



Indonesian and English sentence patterns: A contrastive syntactic perspective

Anita Kusumawati *

Universitas Pamulang, Tangerang Selatan, Indonesia

*dosen02575@unpam.ac.id

Abstract

In learning a foreign language, comprehending similarities and differences between the source language and the target language is crucial to become proficient in the target language. This scientifically can be done by contrasting the two languages. This research aims to contrast two languages, Indonesian language as the source language and English language as the target language. This study contrasts Indonesian and English by examining simple declarative sentence patterns, with the aim of outlining their similarities and differences. The scope of the investigation is limited to the comparison of simple declarative sentence patterns in both languages. The primary objective of this study is to identify and describe the similarities and differences in simple declarative constructions across the two linguistic systems. The Contrastive Analysis method is used to contrast the patterns of sentence structure in both languages. Declarative sentences are categorized into *transitive*, *ditransitive*, *intransitive*, *nominal*, *adjectival*, *prepositional*, and *numeral* patterns. The result of this study reveals that Indonesian and English share declarative patterns in *transitive*, *ditransitive*, and *intransitive* forms, while differing in *nominal*, *adjectival*, *prepositional*, and *numeral* types. Simple declarative sentences in Indonesian and English share several structural patterns in transitive, ditransitive, and intransitive constructions. However, Indonesian also allows nominal, adjectival, prepositional, and numeral declarative sentences, which employ complements as predicates and are not found in English. Conversely, English exhibits patterns absent in Indonesian; those formed with intensive verbs (*to be*) functioning as the predicate. These findings provide useful insights for language teaching, as they highlight specific areas where Indonesian learners of English may encounter structural difficulties.

Keywords

contrastive analysis, contrastive linguistics, sentence, structure, declarative

Introduction

This study employs Contrastive Analysis (CA) as the primary framework for examining Indonesian and English declarative sentences. Contrastive Analysis is a linguistic approach that emphasizes systematic comparisons between two languages with the aim of identifying their similarities and differences rather than merely describing them (James, 1980). It is premised on the assumption that languages can be compared in structured ways, producing insights into their distinct and shared features. According to Fisiak (1981), contrastive analysis is a subdiscipline of linguistics devoted to the systematic comparison of two or more languages in order to uncover both convergences and divergences. Johansson (2000), in his *Languages in Contrast* project report, also emphasizes the relevance of CA as a means of outlining similarities and differences between languages for applied purposes. In this sense, CA not only contributes to descriptive linguistics but also plays a practical role in predicting learning difficulties and facilitating targeted instruction.

There is a widely held assumption in second language acquisition that learners tend to transfer features of their native language into the foreign language they are acquiring. This process, often referred to as language transfer, influences both linguistic form and meaning. As Lado (1957), cited in Larsen Freeman and Long (1991), explains, individuals typically carry over the structures, meanings, and the distribution of forms from their mother tongue and culture into the target language and culture. The transfer process can occur productively, when learners attempt to speak or act in the new language, and receptively, when they try to understand the linguistic and cultural practices of native speakers. This phenomenon highlights the significant role of the first language in shaping learners' performance in the second language, both as a source of support and as a potential source of interference. Paradowski (2017) states that according to the CA hypothesis, the difficulty of second language acquisition is determined primarily by the extent of difference between the learner's first language (L1) and the target language (L2). Structural divergences between the two languages are expected to give rise to interference, or negative transfer, which manifests in learner errors. Conversely, similarities between L1 and L2 are assumed to promote positive transfer, thereby facilitating more accurate production, reducing the frequency of errors, and accelerating the overall learning process. Similarly, Zabrocki (1991) views contrastive studies as part of applied linguistics, particularly in their potential to identify and explain learner errors arising from cross-linguistic influence.

Within applied linguistics, CA has been regarded as particularly valuable for second language learning, as it highlights areas where learners' first language (L1) may interfere with the acquisition of the target language (L2). Such interference frequently manifests in the form of transfer errors, whereby structural patterns of the native language are imposed on the target language. Anticipating these areas of difficulty allows educators to design more effective pedagogical strategies. Aarts and Wekker (1991) outline several key assumptions underlying contrastive analysis. First, the acquisition of a second language is often hindered by interference from the learner's native language. Second, a systematic comparison between the learner's first language and the target language

can reveal both their similarities and differences. Third, such a comparison provides the basis for predicting which aspects of the target language will be relatively easy or difficult for learners to acquire. Finally, the results of this comparison can be applied to the development of effective and appropriate teaching materials.

