

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

English plays an important role in higher education, particularly in academic communication and writing. In Indonesia, English is taught as a Foreign Language (EFL) and is included as a compulsory subject in many universities, including at the Faculty of Law, Ganesha University of Education (Undiksha). Under the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) curriculum, law students take a Basic English course to support their academic and professional development (Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha, 2020).

In higher education, English is especially important for discipline-specific needs, including law. For law students, English writing skills are essential because legal studies involve written communication, including legal essays, reports, contracts, and case summaries. Many legal references and academic publications are also written in English. Although Legal English is characterized by formal language, technical vocabulary, and complex sentence structures, the present study is conducted in a Basic English course rather than a specialized Legal English course. Nevertheless, the students' law academic background remains relevant because they are expected to use English for future academic and professional communication (Abduqayumova & Madalieva, 2025).

Despite the importance of English writing skills, many EFL students still experience difficulties in producing accurate written texts. One important factor contributing to these difficulties is cross-linguistic transfer, which refers to the

influence of the first language (L1) on the second language (L2) (Odlin, 1989). In the Indonesian EFL context, differences between Indonesian and English grammatical systems frequently influence students' English sentence formation.

Indonesian does not apply tense markers and subject–verb agreement in the same way as English. As a result, students often transfer Indonesian linguistic patterns into English writing, leading to morphological and syntactic deviations in their written texts (Lado, 1957). However, these deviations should not merely be viewed as linguistic deficiencies. Rather, according to Interlanguage Theory proposed by Selinker (1972), second-language learners develop a transitional linguistic system that reflects both their first-language knowledge and their developing understanding of the target language. Therefore, the influence of Indonesian linguistic structures on students' English writing can be viewed as evidence of interlanguage development, in which learners draw on existing linguistic knowledge as they attempt to produce English forms. This phenomenon is considered a natural process in second language acquisition because learners tend to draw on their first-language knowledge when producing in the second language (Arabski, 2006; Gass et al., 2020).

In the context of Undiksha, this phenomenon can also be observed among law students. In practice, many students still produce English sentences that reflect Indonesian grammatical patterns, particularly in tense usage, subject–verb agreement, word order, and sentence construction. Students frequently translate ideas directly from Indonesian into English, resulting in written texts that contain structures influenced by their first language. This condition is closely related to limited exposure to English, since the Basic English course is taught for only one

semester. Consequently, students have limited opportunities to develop English writing competence and tend to depend on Indonesian linguistic structures when expressing ideas in English.

Due to the frequent occurrence of first language influence in EFL writing, many researchers have investigated cross-linguistic transfer in various contexts. Russak and Zaretsky (2021) found that learners' first language affects grammatical structures and sentence construction in English writing. Fikri (2023) identified morphological and syntactic interference in Indonesian students' writing, especially in tense usage and subject–verb agreement. Bi and Tan (2024) also reported that first language background influences syntactic patterns in second language writing.

Although previous studies have examined cross-linguistic transfer in EFL writing, most have focused on general EFL learners, secondary school students, or university students across various disciplines. Existing studies have rarely examined cross-linguistic transfer among students from specific academic backgrounds, such as law students enrolled in general English courses. Therefore, this study focuses on law students' English writing within a Basic English course context. In Indonesia, limited attention has been paid to law students, even though their English-learning needs are closely related to future academic and professional communication in legal contexts. Furthermore, little is known about how Indonesian morphological and syntactic features influence the English writing of first-semester law students during a Basic English course. Therefore, this study identifies the types of cross-linguistic transfer in law students' English written texts and analyzes how Indonesian morphological and syntactic features influence their writing.

This study contributes to research on cross-linguistic transfer by providing a detailed form-based analysis of Indonesian morphological and syntactic influence in the English writing of law students. The findings are expected to enrich research on EFL writing among students from specific academic backgrounds and support the development of more context-sensitive English teaching strategies.

1.2 Problem Identification

In learning English as a foreign language (EFL), particularly in the Basic English course in the Law Study Program at the Faculty of Law, Ganesha University of Education, students still experience difficulties with writing English texts. These difficulties are reflected in frequent grammatical, morphological, and syntactic errors in their writing, indicating limited mastery of English language structures.

One possible cause of these difficulties is the difference between the Indonesian and English language systems. Students tend to apply Indonesian linguistic patterns when writing in English, including direct translation from their first language. This practice may lead to cross-linguistic transfer, especially negative transfer, which affects the accuracy of morphological forms and sentence structures in English.

In addition, the limited instructional time in the Basic English course may reduce opportunities for intensive practice and feedback, increasing the possibility of transfer-related errors. As a result, students' writing may lack grammatical accuracy and clarity, hindering effective communication of meaning. Therefore, cross-linguistic transfer needs to be systematically investigated to identify the types

of transfer that occur and to analyze how Indonesian morphological and syntactic features influence law students' English writing.

