



Grammatical Interference and Conceptual Transfer in the Written Indonesian of Arabic-Speaking BIPA Learners: A Cross-Linguistic Influence Perspective

Han Han Ulumudin Ismail

Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia

*Corresponding author: han.ulumudinismail.2502158@students.um.ac.id

Received: May 20, 2026; Revised: June 12, 2026; Accepted: August 25, 2026; Published: August 31, 2026

Abstract. Previous studies on BIPA learners who are native speakers of Arabic have tended to focus on phonology, pronunciation, pragmatic-cultural competence, and vocabulary acquisition, whereas grammatical interference in learner writing has received comparatively limited attention. This study aims to identify and explain forms of grammatical interference and conceptual transfer in the Indonesian writing of Arabic-speaking BIPA learners. It adopts a descriptive qualitative approach using document analysis. The data were obtained from ten Level 3 BIPA learners at the Indonesian Cultural Center in Cairo, Egypt. The corpus consists of ten essays on the topic of “Favorite Figure” and forty written responses to four open-ended questions. The analysis was conducted through close reading of the corpus, identification of grammatically deviant forms, determination of target forms in Indonesian, comparison with possible Arabic patterns, and classification of data according to interference categories. The findings reveal 22 forms of grammatical interference grouped into five categories: prepositional and grammatical relational interference; verb, affixation, and transitivity interference; passive construction interference; nominalization interference; and literal translation interference. Prepositional and grammatical relational interference constitutes the most dominant category. These findings show that interference in learner writing is not merely a matter of formal deviation but also reflects structural and conceptual transfer from Arabic into Indonesian within the interlanguage process. This study contributes to research on BIPA for Arabic speakers by demonstrating that learner writing is a crucial site for understanding cross-linguistic influence. Pedagogically, the findings highlight the need to strengthen writing instruction for Arabic-speaking BIPA learners in the areas of semantically based preposition use, verbs and transitivity, passive constructions, nominalization, and paraphrasing exercises to reduce literal translation.

Keywords: BIPA; grammatical interference; Arabic speakers; conceptual transfer; cross-linguistic influence; learner writing



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

1. Introduction

The Indonesian Language Program for Foreign Speakers (Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing, hereafter BIPA) occupies an important position in the internationalization of Indonesian and in the strengthening of Indonesia’s cultural diplomacy. The promotion of Indonesian as an international language is closely connected to language policy, the development of BIPA programs, and the expansion of access to Indonesian language learning for foreign learners. In international contexts, BIPA functions not only as a language learning program but also as a medium for introducing Indonesian culture, local wisdom, and social values to global audiences. The increasing interest of foreign learners in Indonesian, particularly in regional and

transnational contexts, indicates that BIPA has a strategic role in expanding the reach of Indonesian language and culture in the global arena.

In addition, the teaching of Indonesian to non-native speakers contributes to cross-cultural understanding and supports Indonesia's public diplomacy in various countries. In second or foreign language learning, writing plays an important role because it can reveal grammatical development and the emerging language system of learners. Written production gives learners space to display choices of linguistic forms, sentence structures, and structural accuracy in a more observable way than spontaneous oral production. Studies on interlanguage also show that learner production, including writing, can reflect a developing grammatical system that corresponds to learners' level of second-language proficiency. Moreover, analysis of learner writing can reveal systematic patterns of error rather than merely random mistakes.

In this context, syntactic errors in writing can be understood as part of interlanguage development, whether temporary, persistent, or potentially fossilized. Therefore, learner writing is a relevant source of data for identifying grammatical development, interlanguage patterns, and the possible influence of the first language in the acquisition of the target language. One factor that influences the writing of second or foreign language learners is first-language interference. Interference may occur when learners transfer grammatical patterns, sentence structures, or ways of constructing semantic relations from the first language into the target language. Research on first-language influence in foreign language writing indicates that differences between language systems may lead to grammatical errors related to sentence structure, preposition use, verb choice, and relations among elements within the sentence.

Negative transfer can also affect how learners organize ideas and select grammatical forms in second-language writing. From the perspective of cross-linguistic influence, interference does not occur only at the level of surface linguistic forms; it may also be related to how learners conceptualize events, relations, and meanings through their first language. Thus, the analysis of learner writing needs to consider the relationship between the forms that appear in the data, the grammatical system of the first language, and the formation of the target language system. Arabic-speaking learners face specific grammatical challenges when learning a foreign language because of differences between Arabic and the target language. Several studies have shown that Arabic influence can appear in learner writing in the areas of prepositions, sentence structure, word order, verb forms, and other grammatical relations.

Studies of second-language writing by native speakers of Arabic also indicate that syntactic features and preposition use are areas that are particularly vulnerable to first-language transfer, including in longitudinally observed writing development. Furthermore, first-language-influenced syntactic problems may slow the development of foreign language proficiency among Arabic-speaking learners. These findings suggest that an Arabic linguistic background needs to be considered in the analysis of foreign language learner writing, especially in grammatical domains that are susceptible to first-language transfer. A number of studies have discussed BIPA learning and first-language interference in different contexts. In the BIPA context, research on Azerbaijani learners has shown that the first language can influence Indonesian production in both speaking and writing.

Research on French learners of Indonesian has also shown the emergence of an interlanguage system in the learning of Indonesian as a foreign language. In the Egyptian context, previous studies have indicated that BIPA has developed through several institutions, including the Indonesian Cultural Center, the Indonesian Studies Center, BIPA Al-Azhar, and the Indonesian Language Program at Al-Azhar University. However, studies on BIPA for Arabic speakers in Egypt have so far focused more on learning characteristics, pragmatic-cultural competence, pronunciation, phonology, and vocabulary introduction. Consequently, studies that specifically examine the writing of Arabic-speaking BIPA learners from the perspective of grammatical interference remain relatively limited. This limitation points to both empirical and theoretical gaps.