Contrastive studies may focus on general typological features shared across languages or on language-specific rules that distinguish one system from another. Within this framework, CA may be conducted at various linguistic levels, including phonology, morphology, syntax, lexis, and even cultural aspects (Fisiak, 1991). At the syntactic level, differences in sentence structure often present significant challenges for learners. Since every language operates according to its own grammatical system, divergences in sentence formation—particularly declarative sentences—can lead to errors in second language production.

Indonesian and English provide a compelling site for contrastive study because, while they share certain universal features of sentence construction, they also display marked structural differences. In Indonesian, sentences are traditionally classified into four main types: declarative, which conveys statements; imperative, which issues commands; interrogative, which poses questions; and exclamatory, which expresses strong emotions (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2017). Similarly, English recognizes three major moods—declarative, interrogative, and imperative—alongside two minor ones, exclamatory and subjunctive (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). Declarative sentences in both languages serve the common communicative purpose of expressing statements (Sneddon, 2010). Nevertheless, while their communicative function is comparable, their syntactic realizations differ.

As Fries (1945, as cited in Aarts & Wekker, 1991) indicates, the most effective teaching materials for second language learning are those built upon a scientific description of the target language in comparison with a parallel description of the learner's native language. On this basis, comparing declarative sentence structures in Indonesian and English can help identify key areas of convergence and divergence, thereby providing useful insights for pedagogy.

This study focuses specifically on the comparison of declarative sentences in Indonesian and English within a contrastive framework. By examining their structural patterns, the research aims to uncover both similarities and differences, while also identifying potential areas of difficulty that Indonesian learners may encounter when acquiring English. The ultimate goal is to contribute to a deeper understanding of cross-linguistic influences in sentence construction and to inform more effective strategies for teaching English as a foreign language in Indonesia. Hence, the purpose of this research is to conduct a contrastive analysis of simple declarative sentence patterns in Indonesian and English, with the aim of identifying their structural similarities and differences and highlighting potential implications for second language learning and teaching.

Method

Research Approach

In this study, the writer provides some descriptions about the materials analysed i.e. simple descriptive sentence patterns, in both languages, and followed by comparing the patterns. As James (1980) explains there is the general principle of executing Contrastive Analysis that involves two steps: description and comparison; which are taken in that order. Then in comparing the data, after giving a description, the researcher follows the procedures of both Lado's general and more specific steps to provide the best comparison between the grammatical structure of declarative sentences in the two languages. According to Lado (1957, in Robinett & Schachter, 1983) that there are procedures in comparing two grammatical structures: *general procedure*, the analysing of the foreign language and comparing it structure by structure with the native language. And the other is a *more specific procedure*, since it needed to illustrate the procedure in greater detail. This consists of three steps: 1) Locate the best structural description of the language involved, 2) Summarize in compact outline form all the structure, and 3) Actual comparison of the two language structures, pattern by pattern.

Data Collection

In doing Contrastive Analysis of the two languages systems, this research provides the description of the matter analysed -the sentence patterns in both languages, which is followed by the comparison of the corpus between the languages; the researcher uses bidirectional corpus to provide the comparison between the two languages simple declarative sentence patterns as Filipovic (1970, as cited in Fisiak, 1984) indicates a corpus of L1 and L2, i.e. a bidirectional corpus, can ideally satisfy the requirements for CA. The patterns of simple declarative sentences in the two languages are presented which include *transitive*, *ditransitive*, *intransitive*, *nominal*, *adjectival*, *prepositional*, and *numeral* categories.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, the writer uses a translation method, exactly translation equivalence, that is the Tertium Comparationis (TCs) for grammatical studies. As it has been mentioned that translation equivalence is considered as the best TC for CA, in view of it embraces both semantic and pragmatic equivalence (James, 1980). The study uses this technique in the view that it can find out the differences as well as similarities on the patterns of simple declarative sentences in the structures of both languages, i.e. in the level of syntax, sentences constructions. Furthermore, the patterns in tables are presented to give clear analysis of both languages and compare every single sentence pattern category, including all the types of declarative sentences, i.e. *transitive*, *ditransitive*, *intransitive*, *nominal*, *adjectival*, *prepositional*, and *numeral* patterns.