1.3 Research Questions

The study is guided by the following three research questions:

1. What types of cross-linguistic transfer appear in law students' English written texts?
2. What morphological features of the Indonesian language (as the students' first language) influence the English written texts of the law students?
3. What syntactic features of the Indonesian language (as the students' first language) influence the English written texts of the law students?

1.4 Research Objectives

According to the research questions above, the purpose of the study can be stated as follows:

1. To identify the types of cross-linguistic transfer found in law students' English written texts.
2. To analyze how morphological features of the Indonesian language (as the students' first language) influence law students' English written texts.
3. To analyze how syntactic features of the Indonesian language (as the students' first language) influence law students' English written texts.

1.5 Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations related to its scope and focus. It examines cross-linguistic transfer in law students' English writing, with specific attention to morphological and syntactic aspects. The analysis focuses exclusively on linguistic forms, including morphological features such as verb inflection and tense marking, subject-verb agreement, plural marking, affixation and derivation, and possessive and pronoun marking, as well as syntactic features such as clause construction, article usage, null copula tendency, word order, and flexible word order. The study does not explore semantic meaning, discourse-level organization, stylistic variation, or pragmatic interpretation in the students' texts. Therefore, the investigation is restricted to form based analysis rather than meaning-based analysis.

In addition, this study limits its investigation to written language and does not examine other language skills such as speaking, listening, or reading. The participants were first-semester students of the Law Study Program who were taking the Basic English course at the Faculty of Law, Ganesha University of Education. The data were taken from the students' written assignments in this course. As a result, the findings of this study reflect a specific instructional and institutional context. The results are not intended to be generalized to all EFL learners, other academic disciplines, or different levels of English proficiency.

The students' written texts were different in length. Therefore, the frequencies in this study show the number of transfer features found in the analyzed texts. They are not used to compare the writing ability of individual students.

Furthermore, this study was limited by the use of only one writing task as the data source. Since all students' written texts were produced from the same

writing instruction, the findings may not represent patterns of cross-linguistic transfer that could appear in different writing tasks or genres. In addition, the students' written texts were relatively short; therefore, the frequency of transfer features reflects occurrences within the analyzed corpus and should not be interpreted as a general measure of students' overall English writing ability.

1.6 Significance of the Study

1.6.1 Theoretical Benefit

This study provides theoretical insight into the phenomenon of cross-linguistic transfer, particularly in understanding how Indonesian linguistic features influence students' English writing in the context of English as a foreign language learning in Indonesia.

1.6.2 Practical Benefits

1. For Lecturers

For lecturers, particularly those teaching Basic English and Legal English courses, the findings of this study can serve as a reference for designing more effective teaching strategies that address the specific linguistic difficulties experienced by law students. The findings may also support the implementation of the MBKM curriculum by providing insights into students' actual writing needs and helping lecturers develop more context-sensitive English instructional materials for law students

2. For Students

For law students, this study can help increase awareness of how

Indonesian linguistic structures influence their English writing, particularly in morphological and syntactic aspects. By understanding common patterns of cross-linguistic transfer, students are expected to improve their grammatical accuracy and develop better English writing skills for academic and legal communication. This is particularly important for accessing legal references, completing academic assignments, and supporting future professional activities in the legal field.

3. For Further Researchers

The results of this study may provide useful empirical data and references for future researchers who are interested in investigating cross-linguistic transfer in different academic disciplines, language skills, or educational levels.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

1. Cross-Linguistic Transfer

Cross-linguistic transfer refers to the influence of a learner's first language on the use of a second language. As defined by Odlin (1989), transfer arises from the similarities and differences between the target language and a previously acquired language. In this study, it specifically refers to the influence of Indonesian on students' English sentence construction and writing.

2. Law Students

Law students refer to undergraduate students majoring in law who study English as a supporting subject. In this research, they are categorized as learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

3. Writing

Writing is the process of expressing ideas, thoughts, and information in written language. According to Hyland (2003), writing in an EFL context requires learners to control grammatical forms and organize ideas clearly to communicate meaning effectively. In this study, writing refers to students' ability to produce English sentences and short paragraphs in the Basic English Course.

4. Basic English Course

Basic English Course refers to an introductory English subject designed to develop students' fundamental skills in grammar, vocabulary, sentence construction, and writing. In this study, it refers to the course taken by first-semester law students to support their academic communication and English writing development.

5. Indonesian and English Syntactic Features

Indonesian and English syntactic features refer to the sentence structures and grammatical patterns of both languages. According to Sneddon (2012), Indonesian verbs do not change with tense and do not require subject–verb agreement, whereas English requires both. In this study, these differences may influence students' English writing.

6. Indonesian and English Morphological Features

Morphological features refer to the ways words are formed and grammatically structured in a language. According to Fromkin et al. (2017), morphology concerns word formation and the internal structure of words. Indonesian and English differ in several morphological aspects, particularly

verb inflection, tense marking, subject-verb agreement, plural marking, affixation, and possessive forms. In this study, these differences may influence students' English writing through cross-linguistic transfer.

