

## L1 in L2: Indonesian towards English in Public Speaking Class

Surya Asra<sup>1</sup>, Nizar Saputra<sup>2</sup>, Irma Dewi Isda<sup>3</sup>, Fadlia<sup>4</sup>, Winasti Rahma Diani<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>Department of English Education, Universitas Samudra

<sup>5</sup>Department of Indonesian Education, Universitas Tidar

email: [suryaasra2019@unsam.ac.id](mailto:suryaasra2019@unsam.ac.id) (correspondence email)

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### ABSTRACT

*Indonesian or Bahasa (L1) as a learner's first language is often used in English (L2) speaking lessons. This phenomenon often occurs even though teachers have informed them that using Indonesian during English-speaking skills classes is not permissible. Many reasons are suggested by experts why students use this first language. The most prominent reason is the student's lack of understanding of L2. However, this phenomenon still occurs in Public Speaking classes where students are already at the intermediate and advanced levels. In connection with this phenomenon, this study aims to find the main reasons students in the Public Speaking class use Indonesian in their English-speaking skills and what they think about using Indonesian in their English-speaking skills. A total of 50 students in two Public Speaking classes were observed and given questionnaires about their reasons and opinions for using Indonesian in speaking English skills. The results show that the highest reason students use L1 (Indonesian) in Public Speaking class is to process new and complex concepts. They argue that using Indonesian makes it easier for them to explain and understand the new concept.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The debate among language teaching experts about the use of the first language (L1) in learning a foreign language or second language (L2) leads to two opposing poles, namely a monolingual approach and bilingual approach. The first approach emphasizes only foreign languages as a communication medium in the classroom. Many experts support this approach (Kharma & Hajjaj, 1989; Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Rossel & Baker, 1996; Selinger, 1992; Sharma, 2006; Turnbull, 2001). According to Krashen and Terrell (1983), students acquire a foreign language the same way they acquired their first language; therefore, the use of the first language must be reduced. Furthermore, Sharma (2006: 80) said that the more students are exposed to a foreign language (English), the faster they learn it. He says the only way to get them to learn the language is to force them to use it.

However, experts who support the bilingual approach have criticized this first approach (Aurbach, 1993; Cook, 2001; Macaro, 2001; Mart, 2013; Meyer, 2008; Nation, 2003; Schweers, 1999; Tang, 2002). Nation (2003) says that the first language is an effective way for students to understand the second language. Furthermore, Meyer (2008) said students' first language could help language classes and make them more effective. Even Mart (2013) emphasizes that the first language is a natural resource in learning a second/foreign language. In addition, experts also say that the use of the first language in teaching the target language can increase understanding

in learning the target language (Cook, 2001; Tang, 2002). In short, experts view using the first language in foreign language teaching as a natural thing to contribute to the teaching-learning process positively.

Many studies have been conducted to look at the perspectives of students and teachers on the use of the first language in foreign language classes, including Carson and Kashihara (2012), who conducted research on the use of Japanese (L1) in English classes (L2). This study aimed to find a relationship between students' English proficiency and their views on using Japanese in the classroom. This study found that students perceive using Japanese as necessary to improve their English proficiency. Another study was conducted by Afzal (2013), who found that using the first language in English classes does not reduce exposure to English and can even help teach and learn English. This research was conducted in three English classes in Iran, where the English teachers still used Persian (L1) in their classes. The same thing was expressed by Zulfikar (2019), who conducted research in Indonesia, which found that L1 is inseparable in foreign language teaching classes.

In learning English, students often use Indonesian in their English-speaking skills even though the teacher has told them they are not allowed to use Indonesian during the English-speaking skills class. This is in line with what Wechsler (1997) stated: students cannot escape the influence of the first language. The first language will always influence the student's second/foreign language. Kavaliauskiene and Kaminskiene (2007) stated that most students subconsciously continue to carry out the translation process from the first language into the target language. In short, students who learn a second/foreign language will always use their first language in the process of learning a second/foreign language, especially in speaking skills.

According to Morahan (2009), there are six reasons why students use L1 (in the context of this study is Indonesian) in speaking skills L2 (in the context of this study is English), namely (1) asking clarification questions from friends, (2) showing deficiencies understanding L2, (3) clarifying the meaning of words in L2, (4) finding new words in L2 related to L1 words, (5) processing complex concepts, and (6) building shared meanings. In this research, the researcher wants to see whether these reasons are also why students use Indonesian in their English-speaking skills and which are most often used.