Results

The analysis of Indonesian and English simple declarative sentences reveals both similarities and differences in terms of syntactic structure, functional distribution, and sentence patterns. The study proceeds in two stages: first, a descriptive presentation of declarative sentence patterns in each language, and second, a contrastive analysis to highlight points of convergence and divergence.

Data Description

Indonesian Declarative Sentences

Chaer (2009) indicates declarative sentences may be categorized into seven types according to their clause structure. These include monotransitive verbal sentences, ditransitive verbal sentences, intransitive verbal sentences, nominal sentences, adjectival sentences, prepositional sentences, and numeral sentences. In Indonesian, the basic structure of declarative sentences follows the formal sentence order Subject–Predicate (S–P), which may be extended with Object (O), Complement (C), or Adverbial (A). Keraf (1989) offers simple basic patterns of Indonesian declarative sentences into three patterns:

Table 1. Indonesian declarative sentence patterns by Keraf (1989)

Type	Pattern
Sentence Pattern I	Noun – Verb (<i>Kata Benda – Kata Kerja</i>)
Sentence Pattern II	Noun – Adjective (<i>Kata Benda – Kata Sifat</i>)
Sentence Pattern III	Noun – Noun (<i>Kata Benda – Kata Benda</i>)

These patterns indicate that the structure of Indonesian declarative sentences can be formed by a noun phrase followed by a verb phrase, an adjective phrase, or another noun phrase. In addition, Alwi et al. (2003) present more detail patterns with the element of sentence and examples, as depicted in Table 2.

Table 2. Indonesian declarative sentence patterns by Alwi et al. (2003)

Pattern	Subject	Predicate	Object	Complement	Adverbial
S-P	<i>Orang itu</i>	<i>sedang tidur</i>	-	-	-
	<i>Saya</i>	<i>mahasiswa</i>	-	-	-
S-P-O	<i>Ayahnya</i>	<i>membeli</i>	<i>mobil baru</i>	-	-
	<i>Rani</i>	<i>mendapat</i>	<i>hadiah</i>	-	-
S-P-Pel	<i>Beliau</i>	<i>menjadi</i>	-	<i>ketua koperasi</i>	-
	<i>Pancasila</i>	<i>merupakan</i>	-	<i>dasar negara kita</i>	-
S-P-Ket	<i>Kami</i>	<i>tinggal</i>	-	-	<i>di Jakarta</i>
	<i>Kecelakaan itu</i>	<i>terjadi</i>	-	-	<i>minggu lalu</i>
S-P-O-Pel	<i>Dia</i>	<i>mengirim</i>	<i>ibunya</i>	<i>uang</i>	-
	<i>Dian</i>	<i>mengambilkan</i>	<i>adiknya</i>	<i>air minum</i>	-
S-P-O-Ket	<i>Pak Raden</i>	<i>memasukkan</i>	<i>uang</i>	-	<i>ke bank</i>
	<i>Beliau</i>	<i>memperlakukan</i>	<i>kami</i>	-	<i>dengan baik</i>

Fang (2007) explains six basic patterns of declarative sentences, as follows:

Table 3. Indonesian declarative sentence patterns by Fang (2007)

Pattern	Description
S-C (Subject-Complement)	This pattern is formed when the subject is followed by a noun, an adjective, a prepositional phrase, or a numeral.
S-P-A (Subject-Predicator-Adverbial)	Predicate uses a simple intransitive verb (optionally with <i>ber-</i> , <i>me-</i> , or <i>ter-</i>); adverbial may appear as an optional element.
S-P-O-A (Subject-Predicator-Object-Adverbial)	Predicate is a simple verb (or may use the affixes <i>men-</i> , <i>-i</i> , <i>men-i</i> , <i>meper-i</i> , <i>-kan</i> , <i>men-kan</i>); adverbial is optional. This is called a monotransitive sentence (<i>kalimat ekatransitif</i>)
S-P-C-A (Subject-Predicator-Complement-Adverbial)	Complement functions as the predicate and may be a noun phrase, an adjective, or a noun modified by an adjective; adverbial is optional.
S-P-O-C (Subject-Predicator-Object-Complement)	Complement may be an adjective, noun phrase, or verb; functions as an object complement following the object.
S-P-O-O (Subject-Predicator-Object-Object)	Contains two objects: indirect object (often the beneficiary) and direct object; also called a ditransitive sentence (<i>kalimat dwitransitif</i>) with a ditransitive verb.

