصرف العربي وبنية الجملة البسيطة، غير أن تطبيق هذه الكفاءات يبقى متذبذبًا في القواعد المعقَّدة والاستثناءات والأسلوب العربي الأصيل. ومن أصل ٢١ خطأً في ١٦ جملةً، كان النقل بين اللغتين المصدرَ الأكثر هيمنةً (١١؛ ٥٢٪)، يليه التبسيط والتعميم المفرط (٥ لكلٍ منهما؛ ٢٤٪)، موزعةً على الأبعاد الصرفية والنحوية والمعجمية. وتنطوي هذه النتائج على دلالاتٍ تربويةٍ مباشرة، إذ يُوصى بالتحليل التقابلي والتدريبات المركزة على الاستثناءات الصرفية والتسلسل التعليمي المستند إلى اللغة البينية لتوجيه المتعلمين نحو دقةٍ أكبر. وتُسهم الدراسة في تعزيز تعليم اللغة العربية كلغة أجنبية في إندونيسيا بأدلةٍ تجريبيةٍ سياقية.

الكلمات الرئيسية: اللغة البينية، اللغة العربية كلغة أجنبية، تحليل الأخطاء، النقل بين اللغتين، التعليم العالي الإندونيسي

INTRODUCTION

Second and foreign language acquisition (SLA/FLA) research has produced three major theoretical frameworks for explaining how learners progress from their native language (L1) toward the target language (TL): Contrastive Analysis, Error Analysis, and Interlanguage. Contrastive Analysis predicts learning difficulties through structural comparisons between the L1 and TL, while Error Analysis treats learner errors as theoretically significant evidence of linguistic performance.²⁷ Interlanguage theory, introduced by Selinker, conceptualises learners' developing system as an independent, dynamic linguistic continuum that is neither the L1 nor

²⁷ S. P. Corder, "The Significance of Learners' Errors," *International Review of Applied Linguistics* 5, no. 4 (1967): 161–70.

the TL but evolves progressively toward the TL through a process of hypothesis-testing and rule construction.²⁸

The interlanguage system exhibits four defining characteristics: it is systematic, variable, dynamic, and susceptible to fossilization the condition in which developmental progress ceases before full TL mastery is attained.²⁹ Within this framework, learner errors are not treated as failures but as evidence of active cognitive engagement with the TL.³⁰ This epistemological reorientation has substantially influenced FL pedagogy, privileging diagnostic and formative approaches to error correction over purely prescriptive ones. Research further documents that interlanguage continues to generate productive applications across diverse FL learning contexts, including the Arabic-learning environment.³¹

The Arabic language presents distinctive structural challenges for Indonesian learners. Arabic morphology operates on a pro-drop system in which verbal affixes encode subject information, eliminating the need for overt subject pronouns. Arabic pluralisation employs an extensive inventory of broken plural patterns (*jam' taksir*) that cannot be predicted by rule and must be memorised individually. The *idhafah* (genitive construct) construction prohibits the definite article (*al-*) on the first element, a constraint absent from Indonesian phrase structure. Furthermore, Arabic canonical word order (verb–subject–object) conflicts directly with Indonesian subject–verb–

²⁸ L. Selinker, "Interlanguage," *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching* 10, no. 3 (1972): 209–31.

²⁹ K. Brown, ed., *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, 2nd ed. (Elsevier, 2006); Selinker, "Interlanguage."

³⁰ Corder, "The Significance of Learners' Errors"; M. B. Frith, "Interlanguage Theory: Implications for the Classroom," *McGill Journal of Education*, n.d., 155–65.

³¹ M. H. Al-khresheh, "Interlanguage Theory and Second Language Acquisition: A Review Study," *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature* 10, no. 1 (2021): 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.10n.1p.1>.

object order, generating systematic interlingual transfer errors. These typological contrasts constitute a structural basis for predictable interlanguage phenomena that, if unaddressed pedagogically, risk becoming fossilized in learners' developing systems.³²

Empirical investigations specifically addressing AFL learners in Indonesian higher education remain scarce. Research conducted in other contexts Malaysia,³³ the United States³⁴, and Spain³⁵ has documented interlanguage phenomena in Arabic and other foreign languages. However, these findings are not directly transferable to the Indonesian AFL context, where learners share a common L1 (Indonesian/Bahasa Indonesia), a common educational trajectory through Islamic studies, and a sociolinguistic environment in which Arabic functions predominantly as a liturgical and academic language rather than a language of daily communication. L1 interference and native-language structural transfer constitute persistent challenges in Indonesian FL learning contexts that demand context-specific investigation, and this contextual specificity constitutes the primary rationale for the present study.³⁶

³² R. R. A. Dosh and Y. S. Al-Mahameed, "Cross-Linguistic Interference in the Syntactic and Semantic Acquisition of Arabic Language," *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation* 3, no. 11 (2020): 55–67, <https://doi.org/10.32996/ijllt.2020.3.11.7>.