Empirically, studies of Arabic-speaking BIPA learners have not extensively used written data as a site for examining how Arabic grammatical patterns are transferred into Indonesian.

Theoretically, interference in learner writing is still often understood as formal error rather than as part of interlanguage development and cross-linguistic influence. Yet research on Arabic learners in foreign language contexts shows that Arabic can influence writing in the domains of prepositions, sentence structure, verb forms, and other grammatical relations [13-15]. A study is therefore needed that does not merely identify grammatical errors but also explains how Arabic patterns influence the ways learners construct grammatical relations and conceptualize meaning in Indonesian.

The novelty of the present study lies in its attempt to map the grammatical interference of Arabic-speaking BIPA learners through the perspective of cross-linguistic influence. This study views interference not only as a deviation from Indonesian norms but also as a manifestation of structural and conceptual transfer. Structural transfer appears in the use of prepositions, verbs, transitivity, and passive constructions, whereas conceptual transfer appears in tendencies toward nominalization and literal translation of Arabic expression patterns into Indonesian. In this way, this study expands research on Arabic-speaking BIPA learners from a focus on phonology and pragmatics toward a grammatical analysis of learner writing oriented toward interlanguage and cross-linguistic influence.

Based on the preceding discussion, this study addresses three research questions: (1) What forms of grammatical interference appear in the Indonesian writing of Arabic-speaking BIPA learners? (2) Which grammatical domains are most susceptible to cross-linguistic influence from Arabic in learner writing? and (3) How do these forms of interference reflect structural transfer and conceptual transfer in the interlanguage process of Arabic-speaking BIPA learners? By answering these questions, the study is expected to make an empirical contribution to research on BIPA for Arabic speakers, a theoretical contribution to research on cross-linguistic influence in the acquisition of Indonesian as a foreign language, and a pedagogical contribution to the development of BIPA writing instruction that is more responsive to the grammatical characteristics of Arabic-speaking learners.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach using document analysis. This approach was selected because the study focuses on describing, classifying, and interpreting forms of grammatical interference in the writing of Arabic-speaking BIPA learners. The data analyzed consist of learner written production; therefore, the analysis is directed toward linguistic forms, grammatical patterns, semantic relations, and the possible influence of the first language in the formation of Indonesian as the target language. The study is not intended to produce statistical generalizations about all Arabic-speaking learners of Indonesian. Instead, it aims to obtain an in-depth understanding of grammatical interference patterns that appear in a limited written corpus.

For this reason, the relatively small number of participants is considered appropriate for a qualitative study that emphasizes analytical depth, interpretive accuracy, and the traceability of the relationship between learner forms and possible Arabic patterns. The analysis focuses on Indonesian forms that are grammatically deviant and that may be related to Arabic linguistic patterns. Accordingly, the study does not treat all language errors as interference. It selects specific forms that can be explained through the lens of cross-linguistic influence, especially the relationship between Arabic as the first language and Indonesian as the target language.

2.2 Context and Participants

The study was conducted at the Indonesian Cultural Center in Cairo, Egypt. The participants were ten Level 3 BIPA learners who were native speakers of Arabic. They were selected through purposive sampling because they possessed characteristics relevant to the objectives of the study: they were learning Indonesian as a foreign language and had acquired basic competence in writing simple sentences and paragraphs in Indonesian. Level 3 BIPA learners were selected

because, at this level, learners are generally able to express simple ideas in writing, while their Indonesian grammatical system is still developing.

This condition allows the emergence of forms that reflect interlanguage processes, including possible grammatical transfer from Arabic into Indonesian. Participants at this level are therefore relevant for observing grammatical interference in written production. All participants were assigned the codes P1 to P10. This coding was used to protect learner anonymity and to facilitate data presentation in the analysis. Participants' real names are not included in the article. The data presented consist only of linguistic excerpts relevant to the focus of the study.

2.3 Data Sources

The data consist of learner writing taken from written answers in the final examination of the Level 3 BIPA program, which was held on 28 August 2025 at the Indonesian Cultural Center in Cairo, Egypt. The data comprise two types of writing: essays on the topic "Favorite Figure" and written answers to four open-ended questions. The four open-ended questions concerned the most beautiful tourist attractions in Alexandria, the reasons why many foreign tourists visit Alexandria, the criteria for a good president, and learners' knowledge of President Soekarno.

In total, the corpus consists of ten essays on the topic "Favorite Figure" and forty written responses from ten participants. Each participant wrote one essay and answered four open-ended questions. From the entire corpus, this study does not analyze every language error that appears. The analyzed data are limited to phrases, clauses, or sentences that show grammatical deviation in Indonesian and that may be related to Arabic language patterns. This limitation was established so that the analysis would not stop at an inventory of errors but would instead focus on mapping grammatical interference that can be explained through cross-linguistic influence.

2.4 Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through documentation of learner writing. The texts used in the analysis are the learners' original written production in Indonesian and were analyzed as they appeared, without any prior correction by the researcher. In this way, the linguistic forms in the corpus continue to represent the learners' ability, strategies, and temporary language system at the time of writing. The units of analysis are phrases, clauses, or sentences that show grammatical inconsistency in Indonesian and meet the criteria for Arabic interference. These units were selected because grammatical interference does not always appear in a single word; it can appear in relations among sentence elements, preposition choice, verb patterns, passive forms, nominalization, or expression structures that resemble Arabic patterns.

2.5 Data Analysis and Coding Procedures

The data were analyzed in several stages. First, all learner texts were read closely to obtain an overall picture of writing ability and of the grammatical patterns that appeared in the corpus. At this stage, linguistic forms that seemed to deviate from Indonesian grammatical norms were noted. Second, deviant forms were marked and sorted according to grammatical aspect, especially preposition use, verbs, affixation, transitivity, passive constructions, nominal forms, and expression structure. This stage aimed to distinguish grammatical errors relevant to the focus of the study from other errors that were more mechanical, lexical, or not directly related to first-language interference. Third, each marked form was compared with a more appropriate or more common form in Indonesian. This comparison was used to determine the target Indonesian form.