English Declarative Sentences

Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) explain five major sentence structures dominate English declaratives: S-V, S-V-O, S-V-IO-DO, S-V-SC, and S-V-OC, which correspond to clause patterns, as can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4. English declarative sentence patterns by Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999)

Pattern	Example
Subject + Verb	<i>The building collapses</i>
Subject + Verb + Object	<i>They bought a new car</i>
Subject + Verb + Indirect Object + Direct Object	<i>She wrote him a letter</i>
Subject + Verb + Subject Predicate	<i>Janet is my friend</i>
Subject + Verb + Object + Object Predicate	<i>She makes me happy</i>

Biber et al. (2000) explain major clause patterns in English declarative sentence patterns, they are (as depicted in Table 5):

Table 5. English declarative sentence patterns by Biber et al. (2000)

Pattern
Subject-Verb Phrase
Subject-Verb Phrase-Obligatory Adverbial
Subject-Verb Phrase-Subject Predicative
Subject-Verb Phrase-Direct Object
Subject-Verb Phrase-Prepositional Object
Subject-Verb Phrase-Indirect Object-Direct Object
Subject-Verb Phrase-Direct Object-Prepositional Object
Subject-Verb Phrase-Direct Object-Object Predicative
Subject-Verb Phrase-Direct Object-Obligatory Adverbial

Previously, Quirk et al. (1985) describe the clause types in declarative forms, as follows:

Table 6. English declarative sentence patterns by Quirk et al. (1985)

Type	Example
SVC (S V _{intensive} C _{subject-comp})	Mary is kind.
SVA (S V _{intensive} A _{place})	Mary is in the house.
SV (S V _{intrans})	The child was laughing.
SVO (S V _{monotrans} O _{direct})	Somebody caught the ball.
SVOC (S V _{complex-trans} O _{direct} C _{object-comp})	We have proved him wrong.
SVOA (S V _{complex-trans} O _{direct} A _{place})	I put the plate on the table.
SVOO (S V _{ditrans} O _{indirect} O _{direct})	She gives me expensive present.

Comparison of Indonesian and English Declarative Sentence Patterns

The structural patterns of simple declarative sentences in Indonesian and English consist of several forms. In both languages, simple declarative sentences may appear as transitive sentences, which employ a transitive verb requiring an object as the predicate; ditransitive sentences, which contain two objects (direct and indirect); and intransitive sentences, which use an intransitive verb that does not require an object. Additionally, Indonesian declarative structures include nominal, adjectival, prepositional, and numeral

sentences, each of which employs a complement as the predicate, but these types are not found in English sentence structures. Conversely, English declarative sentences exhibit two additional patterns absent in Indonesian, namely those formed with intensive verbs (the verb *to be*) functioning as the predicate, as presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Comparison on Indonesian and English declarative sentence pattern

Indonesian	English	Category
SPO(A), SPOC	SVO, SVOO, SVOA, SVOC	Transitive
SPOO	SVOO	Ditransitive
SPA, SPCA	SV	Intransitive
SC	–	Nominal
SC	–	Adjectival
SC	–	Prepositional
SC	–	Numeral
–	SVC, SVA	Intensive (verb to be)

Furthermore, it is essential to examine the constituent elements of sentences in each language at the syntactic level, namely subject, predicate, object, complement, and adverbial. While certain word classes function similarly in both Indonesian and English, notable differences also emerge in the realization of specific elements, reflecting the distinct grammatical systems of each language.