³³ A. I. Nasirudeen, "Interlanguage Analysis as a Tool for Improving Instruction for Arabic Language Learners," *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development* 14, no. 4 (2025): 2403–10, <https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarped/v14-i4/27105>.

³⁴ L. M. I. Ahmad, "The Development of Interlanguage in the Written Production of Arabic Foreign Language Learners" (The University of Texas at Austin, 2017).

³⁵ R. M. Luna, "Interlanguage in Undergraduates' Academic English: Preliminary Results from Written Script Analysis," *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses* 23 (2010): 60–73.

³⁶ A. Rohman et al., "Local Language Interference on Non-Native Arabic Speaker in Rural Santri Communities: Sociolinguistic Study," *Langkawi: Journal of The Association for Arabic and English* 11, no. 1 (2025): 76–90, <https://doi.org/10.31332/lkw.v11i1.11078>; Y. Yasih et al., "Interferensi Bahasa Indonesia

Translation tasks are particularly appropriate instruments for interlanguage investigation because they simultaneously elicit morphological, syntactic, and lexical features of the developing linguistic system and render L1 structural interference directly observable.³⁷ Despite their widespread use in AFL classrooms across Indonesian Islamic higher education institutions, translation-based interlanguage analyses have not been systematically conducted in this setting. The present study addresses this research gap by analyzing Indonesian-to-Arabic translation errors produced by university students at STAIN Mandailing Natal, a State Islamic College where Arabic instruction operates under constrained resources and limited authentic Arabic input outside the classroom.

This study aims to: (1) identify the types of linguistic errors morphological, syntactic, and lexical in learners' translation texts; (2) analyse the sources of interlanguage errors based on Selinker's (1972) inter language framework; (3) characterise the developmental stage of learners' interlanguage; and (4) derive pedagogical implications for AFL instruction grounded in the empirical findings.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design using an error analysis approach grounded in interlanguage theory. The qualitative descriptive framework enables systematic, contextualised description of linguistic phenomena without imposing predetermined categorical structures on the data.³⁸ Error analysis was

Dalam Bahasa Inggris," *Jurnal Bastra (Bahasa Dan Sastra)* 10, no. 3 (2025): 1043–51.

³⁷ S. P. Corder, *Error Analysis and Interlanguage* (Oxford University Press, 1982); U. Lakshmanan and L. Selinker, "Analysing Interlanguage: How Do We Know What Learners Know?," *Second Language Research* 17, no. 4 (2001): 393–420, <https://doi.org/10.1177/026765830101700406>.

³⁸ J. W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods*

adopted as the operational method because learner errors constitute theoretically meaningful data about the developing interlanguage system rather than mere deviations from the TL norm (Corder, 1982). Interlanguage theory provided the overarching interpretive framework for classifying error sources and characterising the learners' developmental stage.

Participants

The participants consisted of 34 students enrolled in the Arabic Language Education Program (Pendidikan Bahasa Arab) and the Arabic Language and Literature Program (Bahasa dan Sastra Arab) at STAIN Mandailing Natal, North Sumatra, Indonesia. The sample comprised fourth- and sixth-semester students, corresponding to approximately two and three years of formal Arabic instruction at the tertiary level, respectively. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 22 years and had completed foundational Arabic courses covering basic morphology (*sharaf*), syntax (*nahwu*), and translation skills (*tarjamah*).

Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that participants possessed sufficient Arabic exposure to produce analysable interlanguage output while remaining at an intermediate developmental stage below the threshold of advanced competence. Fourth-semester students had completed two years of formal Arabic instruction; sixth-semester students had completed three years. The cross-semester design permitted a preliminary comparison of interlanguage features across two contiguous developmental points, though the primary analytical focus was on patterns common across both groups.

Approaches, 4th ed. (SAGE Publications, 2014); M. B. Miles et al., *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, 3rd ed. (SAGE Publications, 2014).