For example, learner forms were compared with standard constructions or with constructions that were grammatically more suitable in Indonesian. Fourth, learner forms and target forms were analyzed contrastively by considering their possible relationship with Arabic patterns. At this stage, the researcher examined whether a deviation could be explained through the transfer of prepositional patterns, grammatical relations, verb patterns, passive constructions, nominalization, or literal expressions from Arabic into Indonesian. Fifth, data that met the criteria for interference were coded into five main categories: (1) prepositional and grammatical relational interference; (2) verb, affixation, and transitivity interference; (3) passive

construction interference; (4) nominalization interference; and (5) literal translation interference.

Coding was conducted gradually by comparing each data item with the operational definitions of the categories so that classification was not based solely on intuitive impressions. Sixth, the frequency of each category was calculated in a simple descriptive manner to identify the most prominent tendencies in the data. This calculation was not used as the basis for statistical generalization but as a descriptive aid to show which categories of interference were most prominent in the corpus. Representative data from each category were then selected for further analysis in the Results and Discussion sections. In this study, a form was categorized as interference when it met three criteria.

First, the form deviated from Indonesian grammatical norms. Second, the form showed similarity to Arabic structural patterns, whether at the level of prepositions, verbs, nominalization, passive constructions, or expression structure. Third, the form could be explained through a comparison between Arabic and Indonesian constructions. Through these criteria, the study sought to distinguish first-language interference from general errors, limited vocabulary, overgeneralization, or mechanical inaccuracy in writing.

2.6 Data Validation and Research Ethics

To maintain analytical credibility, the data were read repeatedly, and the coding results were re-examined by checking the correspondence among the learner form, the target Indonesian form, and the possible Arabic pattern underlying the learner form. This examination was conducted to ensure that data categorized as interference were not merely common errors in Indonesian language learning but had an analytical basis that could be traced through cross-linguistic comparison. The interference categories should be validated through expert review before submission, especially by experts in BIPA/Indonesian linguistics and/or Arabic-Indonesian linguistics. This validation is important to confirm the accuracy of data classification, the acceptability of the target Indonesian forms, and the plausibility of the interpretation concerning Arabic influence.

If differences in assessment arise, the data should be reviewed again by considering the learner form, sentence context, the more appropriate Indonesian form, and possible alternative explanations. For ethical reasons, the identities of all participants are anonymized using the codes P1 to P10. Real names, personal information, and other identifying details that could lead to participant identification are not disclosed in this article. The learner writing data are used only for academic purposes and are presented only in excerpts relevant to the focus of analysis. Thus, data presentation maintains participant confidentiality and avoids harm to learners as research participants.

3. Results and Discussions

Analysis of the learner writing corpus revealed a number of forms of grammatical interference in the use of Indonesian. These forms did not appear as entirely random errors; rather, they showed specific patterns related to the transfer of structures and semantic relations from Arabic into Indonesian. Based on identification, coding, and classification, 22 forms of grammatical interference met the analytical criteria. This number refers to the selected forms of interference in the learner writing corpus, not to all language errors appearing in the data.

The interference forms are grouped into five categories: (1) prepositional and grammatical relational interference; (2) verb, affixation, and transitivity interference; (3) passive construction interference; (4) nominalization interference; and (5) literal translation interference. The distribution of the interference categories is presented in Table 1. As shown in Table 1, prepositional and grammatical relational interference is the most dominant category, consisting of 10 data points or 45.45% of the total interference data. This category indicates that learners experience difficulty in mapping semantic relations such as duration, purpose, benefit, target, comparison, and accompaniment into the Indonesian prepositional system.

Table 1. Distribution of grammatical interference in the writing of Arabic-speaking BIPA learners.

No.	Interference category	Number of data points	Percentage	Transfer domain	Representative examples
1.	Prepositions and grammatical relations	10	45.45%	Structural-relational transfer	berkuasa di Mesir untuk 21 tahun; bermanfaat kepada manusia; berkunjung peninggalan bersejarah
2.	Verbs, affixation, and transitivity	3	13.64%	Structural transfer	merasa kebesarnya; mau adalah orang penting; menikahannya
3.	Passive constructions	2	9.09%	Structural transfer	ia bunuh; dilahir
4.	Nominalization	4	18.18%	Conceptual transfer	sebelum lahirnya; sesudah lahirnya; penjajahan Belanda dengan dirinya; sedunia tahu beliau; dari berbeda peradaban
5.	Literal translation	3	13.64%	Conceptual transfer	
Total		22	100%	Transfer domain	Representative examples

The next category is nominalization interference, with 4 data points or 18.18%. Verb, affixation, and transitivity interference and literal translation interference each account for 3 data points or 13.64%. Passive construction interference appears least frequently, with 2 data points or 9.09%. In terms of transfer domain, 15 data points or 68.18% fall under structural and structural-relational transfer, whereas 7 data points or 31.82% show tendencies toward conceptual transfer.

Thus, interference in learner writing occurs not only at the level of surface grammatical forms but also in how learners package events, agents, semantic relations, and expressions according to Arabic patterns. Because this article is written in English while the object of analysis is Indonesian learner writing, the learner forms are retained in Indonesian. English glosses are provided only to help international readers understand the meaning of the Indonesian forms. The data should not be translated as the primary evidence, because translation would obscure the grammatical deviations that constitute the object of analysis. Table 2 presents representative examples.

Table 2. Examples of interference data in learner form, target Indonesian form, and English gloss.