Table 8. Element of sentence in Indonesian and English

Element	Indonesian	English
Subject	A noun/Noun phrase	Noun phrase
	A clause	A clause with nominal function
	Verb phrase	
Predicate	Verb phrase	Verb phrase (auxiliary verbs, linking verbs, and action verbs)
	Adjectival phrase	
	Noun phrase	
	Prepositional phrase	
Object	A noun/Noun phrase	Noun phrase
	A clause	A clause with nominal function
Complement	A noun/Noun phrase	Noun phrase
	Adjectival phrase	An adjective phrase
	Verb phrase	A clause with nominal function
	Prepositional phrase	
	A clause	
Adverbial	Noun phrase	Noun phrase
	Prepositional phrase	Prepositional phrase
	Adverbial phrase	An adverb/adverb phrase
	A clause	Adverbial clause

Discussion

A comparison of Indonesian and English declarative sentence patterns reveals both shared structures and distinctive features shaped by the grammatical systems of each language. At the core, both languages make use of transitive, ditransitive, and intransitive constructions. Transitive patterns are realized in Indonesian as SPO(A) and SPOC, while English counterparts include SVO, SVOO, SVOA, and SVOC. This similarity reflects the universal linguistic principle that many languages rely on verbs requiring objects to complete their meaning. Likewise, both Indonesian and English recognize ditransitive constructions, expressed in Indonesian as SPOO and in English as SVOO, which involve two objects—typically a direct and an indirect object. Intransitive constructions also appear in both languages, with Indonesian employing SPA and SPCA and English using SV, both of which rely on verbs that do not require an object to complete the predicate.

Beyond these shared features, Indonesian and English diverge significantly. Indonesian displays greater structural flexibility by including declarative patterns that do not exist in English. These include nominal sentences, adjectival sentences, prepositional sentences, and numeral sentences, all typically realized in the form SC. The presence of these sentence types in Indonesian reflects the language's tendency to allow a wide variety of phrase types—not limited to verb phrases—to function as predicates. For instance, Indonesian permits an adjective, a prepositional phrase, or even a numeral to serve as the main predicate of a sentence without requiring a copula verb, such as *Dia cantik* ("She [is] beautiful") or *Uang di meja* ("The money [is] on the table"). In English, such constructions would be incomplete without the presence of an intensive verb, most commonly the copula *to be*.

English, on the other hand, introduces intensive verb patterns absent in Indonesian. These patterns, expressed as SVC and SVA, involve the use of *to be* or other linking verbs to connect the subject with a complement or adverbial. For example, *She is a teacher* or *He is in the classroom* illustrates how English requires a linking verb to express relationships that Indonesian can convey without one. This difference highlights a typological contrast between the two languages: Indonesian tends toward a predicate-centered structure where non-verbal elements can serve predicative roles independently, while English exhibits a verb-centered system in which the predicate must always be realized through a verb phrase.

In short, while Indonesian and English share transitive, ditransitive, and intransitive sentence patterns, Indonesian extends further by incorporating nominal, adjectival, prepositional, and numeral declarative structures, reflecting its flexible predicate system. Conversely, English introduces intensive verb patterns that emphasize its reliance on verbal predicates. These differences highlight the distinct grammatical strategies of the two languages: Indonesian permits non-verbal predicates, whereas English requires verbs—particularly linking verbs—to maintain structural and semantic clarity.

Indonesian simple declarative sentences can be classified into several primary patterns: transitive, ditransitive, intransitive, nominal, adjectival, prepositional, and numeral

sentences. These categories are based on the type of predicate, which may consist of a verb phrase, noun phrase, adjectival phrase, or prepositional phrase. A notable feature of Indonesian is the use of subject-complement (SC) constructions, where the predicate is realized directly as a complement. On the other hand, English declarative sentences exhibit some major patterns, including transitive, ditransitive, intransitive, and those involving intensive verbs (*to be*). Unlike Indonesian, English predicates rely heavily on verbs, which may be auxiliary, linking, or action verbs (Quirk et al., 1985). Complements are more restricted in English, typically realized as noun phrases, adjective phrases, or nominal clauses.

