

Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis: Does the Positive Transfer in Writing Skill Occur in Lower Level Students?

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INFO ARTIKEL

Riwayat Artikel:

Diterima: 18-12-2019

Disetujui: 29-11-2020

Kata kunci:

*linguistic interdependence;
hypothesis;
positive transfer;*

ABSTRAK

Abstract: Language transfer always becomes an interesting topic to discuss in SLA. From the two types of language transfer take place in the process of language learning, this research aims to investigate the positive transfer occurs in junior high school students' writing skill. The two languages to be involved in this research, Indonesian as L1 and English as L2. The analysis of the positive transfer within writing skill in this research is carried out under the theory of 'Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis' proposed by Cummins. Correlational research design is employed to analyze the correlation between the students' L1 (Indonesian) writing ability and L2 (English) writing ability. The analysis result shows that the positive transfer in students' writing does not exist. This happens due to the lack of exposure that the students have in practicing L2 (English) writing.

Abstrak: Transfer bahasa selalu menjadi topik yang menarik untuk dibicarakan dalam pemerolehan bahasa kedua. Dari dua jenis transfer bahasa yang terjadi dalam proses pembelajaran bahasa. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menginvestigasi transfer positif yang terjadi dalam keterampilan menulis siswa SMP. Ada dua bahasa yang dilibatkan dalam penelitian ini, yaitu bahasa Indonesia dan bahasa Inggris. Analisis transfer positif dalam keterampilan menulis pada penelitian ini mengacu pada teori 'Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis' yang digagas oleh Cummins. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode korelasional untuk menganalisis korelasi kemampuan menulis siswa dalam bahasa Indonesia dan bahasa Inggris. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa tidak ada transfer positif yang terjadi dalam tulisan siswa. Hal ini terjadi karena kurangnya paparan yang diterima siswa untuk mengasah keterampilan menulis dalam bahasa Inggris.

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Language transfer has increasingly become a fundamental issue to discuss in second language acquisition. According to Kellerman and Smith (1986), language transfer is the behaviors carried out from L1 which is incorporated into the new language learned. It is the activation of previous linguistic knowledge that requires both mental and communicative processes to develop the interlanguage skill (Faerch and Kasper, 1987). The language transfer occurred within a learner can be resulted from both the differences and the similarities between the first language has been acquired and the target language learned (Odlin, 1989). To underline, language transfer is basically the process of carrying over the linguistic knowledge acquired in the native language to help the process of learning the target language.

The early research in language transfer was conducted in the 1940s and 1950s, during which the theory of behaviorism had an enormous impact in linguistics field. Under the influence of behaviorism theory, any transfer derived from the first language is considered as a transfer of habits from the first language that may hinder the success of learning the new language. This notion then leads to the idea that L1 interference is the sole factor that can cause lack of success in L2 learning (Fries, 1945 and Lado, 1957); comparing the differences between the two languages is considered to be an important process of developing both L2 theory and pedagogy.

Inspired by the idea of comparing the two languages to find what might facilitate and hinder the process of L2 learning, Lado (1957) introduces Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH). Through this hypothesis, he distinguishes two types of transfer: positive transfer which is resulted from the similarity shared between the two languages and negative transfer which is resulted from the differences occurred between the two languages. As this hypothesis tends to highlight more of the differences between the two languages which ultimately deals with the term of negative transfer, the positive transfer that may also occur in L2 learning is less often discussed and remains to be neglected at that time.

Until then, in the late 1970s, Cummins (1979) steals the spot light by highlighting the occurrence of positive transfer in L2 learning through his hypothesis popularly known as Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis. In this hypothesis, it is believed that there is a high possibility for learners to transfer the skill or strategy they have acquired in L1 while trying to acquire L2. The level of competence that learners has achieved in L1 can influence their L2 competence. The higher the L1 ability that learners have in a particular skill, the better their L2 ability of that skill will be.