Research Instrument and Data Collection

Data were collected through a structured Indonesian-to-Arabic translation task comprising 16 sentences of varying syntactic complexity, constructed to elicit morphological, syntactic, and lexical interlanguage features across known challenge areas for Indonesian AFL learners: pro-drop morphology, broken plural formation, idhafah constructions, verb-tense morphology, and connective particles. The difficulty level of the sentences was validated through expert consultation with two experienced AFL lecturers at STAIN Mandailing Natal, who confirmed that all items corresponded to the grammatical content of the fourth and sixth semesters.

Participants completed the translation task individually during a regularly scheduled class session, within a 60-minute time allocation. The task was administered without access to dictionaries or reference materials in order to elicit autonomous interlanguage production and to prevent corrective access from obscuring the natural state of learners' developing linguistic systems.

Data Analysis

Error analysis was conducted following Corder's (1982) five-step procedure: (1) collection of written learner samples; (2) identification of errors through comparison with the normatively correct TL form; (3) linguistic description and explanation of each error; (4) classification of errors by linguistic aspect morphological, syntactic, or lexical and interlanguage source interlingual transfer, simplification strategy, or overgeneralization; and (5) evaluation of errors with respect to their frequency, distribution, and pedagogical significance.

Two researchers independently coded errors, and disagreements were resolved through consensus discussion. Inter-rater agreement on initial error categorisation exceeded 85% prior to discussion. Normatively correct target forms were established

on the basis of Standard Arabic (Modern Standard Arabic / Fusha) grammatical conventions. Frequency counts and percentages were calculated for each error category to provide a quantitative summary supplementing the qualitative analysis.

Trustworthiness

Three measures were adopted to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Investigator triangulation was achieved through independent coding by two researchers, followed by consensus resolution. Expert review was conducted by an experienced Arabic linguistics scholar who confirmed the appropriateness of the classification criteria. Thick description of the error data including original learner forms, expected target forms, and detailed linguistic analysis is provided throughout the findings section to enable readers to assess the transferability of the results to comparable AFL contexts.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were informed of the research purpose and provided written consent for their translation texts to be used as research data. Participation was voluntary and carried no academic grade consequences. All data were anonymised; individual participants are not identifiable in the analyses presented below.

FINDINGS

Overview of Error Distribution

Analysis of the 34 learners' translation texts yielded 21 error instances across the 16 target sentences. Errors were classified by linguistic aspect and interlanguage source, as presented in Table 1 (individual errors) and Table 2 (frequency distribution). Syntactic errors constituted the largest category (9 instances, 43%), followed by morphological errors (8 instances, 38%) and lexical errors (4 instances, 19%). Interlingual transfer was the most dominant error

source (11 instances, 52%), followed by simplification strategies and overgeneralization (5 instances each, 24%). The distribution reflects the structural distance between Arabic and Indonesian and is consistent with the intermediate interlanguage stage characterised in the discussion section.

Table 1. Analysis of Learners' Translation Errors Based on Interlanguage Theory

<i>Indonesian Sentence</i>	<i>Expected Translation</i>	<i>Learner's Translation</i>	<i>Linguistic Aspect</i>	<i>Error Source</i>	<i>Analysis</i>
<i>Saya belajar di Prodi Pendidikan Bahasa Arab</i>	أَدْرُسُ فِي قِسْمِ تَغْلِيمِ اللُّغَةِ الْعَرَبِيَّةِ	أَنَا أَدْرُسُ فِي قِسْمِ التَّغْلِيمِ اللُّغَةِ الْعَرَبِيَّةِ	Lexical; Syntactic	Interlingual transfer; Overgeneralization	Redundant explicit subject (ana) derived from L1 subject–predicate obligation; al- incorrectly attached to mudhaf
<i>Saya bersyukur kepada Allah</i>	أَشْكُرُ اللَّهَ	أَشْكُرُ إِلَى اللَّه	Syntactic	Interlingual transfer	Preposition <i>ila</i> added due to L1 influence; <i>syakara</i> is directly transitive (<i>fi'il muta'addi</i>) and requires no preposition
<i>Saya bersyukur kepada Allah</i>	أَشْكُرُ اللَّهَ	أَنَا أَشْكُرُ اللَّهَ	Lexical	Interlingual transfer	Overt subject <i>ana</i> is unidiomatic redundancy; Arabic <i>pro-drop</i> encodes first person within <i>asykuru</i>
<i>Kami mempunyai banyak buku bahasa Arab</i>	عِنْدَنَا الْكُتُبُ الْكَثِيرَةُ بِاللُّغَةِ الْعَرَبِيَّةِ	عِنْدَنَا كَثِيرًا كُتُبُ اللُّغَةِ الْعَرَبِيَّةِ	Syntactic	Interlingual transfer	Word-for-word L1 mapping; adjective <i>katsiiran</i> displaced from its <i>na'at</i> position
<i>Kami mempunyai banyak buku bahasa Arab</i>	عِنْدَنَا الْكُتُبُ الْكَثِيرَةُ بِاللُّغَةِ الْعَرَبِيَّةِ	نَحْنُ كَثِيرٌ كُتُبُ اللُّغَةِ الْعَرَبِيَّةِ	Syntactic	Interlingual transfer	Possessive particle ' <i>inda</i> absent; direct pronoun–noun juxtaposition is ungrammatical in Arabic