## II. METHODS

A qualitative descriptive method was used in this study. This method is used to see the most dominant number of reasons students use Indonesian in English speaking skills and to describe students' opinions about using Indonesian in English speaking skills. Then, the participants for this study were 50 public speaking class students. They are divided into two classes. Their English proficiency is at the intermediate-advanced level.

Observation and questionnaires were used as instruments. They were developed from the theory of Morahan (2009). The observation was used to see students' daily lives regarding using Indonesian in the Public Speaking class. The observation was conducted for 10 meetings. While the questionnaire was used to explore why students used the first language in the Indonesian speaking skills class in the Public Speaking class. The questionnaire consists of 12 statement items with a Likert scale rating.

## III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The questionnaire analysis and observation results found that the most frequent reason students use L1 (Indonesian) in Public Speaking class is to process new and complex concepts. They argue that using Indonesian can make it easier for them to explain and understand the new concepts they find. However, from the six reasons by Morahan (2009), it was found that students

had used Indonesian in Public Speaking classes for six reasons. For more details, it would be explained below.

### 1. Clarifying friends' questions

In a speaking skills class, asking for clarification questions from friends can be done using many formal and informal expressions. Some of them are “*pardon? I beg your pardon? would you clarify that, please?*” and so forth. In the context of this research, the Indonesian language used is to ask for clarification from friends about what topics are being studied and personal topics that are not related to learning. The data is shown in table 1 below.

Table 1. Reasons for Clarifying Friends' Questions

CATEGORY OF REASON	REASONS	YES	NO
1. Clarifying friends' questions	I use Indonesian when I want to ask my friend to explain the task (topic) being studied	6	44
	I use Indonesian when I want to talk about topics that are not related to learning (personal matters)	5	45

From Table 1 above, as many as 44 students (88%) stated that they had used Indonesian for the reason of asking their friends to explain the topic being studied. Meanwhile, for reasons of inviting friends to discuss topics unrelated to learning, there are 45 (90%) students often do it. This data is also confirmed from the results of observations that they often use Indonesian in Public Speaking class to clarify something to their friends, such as for asking: “*kita belajar apa hari ini?* [what did we learn today?].”

### 2. Lack of English as L2

The target language is a classic reason that often occurs in speaking classes when participants change English to their first language (in this context Indonesian). Indonesian is often used as a substitute for English which speakers do not master. This phenomenon also happened in public speaking classes at the university level, as shown from the questionnaire data in table 2 below.

Table 2. Reasons for Lack of Understanding L2

CATEGORY OF REASON	REASONS	YES	NO
2. Lack of understanding L2	I use Indonesian if I do not know the words I want to say in English	34	16
	I use Indonesian if I do not know the pronunciation of the word in English	38	12

From table 2 above, there are 16 students (32%) who use Indonesian in public speaking class because they do not know the words they want to say in English. There are 12 students (24%) use Indonesian since they are unsure about the pronunciation of the word they mean, for example, the words “*choir, debauch, and draft*”. They also used Indonesian to mention specific words from the observations, for example, “*pesantren* [Islamic boarding school], *RPP* [lesson plan], *SKS* [semester credit hour], and *ustad* [Islamic teacher].”

### 3. Clarification of the meaning of words in L2

In learning English in Indonesia, many students still translate the target language (English) into Indonesian. Only then do they understand the meaning. This phenomenon makes students process their understanding of English from the language they understand (Indonesian). It makes them often clarify to determine the meaning of the words or phrases spoken by the interlocutor. The questionnaire data in this study shows it, as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Reasons for Clarifying the Meaning of Words in L2

CATEGORY OF REASON	REASONS	YES	NO
3. Clarifying the meaning of words in L2	I use Indonesian if I want to check the meaning of a new word	28	22
	I use Indonesian if I want to make sure that the words I want to say has been appropriate in terms of meaning	24	26

From table 3 above, there are 22 students (44%) who use Indonesian to clarify the meaning of vocabulary, especially vocabulary they just heard. Then there are 26 students (52%) who use Indonesian to ensure the words they say have the correct meaning according to the context of the conversation. From the results of the observations, they also found several sentences that they often use in this context, for example “*benarkan itu artinya?* [is it the correct meaning?].”

#### 4. Finding new words in L2 related to L1

Language learners in Indonesia often use their first language to find vocabulary relations, including synonyms and antonyms. That way, they get additional vocabulary when they speak. The data in table 4 below shows the same thing.