The interconnection between L1 and L2 underlies the idea of Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis is also discussed in the dual iceberg analogy (Cummins, 1981). In the theory, it is explained that despite the differences that appear in the surface features of two languages such as lexicon, phonology, and syntax; there is a common underlying proficiency that determines learners' performance on academic/cognitive tasks. The proficiency that serves in the surface level is named as BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills) and refers to the conversational proficiency or communicative skill which plays an important role in context-embedded and less cognitively demanding tasks that often takes place in everyday world outside the classroom. Meanwhile, the one in the deeper level is named as CALP (Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency) and refers to the conversational proficiency or communicative skill which plays an important role in context-reduced and cognitively demanding communicative tasks that often takes place in the classroom (Cummins, 1980 and 1983). In short, it can be inferred that the Common Underlying Proficiency which allows language transfer to take place actually refers to CALP (Cognitive/Academic Language Proficiency).

Trying to explain on how the language transfer is possible to take place in CALP, Cummins (1981) presents a theory which is commonly known as One Balloon Theory. In this theory, it is believed that there is only one internal device in human brain that serves the language learning process both in L1 and L2. As asserted by Baker (2006) that a person has one integrated source of thought that allows him to listen, speak, read, and write in two or more languages; a person's cognitive functioning and school achievement may be fed through more than one well-developed language channels. Since the language is processed in the same internal device, there is a high possibility to transfer task that demands cognitive skill, such as literacy-related skill (reading and writing), content learning, problem solving, and abstract thinking.

As it is mentioned that one of the cognitively demanding tasks in CALP is literacy-related skills: reading and writing, writing is chosen to be the topic investigated in this research due to some reasons. (1) In Indonesian educational context, writing has always been claimed to be the most difficult skill to be acquired. Compared to the other three language skills, writing involves a very complex process but yet become the least skill to practice at schools. This may happen due to the influence of the national examination of English subject which only puts a heavy emphasis on listening, reading, and grammar. (2) In further discussion about the common underlying proficiency, Cummins (1981 and 1983) states that literacy-related aspects which are crucially needed for context-reduced and cognitively demanding communication is constituted in Common Underlying Proficiency. Context-reduced communication here refers to the communication that requires explicit and precise elaboration since the addressor and the addressee cannot negotiate meaning and have no situational cue (Carson and Kuehn, 1992:158) whereas cognitively demanding communication refers to the type of communication which requires the involvement of cognitive activity to accomplish the task assigned in classroom setting. The only way of communication that can fulfil such requirements is writing. (3) The positive transfer from L1 into L2 within the common underlying proficiency most likely to be found on super-sentential level, such as process monitoring, topic understanding, ideas generating, and organizing and structuring (Cummins, 1983 and Wang and Wen, 2004). The transfer happens in this super-sentential level will be easier to be assessed and be promoted through writing. Based on all these three reasons, it can be concluded that writing is the most suitable skill to be studied in this area of interest.

Many studies about the positive transfer occurs in writing skill across languages using the idea of Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis have been carried out in the last four decades. The studies conducted by Edelsky (1982), Mace-Matluck et al. (1983), Canale et al. (1988), Carson et al. (1990), Carson and Kuehn (1992), Berman (1994), Sasaki and Hirose (1996), Ma and Wen (1999), Wang and Wen (2002), Hosseini and Derakhshan (2007), Yigzaw (2013), and Pae (2017) shows that there is a positive transfer from the students' L1 writing ability to their L2 writing ability. Even though the subjects of these studies share various L1, such as Japanese, Chinese, Cantonese, Korean, Amharic, Iranian Icelandic, Spanish, and French, all these studies keep showing consistent result about the positive transfer occurred between the subjects' L1 writing ability and L2 (English) writing ability. As a response to this remarkable finding, the researcher is eager to know whether the same positive transfer in writing skill also applies between Indonesian and English.