Data code	Learner form in Indonesian	Target Indonesian form	English gloss	Category and indication of interference
PPR-01	berkuasa di Mesir untuk 21 tahun	berkuasa di Mesir selama 21 tahun	ruled Egypt for 21 years	Prepositions and grammatical relations: use of <i>untuk</i> to express duration
PPR-02	bermanfaat kepada manusia	bermanfaat bagi/untuk manusia	beneficial to/for humans	Prepositions and grammatical relations: inaccurate preposition for beneficiary relation
PPR-03	suka berkunjung peninggalan bersejarah	suka berkunjung ke peninggalan bersejarah/ suka mengunjungi	likes visiting historical sites	Prepositions and grammatical relations: omission of the directional preposition

Data code	Learner form in Indonesian	Target Indonesian form	English gloss	Category and indication of interference
		peninggalan bersejarah		ke after berkunjung
VAT-01	saya bisa merasa kebesarannya	saya bisa merasakan kebesarannya	I can feel his/its greatness	Verbs, affixation, and transitivity: inaccuracy in transitive verb and nominal form
VAT-02	banyak muda yang mau adalah orang penting	banyak anak muda yang ingin menjadi orang penting	many young people want to become important people	Verbs, affixation, and transitivity: use of adalah where menjadi is required for change of status
VAT-03	Sayyidah Khadijah menikahnya	Sayyidah Khadijah menikah dengannya / menikahinya	Sayyidah Khadijah married him	Verbs, affixation, and transitivity: transfer of a direct transitive verb pattern
PAS-01	ia bunuh di San'a	ia dibunuh di San'a	he was killed in San'a	Passive construction: omission of passive marker di-
PAS-02	Beliau dilahir di kota Surabaya	Beliau dilahirkan di kota Surabaya / Beliau lahir di Surabaya	He was born in Surabaya	Passive construction: incomplete passive forms di-...-kan
NOM-01	sebelum lahirnya	sebelum beliau lahir	before he was born	Nominalization: use of a nominal form to express an event
NOM-02	sesudah lahirnya	sesudah beliau lahir	after he was born	Nominalization: use of a nominal form as the equivalent of a clause
NOM-03	ditangkap oleh penjajahan Belanda	ditangkap oleh penjajah Belanda / pihak Belanda	was captured by Dutch colonizers / the Dutch side	Nominalization: use of an abstract noun as an agent
TL-01	beliau dengan dirinya memproklamasi itu	beliau sendiri memproklamasikan nya	he himself proclaimed it	Literal translation: word-for-word transfer of an Arabic emphasis pattern
TL-02	Beliau bekerja keras hingga sedunia tahu beliau	Beliau bekerja keras hingga seluruh dunia mengenalnya	he worked hard until the whole world knew / recognized him	Literal translation: literal transfer of expression structure
TL-03	dari berbeda peradaban	dari berbagai peradaban / dari peradaban yang <u>berbeda-beda</u>	From various/different civilizations	Literal translation: word-for-word transfer from an Arabic pattern

Table 2 shows that interference does not appear only at the level of individual words. It also appears in relations among elements within phrases, clauses, and sentences. Some data show inaccurate preposition selection, others show mismatches between verbs and affixes, and several show a tendency to transfer Arabic expression patterns directly into Indonesian.

3.1 Prepositional Interference and Grammatical Relations

Prepositional and grammatical relational interference is the most dominant category in the data. Forms in this category show learners' inaccuracy in selecting prepositions or constructing grammatical relations between verbs, nouns, and complements. The affected relations include duration, comparison, benefit, target, accompaniment, and purpose. In the learner form *berkuasa di Mesir untuk 21 tahun*, the preposition *untuk* is used to express duration. In Indonesian, duration is more appropriately expressed by *selama*, so the target form is *berkuasa di Mesir selama 21 tahun*. This data item indicates an inaccurate mapping of temporal relation onto Indonesian preposition use. Another form, *bermanfaat kepada manusia*, shows an inaccurate preposition for marking the beneficiary relation.

In Indonesian, the more natural forms are *bermanfaat bagi manusia* or *bermanfaat untuk manusia*. Meanwhile, *suka berkunjung peninggalan bersejarah* shows the omission of the directional preposition after the verb *berkunjung*. The more appropriate form is *suka berkunjung ke peninggalan bersejarah*, or alternatively *suka mengunjungi peninggalan bersejarah*. These findings indicate that prepositional problems in learner writing are not merely a matter of choosing a word-equivalent. They are also related to learners' understanding of the semantic relations expressed by Indonesian prepositions.

3.2 Verb, Affixation, and Transitivity Interference

Verb, affixation, and transitivity interference was found in three data items. These forms show learners' inaccuracy in selecting verbs, using affixes, and constructing relations between verbs and objects or complements. In the learner form *saya bisa merasa kebesarannya*, the more appropriate form is *saya bisa merasakan kebesarannya*. In Indonesian, *merasa* is commonly used to express an internal state, while *merasakan* is used when the verb is followed by an object. In addition, *kebesarannya* needs to be corrected to *kebesarannya* to match the intended nominal form.

The form *banyak muda yang mau adalah orang penting* shows the use of *adalah* in a context where the sentence should express a process of becoming or a change of status. The more appropriate form is *banyak anak muda yang ingin menjadi orang penting*. Meanwhile, Sayyidah Khadijah *menikahannya* shows a tendency to treat *menikah* as a direct transitive verb. In Indonesian, more appropriate forms are *menikah dengannya* or *menikahnya*. These data indicate that verb interference is not only related to word choice. It also involves the relationship among verbs, affixes, objects, and complements in Indonesian sentence structure.