Furthermore, the comparison of sentence elements in Indonesian and English reveals both notable similarities and differences. In terms of similarities, both languages allow noun phrases and clauses to function as subjects, and verb phrases serve as predicates in each. Furthermore, both Indonesian and English make use of noun phrases and clauses as objects, while complements in both systems may include noun phrases, adjective phrases, or clauses. Similarly, adverbials in both languages can take the form of noun phrases, prepositional phrases, or clauses.

Despite these similarities, there are also clear differences. In Indonesian, subjects may be realized not only by noun phrases and clauses but also by verb phrases, whereas English restricts subjects to noun phrases or clauses with nominal function. The predicate structure also differs: Indonesian permits a wider range, allowing verb, adjectival, nominal, or prepositional phrases to serve as predicates. English, by contrast, restricts the predicate strictly to verb phrases, which are further divided into auxiliary verbs, linking verbs, and action verbs. For objects, Indonesian allows nouns, noun phrases, or clauses, while English limits this function to noun phrases and nominal clauses. The complement element in Indonesian is broader, as it can include verb phrases and prepositional phrases, whereas in English it is limited to noun phrases, adjective phrases, or nominal clauses. Finally, Indonesian allows adverbial phrases to function as adverbials, while English distinguishes more explicitly between adverb phrases and adverbial clauses. In short, Indonesian displays greater flexibility in the use of various phrase types to realize different sentence elements, while English tends to be more restricted and structured, particularly in the domains of the subject and predicate.

In pedagogy implication, the similarities in transitive, ditransitive, and intransitive declarative patterns suggest that Indonesian learners of English may transfer their existing syntactic knowledge with relative ease in these areas. However, the differences observed in nominal, adjectival, prepositional, and numeral constructions highlight potential areas of difficulty, as these sentence types may not have direct equivalents in the learners' first language. Therefore, English language teaching should pay particular attention to these categories, providing explicit instruction and practice to minimize errors caused by cross-linguistic interference. In term of sentence elements, The comparison of Indonesian and English sentence elements highlights key pedagogical implications for English language teaching in Indonesia. Because Indonesian permits non-verbal predicates and verb phrases as subjects, learners frequently transfer these patterns into English, resulting in errors such as omitting the verb *to be*. To address this,

teachers should explicitly contrast the two systems, stressing the obligatory role of verbs in English predicates and the more restricted distribution of sentence elements.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that while Indonesian and English share several structural similarities in declarative sentence construction, they also diverge in significant ways. The main distinctions lie in Indonesian's allowance of SC patterns and English's reliance on copular verbs (*to be*). Indonesian allows SC patterns without the use of a copular verb, while English does not. English includes declarative structures based on the copular verb *to be*, which have no direct equivalent in Indonesian. Both Indonesian and English share similarities in their transitive, ditransitive, and intransitive declarative patterns, underscoring certain universal syntactic features. However, major divergences were identified: Indonesian allows SC patterns without the use of a copular verb, while English does not. English includes declarative structures based on the copular verb *to be*, which have no direct equivalent in Indonesian. These differences highlight the potential for transfer-related errors among Indonesian learners of English, particularly in the construction of copular sentences. The overlap in transitive, ditransitive, and intransitive patterns suggests that Indonesian learners may transfer their knowledge more smoothly in these areas. However, the absence of direct equivalents in nominal, adjectival, prepositional, and numeral constructions often lead to learner difficulties. Targeted instruction in these categories is therefore essential to reduce interference and enhance learners' mastery of English declarative sentences.

These findings underscore the pedagogical importance of addressing such contrasts in English language classrooms in Indonesia. Teachers should focus on raising learners' awareness of structural contrasts, particularly the use of the copula in English, which often causes errors due to the absence of an equivalent structure in Indonesian. Emphasis on problematic areas through explicit instruction and comparative practice may reduce interference-related mistakes. Learners, in turn, should pay careful attention to sentence patterns unique to English and engage in sustained practice to build accuracy.

This research was limited to the syntactic level of simple declarative sentences and relied on descriptive data rather than learner corpora. Future studies should incorporate discourse-level analysis, examine spoken as well as written data, and analyze learner production to provide empirical validation of predicted error patterns. Expanding the scope to include other sentence moods (interrogative, imperative, exclamatory) would also contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of cross-linguistic influence.

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