<i>Indonesian Sentence</i>	<i>Expected Translation</i>	<i>Learner's Translation</i>	<i>Linguistic Aspect</i>	<i>Error Source</i>	<i>Analysis</i>
<i>Buku-buku itu wajib kami baca</i>	الْكُتُبُ يَجِبُ عَلَيْنَا قِرَاءَتُهَا	يَلِكُ الْكُتُوبُ وَاجِبٌ نَقْرَأُ	Morphological; Syntactic	Overgeneralization; Interlingual transfer	<i>fu'ul pattern</i> overgeneralized to all <i>jam' taksir</i> ; L1 declarative word order transferred without obligatory <i>an + subjunctive</i>
<i>Buku-buku itu wajib kami baca</i>	الْكُتُبُ يَجِبُ عَلَيْنَا قِرَاءَتُهَا	الْكِتَابُ وَاجِبٌ لِلْقِرَاءَةِ	Morphological	Simplification	Unknown plural replaced by singular; active obligation recast as passive gerundial phrase (<i>lil-qira'ah</i>)
<i>Saya dan teman-teman saya sangat menyukai bahasa Arab</i>	أَنَا وَأَصْدِقَائِي نُحِبُّ اللُّغَةَ الْعَرَبِيَّةَ كَثِيرًا	أَنَا وَأَصْدِقَاءُ أُحِبُّ اللُّغَةَ الْعَرَبِيَّةَ	Morphological	Simplification	Compound subject reduced to first-person singular; verb not adjusted for dual-headed subject <i>nahnu</i>
<i>Bahasa Arab adalah bahasa al-Qur'an</i>	اللُّغَةُ الْعَرَبِيَّةُ لُغَةُ الْقُرْآنِ	اللُّغَةُ الْعَرَبِيَّةُ اللُّغَةُ الْقُرْآنِ	Syntactic	Overgeneralization	<i>al-</i> overapplied to <i>mudhaf (lughat)</i> in violation of <i>idhafah</i> constraint
<i>Dahulu, kami belajar Bahasa Arab dari pagi sampai malam</i>	فِي الْمَاضِي كُنَّا نَدْرُسُ مِنَ الصَّبَاحِ حَتَّى اللَّيْلِ	فِي الْقَدِيمِ نَدْرُسُ مِنَ الصَّبَاحِ إِلَى اللَّيْلِ	Morphological	Interlingual transfer	Indonesian tense-neutral morphology transferred; <i>fi'il mudhari'</i> used for past context; <i>fi al-qadim</i> is unidiomatic
<i>Dahulu, kami belajar Bahasa Arab dari pagi sampai malam</i>	فِي الْمَاضِي كُنَّا نَدْرُسُ مِنَ الصَّبَاحِ حَتَّى اللَّيْلِ	كَانَ نَدْرُسُ فِي الصَّبَاحِ إِلَى اللَّيْلِ	Morphological	Interlingual transfer	<i>Kana</i> treated as invariant past particle analogous to Indonesian <i>dahulu</i> ; <i>kunnaa</i> required for <i>nahnu</i> subject