3.3 Passive Construction Interference

Passive construction interference was found in two data items: *ia bunuh di San'a* and *Beliau dilahir di kota Surabaya*. Both show inaccuracy in forming Indonesian passive constructions. In *ia bunuh di San'a*, the subject *ia* is the entity affected by the action. Therefore, the verb needs to be marked with the passive form *dibunuh*, yielding *ia dibunuh di San'a*. In *Beliau dilahir di kota Surabaya*, the passive prefix *di-* is present, but the verb form is incomplete. The more appropriate form is *Beliau dilahirkan di kota Surabaya*, or more simply *Beliau lahir di Surabaya*. These findings indicate that passive constructions remain unstable in learner writing. This instability appears in the omission of passive marking or in incomplete passive forms.

3.4 Nominalization Interference

Nominalization interference was found in four data items. Forms in this category show a tendency to use nominal forms to express events, temporal relations, or agents that are more naturally expressed in Indonesian through clauses or other more suitable forms. The forms *sebelum lahirnya* and *sesudah lahirnya* show the use of nominal forms to express the event of birth. In Indonesian, the intended meaning is more naturally expressed through clauses, namely *sebelum beliau lahir* and *sesudah beliau lahir*. The form *tinggal masa kecilnya bersama kakeknya* similarly shows the use of a temporal noun as a direct complement. More appropriate alternatives include *tinggal pada masa kecilnya bersama kakeknya* or *menghabiskan masa kecilnya bersama kakeknya*.

The form *ditangkap oleh penjajahan Belanda* shows the use of an abstract noun as an agent in a passive construction. In Indonesian, the element following *oleh* normally refers to an agent, such as *penjajah Belanda*, *pemerintah kolonial Belanda*, or *pihak Belanda*. The phrase *penjajahan Belanda* refers to a process or system rather than to the actor performing an action. Nominalization interference therefore shows that learners experience difficulty not only with grammatical form but also with how to package events, agents, and action relations in Indonesian.

3.5 Literal Translation Interference

Literal translation interference was found in three data items. These data show a tendency for learners to construct Indonesian sentences based on Arabic expression structure and then replace the lexical elements with Indonesian words. The form *beliau dengan dirinya memproklamasikan* itu is more appropriately expressed as *beliau sendiri memproklamasikannya*. The phrase *dengan dirinya* can be understood as a literal translation of an Arabic pattern used to emphasize “himself.”

The form *Beliau bekerja keras hingga sedunia tahu beliau* also sounds less natural in Indonesian. A more appropriate form is *Beliau bekerja keras hingga seluruh dunia mengenalnya*. Meanwhile, *dari berbeda peradaban* is better expressed as *dari berbagai peradaban* or *dari peradaban yang berbeda-beda*. This category indicates that interference appears not only in preposition choice or verb form but also in expression structure. Learners tend to transfer Arabic expression patterns directly into Indonesian, producing sentences whose meanings may be understandable but whose grammatical and idiomatic form is less natural in Indonesian.

Discussions

Grammatical Interference as a Manifestation of the Interlanguage of Arabic-Speaking BIPA Learners

The findings show that grammatical interference in the writing of Arabic-speaking BIPA learners cannot be understood simply as a collection of language errors. The patterns appearing in the data indicate the presence of a provisional linguistic system that learners are constructing as they write in Indonesian. From a second-language acquisition perspective, such a system can be understood as interlanguage: an intermediate linguistic system that is not fully identical to the first language and not yet fully aligned with the target language. In learner writing, interlanguage is visible in inaccurate preposition use, verb choice, passive constructions, nominalization, and expression structure.

Forms such as *berkuasa di Mesir untuk 21 tahun, saya bisa merasa kebesarannya, ia bunuh di San'a, and sebelum lahirnya* show that learners are attempting to construct meaning in Indonesian, but the grammatical resources they use are still influenced by the language system previously acquired, namely Arabic. Thus, interference in the data is not random but reflects the process of forming a target language system that is still developing. These findings are consistent with the view that learner writing can reveal stages of grammatical development in second-language acquisition. Errors in writing do not always indicate failure to learn; they may also show learners' strategies for constructing a new language system using available linguistic resources, including the first language. Grammatical interference in this study should therefore be understood as part of the dynamics of interlanguage rather than merely as deviation from Indonesian norms.

Cross-Linguistic Influence and Structural Transfer in Learner Writing

The results show that most interference occurs in the structural domain, especially in prepositions, verbs, transitivity, and passive constructions. This indicates that Arabic as the first language influences not only lexical choice but also the way learners construct grammatical relations in Indonesian. In the study of cross-linguistic influence, the first language can influence target language production when learners rely on previously mastered patterns, especially when the two languages differ in the mapping of form and meaning. Structural interference is especially visible in preposition use. Data such as *berkuasa di Mesir untuk 21 tahun, bermanfaat kepada*

manusia, and suka berkunjung peninggalan bersejarah show that learners have not fully mastered the relation between verbs, prepositions, and meanings in Indonesian.

These errors do not merely indicate inaccurate preposition selection; they also show difficulty in mapping semantic relations such as duration, target, benefit, and purpose. In the domain of verbs, interference appears in forms such as *merasa kebesarannya, mau adalah orang penting, and menikahannya*. These forms show learners' instability in distinguishing transitive and intransitive verbs, stative and action verbs, and relations between verbs and complements. In Indonesian, the relationship among verbs, affixes, objects, and complements is a crucial part of sentence structure.

The differences between *merasa* and *merasakan*, *menikah dengan* and *menikahi*, and *lahir* and *dilahirkan* are not merely lexical; they are also grammatical. Structural transfer in this study therefore indicates that learners do not simply transfer Arabic forms into Indonesian. They also carry over patterns of grammatical relation that have been established in the first language. When these patterns do not align with the Indonesian system, forms of interference emerge in learner writing.