This research endeavors to investigate the L1 positive transfer in L2 acquisition by using Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis. To be more precise, this research only focuses on investigating the existence of positive transfer between junior high school students' L1 writing ability and L2 writing ability. Junior high school students are chosen to be the subjects in order to find out whether this positive transfer of writing skill also occurs in lower level of education; most of the subjects involved in the previous studies are senior high school students and university students. The L1 to be investigated in this research is Indonesian whereas the L2 is English. The result of this research is expected to be able to provide the empirical evidence about the positive transfer of writing skill between Indonesian and English, verify the Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis proposed by Cummins, and give useful pedagogical implication for the teaching of L2 writing in junior high school in Indonesia.

METHOD

Research Design

This research intended to investigate the transfer of writing skill from Indonesian to English in junior high school by using Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis. According to Cummins (1980), any particular language measure which is intended to find empirical evidence related to CALP can be answered by using correlational techniques. Thus, this research applied correlational research design since the transfer of writing skill to be investigated in this research belongs to one of the literacy-related skills constituted in CALP. There were two continuous variables involved in this research, which were junior high school students' L1 (Indonesian) writing ability and junior high school students' L2 (English) writing ability. In relation to the nature of correlational research design, this research tried to find out the correlation between junior high school students' L1 (Indonesian) writing ability and their L2 (English) writing ability.

Participants

The eighth-grade students of a junior high school in Lumajang was taken as the population of this research. Due to the limitation of time and energy, there was only 10% of the population taken as sample. To provide more representative data from the population, proportional random sampling was applied. Therefore, there were 36 subjects to be involved in this research since there were nine classes of the eighth-grade which consisted of 31-33 students each. The eighth-grade students were chosen as the subjects of this research by considering the fact that they have at least spent a year or even more to learn English at school and are required to be able to write well in some genres of text both in Indonesian and English based on the 2013 Curriculum (2017 revised version).

Instruments

There were two instruments used in this research. They are L1 (Indonesian) writing test and L2 (English) writing test. For both writing tests administered, writing a descriptive text on the topic of "My Favorite Place" was chosen due to some reasons. First, the students had learned about descriptive text when they were in the seventh grade; they have had the knowledge about what descriptive text is and also the experience on how to compose a good descriptive text. Second, descriptive text appears to be the genre of text that the students have experienced writing in both Indonesian in English when they were in the seventh grade. Third, the topic of "My Favorite Place" was assigned by considering that it was important to make sure that all the students were familiar with the topic so that they were able to write the texts required as expected.

For the L1 (Indonesian) writing test, the students were required to compose a descriptive text on the topic of "*Tempat Terfavoritku*" (My Favorite Place) in Indonesian in 60 minutes. The text written had to approximately consist of 150—200 words. Meanwhile, for L2 (English) writing test, the students were required to compose a descriptive text on the topic of "My Favorite Place" in English in 60 minutes. The text written in this second writing test had to approximately consist of 75—100 words. The students were expected to write longer text for L1 (Indonesian) writing test since it was the language that they had been using since childhood.

For the validity of the instruments, content validity, face validity, and expert validation were employed. The content validity of the instruments was obtained by constructing test materials which matched the fourth basic competence of teaching Indonesian and English for the eighth-grade students. The face validity of the instruments could be seen through the instruction of both instruments which required the students to write a descriptive text about a favorite place that they like to go to. The expert validation was completed by asking an expert of Indonesian language teaching and an expert of English language teaching with at least 10 years of experience to validate the L1 (Indonesian) and L2 (English) writing instruments. After the validation, a try out was also carried out to make sure that the eighth-grade students could easily understand what they are supposed to do once they read the instruction stated in L1 (Indonesian) and L2 (English) writing test prompts.