Indonesian Sentence	Expected Translation	Learner's Translation	Linguistic Aspect	Error Source	Analysis
Saya ingin belajar Bahasa Arab dengan giat	أُرِيدُ أَنْ أَدْرُسَ اللُّغَةَ الْعَرَبِيَّةَ بِجِدٍّ	أُرِيدُ تَدْرُسُ اللُّغَةَ الْعَرَبِيَّةَ	Morphological	Interlingual transfer; Simplification	Consecutive verb placement follows L1 pattern; particle an omitted; second verb not inflected for first person
Saya ingin belajar Bahasa Arab dengan giat	أُرِيدُ أَنْ أَدْرُسَ اللُّغَةَ الْعَرَبِيَّةَ بِجِدٍّ	أُرِيدُ يَتَعَلَّمُ اللُّغَةَ الْعَرَبِيَّةَ	Morphological	Simplification	Particle an omitted to reduce morphological load; base fi'il mudhari' used without subject–person agreement
Di kelas saya ada beberapa orang mahasiswa, Fatimah salah satunya	فِي فَصْلِي مَوْجُودُ بَعْضُ الطَّلَابِ فَاطِمَةُ وَاحِدَةٌ مِنْهُمْ	فِي فَصْلِي فَاطِمَةُ وَاحِدَةٌ مِنْهُمْ	Lexical	Interlingual transfer	Maujud inserted as literal equivalent of Indonesian ada; khabar muqaddam construction already expresses existence
Fatimah baru mulai belajar Bahasa Arab	بَدَأَتْ فَاطِمَةُ تَتَعَلَّمُ اللُّغَةَ الْعَرَبِيَّةَ	فَاطِمَةُ جَدِيدٌ تَعَلَّمُ اللُّغَةَ الْعَرَبِيَّةَ	Morphological; Lexical; Syntactic	Simplification; Overgeneralization; Interlingual transfer	L1 word-for-word mapping; masdar used instead of inflected verb; jaidid misapplied for baru mulai; gender agreement absent
Fatimah baru mulai belajar Bahasa Arab	بَدَأَتْ فَاطِمَةُ تَتَعَلَّمُ اللُّغَةَ الْعَرَبِيَّةَ	فَاطِمَةُ تَتَعَلَّمُ اللُّغَةَ الْعَرَبِيَّةَ الْجَدِيدَةَ	Syntactic	Overgeneralization	Jadidah overgeneralized as post-nominal adjective without contextual appropriateness; verb badaa't absent

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of Interlanguage Errors by Source and Linguistic Aspect

Source of Error	Morphological	Syntactic	Lexical	Total (%)
Interlingual Transfer	5	4	2	)%11 (52
Simplification Strategy	3	1	1	)%5 (24
Overgeneralization	—	4	1	)%5 (24
Total	)%8 (38	)%9 (43	)%4 (19	)%21 (100

Interlingual Transfer

Interlingual transfer—the transfer of L1 structural rules into TL production accounted for 11 of the 21 error instances (52%) and was distributed across syntactic (4), morphological (5), and lexical (2) dimensions. This finding is consistent with the broader SLA literature documenting L1 structural interference in AFL learning and reflects the substantial typological distance between Indonesian and Arabic.³⁹

The most recurrent form of interlingual transfer was literal word-for-word translation in which Indonesian subject–predicate order was imposed on Arabic verbal sentences. The rendering of 'Saya bersyukur kepada Allah' as أَنَا أَشْكُرُ اللَّهَ (Sentence 3) demonstrates reliance on an overt subject (ana) modelled on Indonesian's obligatory subject–predicate structure, whereas Arabic verbal morphology already encodes the first person within the verb form (asykuru). The addition of ana, while not strictly ungrammatical, constitutes an unidiomatic redundancy revealing L1 structural dependence. Rohman et al. (2025) observe that this pattern of L1 syntactic frame transfer is particularly persistent among Indonesian Arabic learners whose primary metalinguistic framework remains anchored to Bahasa Indonesia.

A second prominent interlingual transfer pattern involved preposition use based on Indonesian argument structure rather than Arabic. The error أَشْكُرُ إِلَى اللَّهِ (Sentence 2) demonstrates the insertion of preposition *ila* as a direct equivalent of Indonesian *kepada*, without recognition that *syakara* is a directly transitive verb (*fi'il muta'addi*) requiring its object with no intervening preposition. This argument-structure transfer reflects the failure to fully internalize the individual valency of Arabic lexical items.⁴⁰

³⁹ Dosh and Al-Mahameed, "Cross-Linguistic Interference in the Syntactic and Semantic Acquisition of Arabic Language"; Rohman et al., "Local Language Interference on Non-Native Arabic Speaker in Rural Santri Communities: Sociolinguistic Study."