Dominance of Prepositional Interference and Grammatical Relations

The category of prepositions and grammatical relations is the most dominant category in the study. This dominance is theoretically significant because it indicates that the most vulnerable area in learner writing is not merely word form but the mapping of meaning relations among words. In Indonesian, prepositions mark various semantic relations, including direction, purpose, duration, recipient, benefit, accompaniment, and comparison. These relations do not always have direct equivalents in Arabic. When learners use *untuk* to express duration, as in *berkuasa di Mesir untuk 21 tahun*, it can be assumed that they are employing a relational pattern that does not fully correspond to Indonesian. In Indonesian, duration is more appropriately expressed by *selama*.

Similarly, *bermanfaat kepada manusia* shows an inaccurate choice of preposition for beneficiary relation, while *suka berkunjung peninggalan bersejarah* shows omission of the directional preposition *ke* after the verb *berkunjung*. The dominance of prepositions in the data is consistent with studies on Arabic-speaking learners in foreign language contexts, which have shown that prepositions are among the areas most vulnerable to first-language transfer. This is understandable because prepositions often have abstract, relational, and context-dependent meanings. Moreover, a single preposition in the first language may cover several functions that are expressed by different forms in the target language.

Preposition errors should therefore not be regarded only as failures of vocabulary memorization but as difficulties in mapping cross-linguistic systems of semantic relation. In the context of BIPA for Arabic speakers, these findings suggest that preposition teaching needs to go beyond lists of word equivalents. Learners do not only need to know that *di, ke, dari, daripada, untuk, bagi, kepada, and selama* are prepositions. They need to understand the relational function of each preposition in sentence context. In other words, preposition instruction should focus on the relations among verbs, nouns, direction, purpose, duration, benefit, and target in Indonesian.

Conceptual Transfer in Nominalization and Literal Translation

In addition to structural transfer, the study found forms of interference that can be understood as conceptual transfer. Conceptual transfer occurs when learners transfer not only linguistic forms but also the way the first language packages events, agents, relations, or expressions into the target language. In studies of cross-linguistic influence, transfer may occur not only at the level of surface structure but also in how speakers conceptualize meaning through the first language. Nominalization interference illustrates this phenomenon. Forms such as *sebelum lahirnya* and *sesudah lahirnya* show a tendency to use nominal forms for events that are more naturally expressed in Indonesian through clauses, namely *sebelum beliau lahir* and *sesudah beliau lahir*. Semantically, the learner forms remain understandable, but structurally and conventionally they are less natural in Indonesian.

The same phenomenon appears in *ditangkap oleh penjajahan Belanda*. In Indonesian, the element following *oleh* in a passive construction normally refers to an agent, such as *penjajah Belanda*, *pemerintah kolonial Belanda*, or *pihak Belanda*. The form *penjajahan Belanda* refers to a process or system, not to an actor. This error suggests that the problem is not merely word choice but also how learners categorize actors, processes, and actions. Conceptual transfer is also visible in literal translation. Forms such as *beliau dengan dirinya memproklamasikan itu*, *sedunia tahu beliau*, and *dari berbeda peradaban* show a tendency to construct Indonesian sentences according to Arabic expression patterns. In such cases, learners seem to translate not only words but also the way Arabic structures expressions. As a result, the sentences are meaningful but lack grammatical and idiomatic naturalness in Indonesian.

The categories of nominalization and literal translation therefore show that interference in Arabic-speaking BIPA learner writing operates not only at the structural level but also at the conceptual level. This is one of the central contributions of the study: grammatical interference in Arabic learner writing needs to be understood as a combination of structural transfer and conceptual transfer.

Interference, Developmental Errors, and the Limits of Interpretation

Although this study focuses on interference from Arabic, not every grammatical error in learner writing can automatically be categorized as a direct consequence of the first language. Some errors may also be related to developmental errors, namely errors that arise because learners are still constructing the target language system and have not yet fully mastered Indonesian rules. Such errors may occur among learners from various linguistic backgrounds, not only among Arabic speakers.

For example, passive inaccuracies such as *dilahir* or the omission of the prefix *in* in *ia bunuh* may be related to differences between Arabic and Indonesian passive systems. However, they may also indicate that learners have not yet stabilized their mastery of Indonesian passive affixation. Similarly, *merasa kebesarnya* may reflect the influence of Arabic patterns, but it may also show overgeneralization of Indonesian verb forms. This study therefore applies caution in interpreting data as interference. A form is not treated as interference simply because it is grammatically incorrect. It must show a possible relation to Arabic patterns and be explainable through comparison between Arabic and Indonesian constructions.

In this way, the analysis avoids the oversimplified assumption that all errors made by Arabic-speaking learners originate from Arabic. This discussion is important because first-language influence always interacts with other factors, such as proficiency level, limited vocabulary, communication strategies, overgeneralization of target language rules, and learning experience. Interference in learner writing should therefore be viewed as one factor in the formation of interlanguage, not as the only cause of error.

Position of the Findings in Studies of Arabic-Speaking Learners and BIPA

The findings are related to global studies on Arabic-speaking learners in foreign language learning. Studies on Arabic learners in EFL contexts have shown that Arabic influence often appears in prepositions, sentence structure, verbs, word order, and grammatical relations. This similarity suggests that some of the difficulties found in the writing of Arabic-speaking BIPA learners are not isolated phenomena but part of a broader pattern in foreign language learning by Arabic speakers. However, this study also differs from those EFL studies. Much research on Arabic-speaking learners has focused on English as the target language, whereas this study positions Indonesian as the target language. This difference is important because Indonesian has a grammatical system that differs from English, especially in affixation, passive constructions, prepositional relations, and verb formation.

Therefore, this study expands the discussion of Arabic influence into the context of Indonesian as a foreign language. In BIPA studies, previous research on Arabic speakers in Egypt has focused more on learning characteristics, pragmatic-cultural competence, pronunciation, phonology, and vocabulary introduction. The present study complements this body of research

by showing that learner writing also contains patterns of grammatical interference that deserve analysis. In other words, grammatical aspects of writing should receive attention equal to phonological, pragmatic, and cultural aspects in BIPA studies of Arabic speakers. The contribution of this study lies in mapping grammatical interference in the writing of Arabic-speaking BIPA learners through the perspective of cross-linguistic influence.