For the reliability of the instrument, inter-scoring method was employed. There were two scorers assigned to score the students' writing in each language. The ones who scored the students' writing in Indonesian were a person who had experience in Indonesian language teaching and the eighth-grade Indonesian teacher. Meanwhile, the ones who scored the students' writing in English were a person who had experience in English language teaching and the eighth-grade English teacher. The scorers used the same scoring rubric to assess the students' writing in both languages. If the discrepancy between the scores allocated by the first and the second scorer was more than 5, the two scorers had to discuss the piece of writing being assessed until an agreement was made.

Scoring Rubrics

There were two scoring rubrics used to assess the students' writing: a scoring rubric used to assess L1 (Indonesian) descriptive writing and a scoring rubric used to assess L2 (English) descriptive writing. Since both the teaching of Indonesian and English were carried out under Genre Based Approach, there were three important components to be accommodated in the scoring rubrics: social purpose, generic structure, and language features. Therefore, there were five aspects included in the scoring rubrics: content which dealt with the social purpose of the text, organization which dealt with the generic structure of a descriptive text, grammar, vocabulary, mechanics (punctuation, capitalization, and spelling) which dealt with the language features of the text.

From the table presented above, it can be seen that in L1 (Indonesian) writing test, there are 5 students who achieve the highest score (92.5) and 2 students who achieve the lowest score is 50. The value of range in this writing test is so great, that is 42.5. Interpreting from the value of mean (77.1), median (80), and mode (92.5) which are highly different from each other, it can be taken into a conclusion that the data of the students' L1(Indonesian) writing ability is not normally distributed. Quite the same result also goes to the data of the L2 (English) writing test. In L2 (English) writing test, there are 2 students who achieve the highest score (92.5) and 7 students who achieve the lowest score (62.5). However, the value of range in this writing test is not as great as the one appears in L1 (Indonesian) writing test, that is 30. Interpreting from the value of mean (73.8), median (72.5), and mode (62.5) of the L2 writing ability which are highly different from each other, particularly the value of mode, implies that the data of the students' L2 (English) writing ability is also not normally distributed.

The Students' L1 Writing Ability and L2 Writing Ability Normality Test Result

A normality test using .05 (95%) level of significance was performed to provide more evidence whether the students' L1 (Indonesian) writing ability and L2 (English) writing ability data are normally distributed or not. It is important to know the distribution of the data in this research since it will be used to determine which type of test should be run for the correlation analysis. The following is the result of the normality test for the students' L1 (Indonesian) writing ability and L2 (English) writing ability data.

Table 2. The Result of the Normality Test for the Students' L1 Writing Ability and L2 Writing Ability

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
L1 (Indonesian) Writing Ability	.161	32	.035	.867	32	.001
L2 (English) Writing Ability	.172	32	.017	.884	32	.003

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

There are two sets of normality statistics shown as the result of the computation. However, for this research, Shapiro-Wilk is more appropriate to be used since each of the data set only consists of 32 elements. Under the column of Shapiro-Wilk data, it can be seen that the ρ -value of L1 (Indonesian) writing ability data set (.001) and L2 (English) writing ability data set (.003) are smaller than the α -value (.05). Thus, it can be interpreted that both of the data are normally distributed.

The Students' L1 Writing Ability and L2 Writing Ability Correlation Result

As the result of normality test shows that the data of the students' writing ability in both languages are non-parametric, the Spearman's rank-order correlation was performed by using one-tailed test and .05 (95%) level of significance. The following is the result of the correlation test performed on the students' L1 (Indonesian) writing ability and L2 (English) writing ability.

Table 3. The Correlation between the Students' L1 Writing Ability and L2 Writing Ability

		L1 (Indonesian) Writing Ability	L2 (English) Writing Ability
Spearman's rho	L1 (Indonesian) Writing Ability	Correlation Coefficient	1.000
		Sig. (1-tailed)	.012
		N	32
	L2 (English) Writing Ability	Correlation Coefficient	.012
		Sig. (1-tailed)	.475
		N	32

From the table above, it can be seen that the correlation coefficient (r) is very low (.012). Moreover, the ρ -value (.475) is greater than the α -value (.05) which means that there is not enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis. To wrap up, it can be said that there is no significant and positive correlation between the students' L1 (Indonesian) writing ability and L2 (English) writing ability.