⁴⁰ Al-khresheh, "Interlanguage Theory and Second Language Acquisition: A

Simplification Strategies

Simplification strategies accounted for five error instances (24%) and were concentrated in morphologically complex environments. Learners systematically avoided complex conjugation patterns by using base verb forms or substituting singular nouns for unfamiliar plurals. The translation of ‹Buku-buku itu wajib kami baca› as *اَلْكِتَابُ وَاجِبٌ لِّلْقِرَاءَةِ* (Sentence 7) exemplifies a double simplification: the unknown plural *al-kutub* was replaced by the singular *al-kitab*, and the active obligation structure was recast as a passive gerundial phrase (*lil-qira'ah*). This strategy reflects what⁴¹ terms performance strategies communicative compensations that reduce linguistic burden at the cost of morphological precision. Similarly document that simplification constitutes a consistent compensatory mechanism among intermediate AFL learners who have not yet automatised complex morphological paradigms.⁴²

The systematic omission of the subjunctive particle *an* in sentences such as *أُرِيدُ تَذَرُسُ* and *أُرِيدُ يَتَعَلَّمُ* (Sentences 12 and 13) constitutes another recurrent simplification pattern. These learners have internalised the lexical meaning of the modal verb *aridu* but have not yet acquired the syntactic requirement for *an* to introduce the subsequent verb in the subjunctive mood (*manshub*). Lubis et al. (2024) identify the *an*-subjunctive construction as a persistent developmental challenge across Indonesian AFL learner populations, and the present findings confirm this observation.⁴³

Review Study”; Dosh and Al-Mahameed, “Cross-Linguistic Interference in the Syntactic and Semantic Acquisition of Arabic Language.”

⁴¹ J. C. Richards, “A Non-Contrastive Approach to Error Analysis,” *English Language Teaching Journal* 25, no. 3 (1971): 204–19.

⁴² M. Al-kaosari et al., “Analisis Kesalahan Berbahasa Dalam Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab: Kajian Literatur,” *AL-AFKAR: Journal for Islamic Studies* 8, no. 2 (2025): 2090–102, <https://doi.org/10.31943/afkarjournal.v8i2.2246>.

⁴³ R. H. Lubis et al., “Tahlil Al-Akhtha’ ‘ala Kitabat al-Jumlah al-Fi’liyyah Fi Ad-Darsi l-Insyah’ Bima’hadhi Darissalam Gontor Lil-Banat,” *Jurnal Pendidikan*

Overgeneralization

Overgeneralization errors numbered five instances (24%) and reflect learners' extension of a productive Arabic grammatical rule to contexts where it is inapplicable, a process Richards (1971) characterises as intralingual error and ⁴⁴ associates with the overapplication of target-language schema in inappropriate contexts. The most systematic overgeneralization involved the definite article *al-*. Learners have internalised the general rule that definite Arabic nouns are marked with *al-*, but have not acquired the constraint that the first element of an *idhafah* (*mudhaf*) construction may not carry *al-*. This produced the error *اللُّغَةُ الْعَرَبِيَّةُ الْقُرْآنُ* (Sentence 9), in which *al-* violates the *idhafah* rule.

A second overgeneralization pattern involved the broken plural. Learners applied the high-frequency *fuʾul* pattern (e.g., *dars–durus*, *qalb–qulub*) to forms that follow different patterns, generating non-target plurals such as *kutuub* (Sentence 6) in contexts requiring *al-kutub*. Desrani (2019) and Himami and Manshur (2026) identify this overapplication of a single productive plural schema as characteristic of intermediate AFL learners who have encountered *fuʾul* as their most frequently encountered broken plural form and have not yet internalised the full range of pattern irregularity.

DISCUSSION

Learners' Interlanguage Developmental Stage

The error distribution reported in Section 3 supports the characterisation of the participants' interlanguage as occupying an intermediate developmental stage. Three empirical indicators converge on this conclusion: the learners produce systematic, rule-governed errors rather than random deviations, indicating active TL

Bahasa Arab 4, no. 2 (2024): 1–20.

⁴⁴ R. Ellis, *The Study of Second Language Acquisition* (Oxford University Press, 1999).

hypothesis-testing; they demonstrate adequate receptive vocabulary to engage meaningfully with 16 structurally varied translation sentences; and they exhibit a general command of Arabic word classes and simple verbal sentence structure. These indicators align with characterisation of intermediate interlanguage as a stage at which core TL rules have been internalised but are applied inconsistently across complex structures, exceptions, and stylistic registers.⁴⁵

The persistence of interlingual transfer as the dominant error source (52%) indicates that the learners have not yet progressed to the restructuring stage in which L1 influence is substantially reduced. This contrasts with findings by Nasirudeen (2025), who reported a higher proportion of intralingual errors among Arabic learners in Malaysia, a discrepancy attributable to differences in instructional intensity, L1 background, and Arabic-use environment. The present participants engage with Arabic almost exclusively within the classroom, a condition that the literature consistently associates with elevated rates of L1 structural transfer and attenuated interlanguage development.⁴⁶ Song (2012) observes that variability in interlanguage output is not random but reflects context-driven modulation, a pattern consistent with the present finding that some sentences elicited target-like forms while others elicited systematic errors.