It shows that interference appears not only as surface error but also as a symptom of the transfer of relational and conceptual patterns from Arabic into Indonesian. Thus, the article strengthens the position of BIPA studies as part of international discussions on second-language acquisition, interlanguage, and cross-linguistic influence.

Pedagogical Implications for Teaching Writing to Arabic-Speaking BIPA Learners

The findings have direct implications for teaching Indonesian writing to Arabic-speaking BIPA learners. First, preposition instruction should be directed toward relational functions rather than merely lexical equivalents. Learners need practice in distinguishing the uses of *di*, *ke*, *dari*, *daripada*, *untuk*, *bagi*, *kepada*, and *selama* through concrete sentence contexts. Such exercises are important because prepositions and grammatical relations constitute the most dominant interference category in the data. Second, verb instruction should emphasize the relationship among base forms, affixation, transitivity, objects, and complements. Pairs such as *merasa/merasakan*, *berkunjung ke/mengunjungi*, *menikah dengan/menikahi*, and *lahir/dilahirkan/dilahirkan oleh* can be used as explicit teaching materials in BIPA classes for Arabic speakers.

In this way, learners do not merely memorize verb forms but understand their grammatical functions. Third, writing instruction should include paraphrasing exercises to reduce literal translation. Learners may be given example sentences that follow Arabic patterns and then asked to reformulate them into more natural Indonesian structures. This type of exercise is important for developing sensitivity to common Indonesian expression patterns, especially in forms involving self-emphasis, the introduction of public figures, and relations of origin. Fourth, remedial materials for Arabic-speaking BIPA learners should be developed from authentic learner writing data. Forms such as *untuk 21 tahun*, *bermanfaat kepada manusia*, *sebelum lahirnya*, and *sedunia tahu beliau* can be used as classroom discussion materials because they reflect real error patterns.

Analysis of learner language can help teachers identify areas of difficulty, understand the development of learners' language systems, and design instructional interventions that correspond more closely to learner needs. Thus, the pedagogical implications of the study are not limited to general recommendations for improving grammar. They point to more specific instructional strategies: teaching prepositions based on semantic relations, practicing verbs through transitivity, reinforcing passive constructions, using clause-based exercises to reduce unnatural nominalization, and developing paraphrasing activities to avoid literal translation.

4. Conclusions

This study shows that grammatical interference in the Indonesian writing of Arabic-speaking BIPA learners appears in five main categories: prepositional and grammatical relational interference; verb, affixation, and transitivity interference; passive construction interference; nominalization interference; and literal translation interference. Among these categories, prepositional and grammatical relational interference is the most dominant. This finding indicates that the mapping of semantic relations, such as duration, purpose, benefit, target, and comparison, is the area most vulnerable to cross-linguistic influence from Arabic in learner writing.

Theoretically, the findings confirm that grammatical interference in learner writing cannot be understood only as error in Indonesian form. Such interference reflects an interlanguage process in which learners construct an Indonesian system that is still influenced by first-language patterns. In this context, Arabic influence appears in two domains. The first is structural transfer, which appears in the use of prepositions, verbs, transitivity, and passive constructions. The

second is conceptual transfer, which appears in tendencies toward nominalization and literal translation of Arabic expression patterns into Indonesian.

The study contributes to the development of BIPA research on Arabic-speaking learners by expanding attention from phonology, pronunciation, culture, and pragmatics toward grammatical analysis of written text. It also demonstrates that learner writing can serve as an important source of data for understanding how the first language influences the acquisition of Indonesian as a foreign language. From a pedagogical perspective, the findings emphasize the need for BIPA writing instruction for Arabic speakers that gives greater attention to semantically based prepositions, verbs and transitivity, passive constructions, and paraphrasing exercises to reduce literal translation.

This study has several limitations. The data were obtained from ten Level 3 BIPA learners in a single institutional context; therefore, the findings are not intended to be broadly generalized to all Arabic-speaking BIPA learners. In addition, the analyzed data were drawn from final examination writing, so the language forms may have been influenced by topic, time constraints, and evaluation context. The study also did not include supporting data such as interviews, learner reflections, or tracing of thought processes during writing. Future research is therefore recommended to involve a larger number of participants, different proficiency levels, diverse institutional contexts, and a longitudinal approach to observe the development of grammatical interference over time.

References

- Alfaifi AAM, Saleem M. Negative Transfer and Delay in Proficiency Development: L1 Influenced Syntax Issues Faced by Arab EFL Learners. *Forum Linguist Stud* [Internet]. 2024;6(4):42–56. Available from: <https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-85204495239&doi=10.30564%2Ffls.v6i4.6664&partnerID=40&md5=63f60694301b5e5cbebd28b6a5bd1f9d>
- Al-Hamzi A, Nababan M, Santosa R, Djatmika D, Sumarlam S, Yustanto H. Frequent linguistic errors in the writing of Yemeni EFL Arabic-speaking learners. *Stud English Lang Educ*. 2023 Jan 31;10:350–68.
- Aljuraifani Y, Alanazi Z. L1-Induced Grammatical Errors Affecting Saudi Female EFL Students' Academic Writing: A Cross-Linguistic Study of Arabic Language Interference. *World J English Lang*. 2025 Apr 2;15:171.
- Alsoweed RA, Alharbi AS, Alqusumi FA. An Investigation of Writing Errors Made by Saudi EFL Learners. *Arab World English J* [Internet]. 2025;16(4):107–23. Available from: <https://www.scopus.com/pages/publications/105025694042?origin=resultslist>
- Alwi H, Dardjowidjojo S, Lapoliwa H, Moeliono AM. *Tata Bahasa Baku Bahasa Indonesia*. Edisi Ketiga. Jakarta: Balai Pustaka; 2010.
- Bonilla-Lopez M. Patterns of errors in texts written by Costa Rican university English learners: A corpus-aided study. *Actual Investig en Educ*. 2022 Nov 18;23:1–31.
- Ellis R, Barkhuizen G. *Analysing Learner Language*. Asian J English Lang Teach. 2005;
- Erowati R, Nurjanah N. Pelafalan dan pengenalan kosakata pada pemelajar BIPA di dalam tes kemahiran berbicara. *Dialekt J Bahasa, Sastra, dan Pendidik Bhs dan Sastra Indones*. 2020 Jun 28;7:17–28.
- Hao Y, Wang X, Wu M, Liu H. Syntactic Networks of Interlanguage Across L2 Modalities and Proficiency Levels. *Front Psychol* [Internet]. 2021;12:643120. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.643120>