However, examining from the students' mean score in both L1 (Indonesian) writing and L2 (English) writing, it is found that the score discrepancy between the two is not high. The students' mean score in L1 (Indonesian) writing is 77.1 while in L2 (English) writing is 73.8. Logically, regarding to the result of the mean scores achieved, there should have been a positive correlation found between the two variables investigated. Having a closer look at the students' raw score in both writing tests, it is found that there are 18 data which show that the discrepancy between the scores achieved in L1 (Indonesian) writing and L2 (English) writing are not high. Performing Spearman's correlation test on these 18 data, it is found that the correlation coefficient (r) is .789 and the p -value of the data is .000 which is smaller than the α -value (.05). It means that there is a high and significant correlation between the students' L1 (Indonesian) writing ability and their L2 (English) writing ability. In this case, it can be concluded that one of the factors affecting the result of the correlation analysis performed in this research is the outliers appear in the rest 15 data. These outliers may appear due to the heterogeneity of the subjects caused by the sampling method applied.

DISCUSSION

The very low correlation coefficient (.012) between the two variables indicates a weak relationship between the students' L1 (Indonesian) writing ability and L2 (English) writing ability. This means that the students' ability to write in L1 (Indonesian) cannot be used as the predictor of their success in composing a piece of writing in L2 (English). Those who can write well in L1 (Indonesian) are not always be able to write well in L2 (English). The p -value (.475) is also greater than the α -value (.05) which signifies that the null hypothesis is rejected. To this extent, the finding of this research contradicts to Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis (1979) and can also lead to the conclusion that it is the negative transfer that takes the stance in this case.

There have been some other studies showing similar results to this present research finding. The study conducted by Carson et.al (1990) examining the correlation between L1 and L2 writing performance of 57 Japanese students and 48 Chinese students revealed that there is no positive correlation between the writing skills of the Chinese students and weak but positive correlation between the writing skills of Japanese students. In another study conducted by Abu-Akel (1997) which took 55 Arabic students and 45 Hebrew students as samples, it was found that there was a weak but positive correlation between the writing skills of the Arabic students and no significant correlation between the writing skills of the Hebrew students. Strengthening this negative transfer phenomena in L2 writing production, Xiao-xia (2008) who reviewed some previous studies in this area of interest say that it is more frequent for the negative transfer of L1 to take place rather than its positive transfer in L2 writing.

The most possible factor that may cause the absence of positive transfer from the students' L1 (Indonesian) writing ability into their L2 (English) writing ability is the very limited exposure to practice the L2. As Cummins (1979) says in his Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis, it is only possible for the language skills to be transferred from L1 to L2 if only a student has motivation to learn the L2 and sufficient exposure to it. L2 exposure here refers to the contact that the students have with the new language they are trying to learn. It can be from the environment, teaching and learning process in the classroom, or even the conversations with parents at home. Having sufficient L2 exposure plays a significant role on why certain students learn the language faster than the others.

Providing sufficient L2 exposure has been proved in many studies to be a fundamental factor influencing the success of learning the target language (Hamayan et al., 1977; Seliger, 1977; Briere, 1978; and Chesterfield et al., 1983). According to Genesee (2008) the sufficient exposure to L2 could lead to effortless second language acquisition. What is important to keep in mind in the term of "sufficient exposure" here is that it actually refers to the amount of exposure that the students receive, not the variety of exposure that they get. The more often the students are exposed to the new language learned, the more confident they might be in trying to use the language for communication; that is where the motivation to learn the target language sparks.