The characterisation of a specific interlanguage stage should be treated as preliminary, however, given the cross-sectional design and single-task elicitation instrument. Longitudinal investigation across multiple task types including oral production and free writing would be required to establish developmental trajectories with greater precision.

⁴⁵ G. Qiaolan, "Interlanguage and Its Implications to Second Language Teaching and Learning," *Pacific International Journal* 5, no. 4 (2022): 8–14, <https://doi.org/10.55014/pij.v5i4.223>.

⁴⁶ H. E. D. Samir et al., "The Impact of Language Immersion on Arabic Language Acquisition for Speakers of Other Languages," *Journal of Posthumanism* 5, no. 3 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.63332/joph.v5i3.919>.

Factors Sustaining the Current Interlanguage Stage

Several interacting factors sustain the intermediate interlanguage stage identified in this study. The substantial typological distance between Indonesian and Arabic particularly in verbal morphology, plural formation, and argument structure provides a structural basis for persistent interlingual transfer.⁴⁷ The limited authentic Arabic input and output opportunities outside the classroom attenuate the implicit learning processes that drive restructuring and reduce L1 transfer.⁴⁸ Patterns of instructional sequencing also appear relevant: the observed tendency to overgeneralize rules that have been recently taught without simultaneous instruction in exceptions suggests that instructional design may inadvertently reinforce overgeneralization.⁴⁹

A distinction is necessary between factors directly supported by the error analysis data and factors inferred from the theoretical literature. The empirical data directly evidence the three interlanguage processes: interlingual transfer, simplification, and overgeneralization. The proposed causal mechanisms typological distance, limited exposure, instructional sequencing are consistent with theoretical accounts (Selinker, 1972; Corder, 1982) but were not independently assessed in the present study and should be treated as theoretical interpretation rather than empirical finding.

⁴⁷ Dosh and Al-Mahameed, "Cross-Linguistic Interference in the Syntactic and Semantic Acquisition of Arabic Language"; Rohman et al., "Local Language Interference on Non-Native Arabic Speaker in Rural Santri Communities: Sociolinguistic Study."

⁴⁸ T. Ahibalova, "Fossilization in Adult Second Language Acquisition," *Naukovi Zapysky Natsionalnoho Universytetu «Ostrozka Akademiia», Serii «Filolohiia»* 5, no. 73 (2019): 150–53, [https://doi.org/10.25264/2519-2558-2019-6\(74\)-150-153](https://doi.org/10.25264/2519-2558-2019-6(74)-150-153); Samir et al., "The Impact of Language Immersion on Arabic Language Acquisition for Speakers of Other Languages."

⁴⁹ Qiaolan, "Interlanguage and Its Implications to Second Language Teaching and Learning."

Connections to Prior Research

The dominance of interlingual transfer in the present findings corroborates Selinker's (1972) foundational characterisation of interlanguage as strongly shaped by L1 structural influence and extends Corder's (1982) identification of interlingual transfer and overgeneralization as the primary sources of learner error. The present findings extend Ahmad's (2017) analysis of AFL learners in an advanced US university context by documenting the same error processes in a more constrained Indonesian institutional environment, suggesting that these processes operate consistently across AFL learner populations at different proficiency levels and institutional settings.

The frequency of simplification strategies partly confirms Richards' (1971) account of performance strategies as compensatory responses to morphological complexity. The present data, however, reveal that learners do not simplify uniformly: target-like forms were produced in several sentences, indicating that simplification is context-dependent and modulated by the specific morphological demands of individual items rather than reflecting a stable simplification tendency. This observation aligns with characterisation of interlanguage variability as a systematic, rule-governed phenomenon reflecting context-sensitive performance rather than random noise.⁵⁰

Pedagogical Implications

For interlingual transfer, learners require explicit contrastive instruction that foregrounds structural differences between Arabic and Indonesian at the levels of verbal morphology (pro-drop vs. obligatory overt subjects), argument structure (direct vs. prepositional objects), and phrase construction (idhafah vs.

⁵⁰ L. Song, "On the Variability of Interlanguage," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 2, no. 4 (2012): 778–83, <https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.2.4.778-783>.

adjective-noun sequences). Contrastive analysis exercises in which learners identify and explain structural differences between the L1 and TL have been demonstrated to reduce L1 transfer errors in AFL contexts.⁵¹ Exposure to authentic Arabic reading and writing materials should be increased to furnish richer implicit input than the current classroom-only environment provides.