- Hardini T, Yulianeta Y, Fikrianto M, Hamidah H, Emilia E, Kharismawati L. ASEAN Students' Interest in Learning the Indonesian Language: A Descriptive Study from the Perspective of SEAMEO ASEAN. *Int J Lang Educ*. 2023 Dec 31;7.
- Hasanah M, Sari RR. Acquiring Indonesian Pragmatic and Cultural Competencies Towards Indonesian Language Learners by Arabic Speakers at Al-Azhar University Cairo: *Proc Int Conf Eng Technol Soc Sci (ICONETOS 2020)*. 2021;529(Iconetos 2020):493–7.
- Henkin R, Gafter R, Abu-Rabiah E. Where syntactic interference persists: The case of Hebrew written by native Arabic speakers. 2023.
- Jarvis S, Pavlenko A. *Crosslinguistic Influence in Language and Cognition*. 1st ed. Routledge; 2008. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203935927>
- Jarvis S. Methodological Rigor in the Study of Transfer: Identifying L1 Influence in them Interlanguage Lexicon. *Lang Learn* [Internet]. 2000;50(2):245–309. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/0023-8333.00118>
- Jawad A, Mansour A. An Exploration of Grammatical Errors in Written English of Libyan EFL Students with Special Reference to Arabic as their First-Language. *J World Englishes Educ Pract*. 2021 Jul 31;3:7–25.
- Kazazoğlu S. The impact of L1 interference on foreign language writing: A contrastive error analysis. *Dil ve Dilbilimi Çalışmaları Derg*. 2020 Oct 1;16:1168–88.
- Polio C. Chapter 16. Can writing facilitate the development of grammatical competence?: Advancing research agendas. In 2020. p. 381–402.
- Pramuniati I, Sitinjak DR. The interlanguage of French learning Indonesian as a foreign language. *Indones J Appl Linguist* [Internet]. 2024;14(1):206–19. Available from: <https://www.scopus.com/pages/publications/85204459699?origin=resultslist>
- Qasem F. Crosslinguistic Influence of the First Language: Interlingual errors in the writing of ESL Saudi learners. *Macrolinguistics*. 2020 Dec 1;8:105–20.
- Rafkahanun R. Analisis Kesalahan Fonologis dalam Keterampilan Berbicara Pembelajaran BIPA di Pusat Studi Indonesia Ismailia Mesir. *Madah J Bhs dan Sastra*. 2021;12(1):78–87.
- Ragab I. Karakteristik Pembelajaran BIPA Mesir. *Nuances Indones Lang*. 2022;2(2):67–78.
- Rustandi A, Febriani R, Asistido M, Syafryadin S. Interlanguage syntactic temporary, permanent, and fossilized errors in second language writing. *J English as a Foreign Lang*. 2023 Mar 31;13.
- Saddhono K. Integrating culture in Indonesian language learning for foreign speakers at Indonesian universities. 2015 May 1;6:273–6.
- Selinker L. Interlanguage. *IRAL Int Rev Appl Linguist Lang Teach* [Internet]. 1972;10(1–4):209–31. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1515/iral.1972.10.1-4.209>
- Shen D, Huang D. Negative Transfer of L1 Thinking on L2 Writing Based on Iwrite Evaluation System. In 2022. p. 304–12.
- Sneddon JN, Adelaar KA, Djenar D, Ewing M. *Indonesian: A Comprehensive Grammar* [Internet]. 2nd ed. Routledge; 2010. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203720882>
- Sri Nugraheni A. Teaching design and Indonesian language materials at universities of Thailand and Manila, Philippines, based on local wisdom in BIPA learning. *Gramatika STKIP PGRI Sumatera Barat*. 2022 Oct 26;8.

- Susanto G, Pickus D, Espree-Conaway D, Suparmi, Rusiandi A, Noviyya H. Indonesian language policy and perspectives on its implementation in promoting Bahasa Indonesia as an international language. *Cogent Arts Humanit.* 2024 Jun 25;11.
- Widianto E, Weix GG. How to Bridge Cross-Cultural Understanding? Indonesian Language Instruction as an Instrument for Advancing Religious Moderation Diplomacy in Vietnam. *SUVANNABHUMI.* 2025;17(2):157–84.
- Williams J. The potential role(s) of writing in second language development. *J Second Lang Writ.* 2012 Dec 1;21:321–331.
- Yoviyani SH, Mulyati Y, Sastromiharjo A. Implementasi Strategi Sound Association bagi Pemelajar BIPA Penutur Arab Tingkat Dasar. *Imajeri J Pendidik Bhs dan Sastra Indones.* 2024;7(1):92–100.
- Zarbali N, Suroso S, Syamsi K. First language interference in speaking and writing Indonesian language of Azerbaijani students in Indonesian language course at Azerbaijan University of Languages. *Forum Linguist Stud.* 2024 Feb 29;6.