In Indonesian educational context, providing sufficient exposure to L2 (English) has been a non-ending struggle that teachers have to cope with. The status of English that is only as a foreign language contributes much to this matter. It is almost impossible for the students to have the access to practice their English on the daily basis, except during the English teaching and learning process. Being able to speak fluently in English is somehow considered to be a fancy thing. Indonesian people would rather speak in their local language or Indonesian as another option. However, the time given to learn English at school also does not promise much. Junior high school students only have 4×40 minutes per week to learn English subject.

With the very limited amount of time allocated for English teaching, ideally, there are four language skills should be covered. Unfortunately, the expectation might be far from the reality. In the reality, it can be found that most junior high school teachers in Indonesia only put heavy emphasis on listening skill, reading skill, and grammar. They favor these skills over the others because those are the skills that the students have to deal with in the national examination later. Focusing on teaching those three skills is just the effort that the teachers make in order to help the students prepare themselves to be able to accomplish a good score in the national examination.

Favoring certain skills over the others has made writing to be the least practiced skill at school. The students are not required to compose a piece of writing during the national examination. There are also many teachers who still hold on to the believe that oral communication is far more important than written communication. All these has made the students to only have very limited chance to expose their writing skill at school. It is not surprising at all to find that the students' writing ability

in English is still poor. In contrary to this condition, the results of the studies conducted by Cumming (1989) and Dressel, Schmid, and Kincaid (1952) conveys that the frequency of writing exercise can influence the students writing proficiency in L2. Having insufficient exposure in L2 (English) writing skill has shaped the students to be less proficient L2 writers. Therefore, it is impossible for the positive transfer in writing skill between L1 (Indonesian) and L2 (English) to take place in this research.

Another theoretical explanation for the absence of positive transfer from the students' L1 (Indonesian) writing ability to their L2 (English) writing ability in this research is the students' level of L2 (English) proficiency. The theory of how the level of L2 proficiency affects the success of language transfer process is discussed by Cummins (1979) through his 'Threshold Hypothesis' and Clark (1979) through his 'language ceiling' notion. Many studies have been carried out to prove the existence of this hypothesis (see Ito, 2009; Yanqun, 2009; Behjat and Sadighi, 2010, and Marzban and Jalali, 2016). Unfortunately, due to the limitation of this research, the researcher cannot provide further discussion related to the students' L2 (English) proficiency level because the researcher did not conduct any specific test to measure the variable.

CONCLUSION

The result of the correlational analysis performed in this research shows that the correlation coefficient between the two variables investigated is very low ($r = .012$) and is not significant, the p -value (.475) is greater than the α -value (.05). It means that there is no positive correlation between the students' L1 (Indonesian) writing ability and their L2 (English) writing ability; the writing ability that the students have acquired in L1 (Indonesian) does not always guarantee the success of acquiring the writing ability in L2 (English). The absence of positive correlation that occurs in this research is expected to be influenced by the very limited exposure given to L2 (English) writing.

For future researchers, it is expected that the result of this research can provide source of information related to the testing of Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis, particularly in the transferability of Indonesian writing ability into English writing ability in junior high school level. To have better empirical explanation about the occurrence of positive transfer in writing skill across languages and how the level of L2 proficiency influences the success of it, it is suggested to the future researchers to also examine the students' level of L2 proficiency and then group them based on their proficiency level to see how it affects the transfer of writing skill. To prevent the outliers from appearing in the data collected and influence the result of the data analysis, future researcher should make sure that the subjects involved are homogeneous. Lastly, related to the technical aspect in collecting the data of the research, it is important for the future researchers to employ experienced university-level teachers to make sure that the students' writings are not scored either too strictly or too leniently. Meanwhile, for junior high school English teacher, it is expected that the result of this research can give a new insight about the importance of providing sufficient exposure to practice writing in English. More importantly after knowing that the writing ability the students have acquired in L1 (Indonesian) can actually help them develop better L2 (English) writing ability if given sufficient exposure.

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