For simplification, targeted drill exercises on Arabic morphological paradigms particularly the an-subjunctive construction, broken plural patterns, and kana paradigm inflection are essential to reduce the cognitive load that currently drives simplification. Combining drill-based and communicative practice, as recommended by Himami, builds automaticity in complex forms and progressively reduces learners' dependence on simplified alternatives. Lubis recommend integrating short, directed grammatical exercises into every lesson cycle rather than reserving grammar instruction for dedicated grammar sessions.⁵²

For overgeneralization, teachers should explicitly address exceptions to recently introduced grammatical rules at the point of instruction, rather than deferring exception coverage to later lessons. Regular memorisation and recycling of broken plural patterns, idhafah constraints, and kana agreement paradigms integrated into both writing and speaking activities reduce the over-application of productive but limited schemas. Awareness-raising activities in which learners locate, discuss, and self-correct their own

⁵¹ M. Dimyaty, "Tahlil Akhtha' Kitabah al-Lughah al-'arabiyyah Lada Thulab Syu'bah Ta'lim al-Lughah al-'arabiyyah Bi al-Jami'ah al-Islamiyyah Dar al-Salam" (UIN Kiai Haji Achmad Shiddiq Jember, 2018); Rohman et al., "Local Language Interference on Non-Native Arabic Speaker in Rural Santri Communities: Sociolinguistic Study."

⁵² M. A. Himami and U. Manshur, "Analisis Kesalahan Bahasa Arab Pada Siswa Kelas 3 Language Intensive Program," *Shaut Al-'Arabiyah* 14, no. 1 (2026): 91–107.

overgeneralization errors promote metalinguistic reflection and accelerate restructuring.⁵³

Across all error sources, the systematic use of learner error data as formative assessment constitutes a high-yield pedagogical practice. Teachers who document error patterns across cohorts, tailor instructional content to learners' current interlanguage stage, and track error-distribution changes over time obtain evidence-based guidance for instructional decision-making.⁵⁴ Explicit and immediate corrective feedback on systematic errors particularly those displaying fossilization indicators through repeated recurrence is preferable to tolerance, as uncorrected systematic errors risk permanent stabilisation in the learner's interlanguage system.⁵⁵

CONCLUSION

This study examined interlanguage phenomena among AFL learners at STAIN Mandailing Natal through the analysis of Indonesian-to-Arabic translation errors. Analysis of 16 translation sentences yielded 21 error instances classified across morphological (38%), syntactic (43%), and lexical (19%) dimensions. Interlingual transfer was the dominant error source (52%), followed by simplification strategies and overgeneralization (24% each), a distribution that mirrors foundational accounts of interlanguage processes and confirms their operation in the Indonesian AFL institutional context. The learners' error patterns indicate an intermediate interlanguage developmental stage: sufficient vocabulary and basic grammatical competence support engagement with translation tasks, yet complex grammatical

⁵³ Al-kaosari et al., "Analisis Kesalahan Berbahasa Dalam Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab: Kajian Literatur"; Ellis, *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*.

⁵⁴ Nasirudeen, "Interlanguage Analysis as a Tool for Improving Instruction for Arabic Language Learners."

⁵⁵ Ahibalova, "Fossilization in Adult Second Language Acquisition."

rules, exceptions, and authentic Arabic stylistic conventions are applied inconsistently. This stage is characterised by productive but overgeneralised rule application, significant L1 structural dependence, and context-sensitive simplification in morphologically demanding environments. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in providing empirically grounded, context-specific evidence of interlanguage development in the understudied Indonesian AFL institutional setting. The findings confirm and extend the identification of interlingual transfer, simplification, and overgeneralization as the primary interlanguage processes by documenting their specific linguistic manifestations in Indonesian-to-Arabic translation a contribution distinct from studies conducted in English-speaking, multilingual, or more intensively resourced AFL contexts. Several limitations constrain the generalisability of these findings. First, the cross-sectional design and single translation-task instrument restrict the scope of interlanguage stage characterisation; longitudinal investigation employing multiple task types is required to trace developmental trajectories comprehensively. Second, the single-institution design limits transferability; replication across comparable Indonesian Islamic higher education contexts would strengthen external validity. Third, learners' explicit grammatical knowledge and motivational orientations variables that interact with interlanguage development were not assessed. Future research should examine interlanguage development across oral production and free writing tasks, investigate the differential effectiveness of explicit corrective feedback on interlanguage restructuring in AFL contexts, and explore the relationship between learner motivation, classroom input intensity, and fossilization trajectories.

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