Table 4. Reasons for Finding New Words in L2 Related to L1

CATEGORY OF REASON	REASONS	YES	NO
4. Finding new words in L2 related to L1	I ask in Indonesian the meaning of a word that I do not know	20	30
	I ask in Indonesian the synonym/antonym of a word	22	28

From table 4 above, 30 students (60%) use Indonesian to find out the meaning of words when they hear their friends speak. Then 28 students (56%) ask questions in Indonesian regarding the antonym/synonym of a word (the initial word is already known).

#### 5. Processing complex concepts

Complex concepts are challenging for foreign language learners. This will be a challenge even for complex concepts in the first language connected with speaking skills. Terms related to scientific fields must be understood in the first language to be easier in the target language (L2). Table 5 below shows the number of students who have difficulty understanding complex terms in English, so they use Indonesian to explain these complex concepts to their interlocutors.

Table 5. Reasons for Processing Complex Concepts

CATEGORY OF REASON	REASONS	YES	NO
5. Processing complex concepts	I explain new concepts to my friends in Indonesian	-	50
	I ask in Indonesian if there are new concepts that I don't understand	6	44

From Table 5 above, there are 50 students (100%) who use Indonesian to explain new and complex concepts to their friends. While, 44 students (88%) ask questions using Indonesian regarding new concepts they do not understand.

#### 6. Build shared meaning

Build shared meaning related to language attitude and language comfort. Language learners tend to choose the language they are used to in real life. This means that in this context, students have already used Indonesian as a daily communication tool in their educational environment, so they feel more comfortable using Indonesian. The data in table 6 below provides an illustration of this.

Table 6. Reasons for Building Shared Meaning

CATEGORY OF REASON	REASONS	YES	NO
6. Building shared meaning	Speak Indonesian if my friends start speaking Indonesian for the first time	30	30
	I feel more comfortable using Indonesian in English speaking class	45	5

Table 6 shows that 30 students (50%) said they used Indonesian to respond to their friends who used Indonesian first. While, 5 people (10%) claim to be more comfortable communicating using Indonesian than English. From the observation results, students in public speaking classes often speak with friends beside them using Indonesian when the lecturer explains the material. They whispered in class, also using Indonesian.

To see which reasons occur more often in public speaking class, the number of students who responded to the questionnaire for each mentioned above is summed up in frequency. The data can be seen in table 7 below.

Table 7. Frequency of Students' Reasons for Using L1 in L2

No.	Reasons	Amount
1.	Asking for clarification questions from friends	89
2.	Showing lack of understanding L2	28
3.	Clarifying the meaning of words in L2	48
4.	Finding new words in L2 related to L1 words	58
5.	Processing complex concepts	94
6.	Building shared meaning	35

From table 7 above, it can be concluded that the reason most often and always used is to process complex concepts, which was recognized by 94 responses (94%). This figure shows that almost all students have used Indonesian in public speaking classes to understand the foreign terms they encounter. While the reason that it is rarely used is the need for more understanding of the target language (English). It happens because students who take public speaking classes are students in semesters 6/7 who already have advanced level skills in English.

In summary, all the reasons in the questionnaire have been used by students. The most frequent reason behind students using Indonesian in their English speaking skills is to process complex concepts and ask for clarification on their friends' questions. Therefore, English teachers must pay special attention to these two reasons. For the first reason, it can be overcome by asking students to learn specific terms that exist in the academic world in Indonesian. Meanwhile, for the second reason, the lecturer can teach him sentence expressions in English to ask for clarification, for example, "pardon?, could you repeat that?", and so on.

This study's results align with the opinion of Morahan (2009), who states that students have several reasons for using L1 when speaking L2. Questionnaire data shows that the reasons most often used by students are processing complex concepts and asking for clarification of their friends' questions. In other words, the Indonesian language used by students in the English speaking skills class aims to negotiate and clarify meanings among them in the class.

In addition, this research also shows that students cannot get rid of the influence of their mother tongue (Indonesian) when learning another language (both a second language and a

foreign language). It follows what has been stated by many studies that EFL students cannot avoid being influenced by their first language (Afzal, 2013; Asra, 2017; Carson & Kashihara, 2012; Wechsler, 1997; Zulfikar, 2019). However, this research also shows that most students are highly motivated to use only English in their English-speaking skills. In summary, the influence of the first language is natural, but it needs control to obtain high fluency in speaking English.

#### IV. SUGGESTION AND CONCLUSION

This research strengthens the experts' opinions who support using the first language in second/foreign language classes, particularly in English speaking skills. This can be seen from the analysis of questionnaires and interviews.

The reasons students use Indonesian in their English speaking skills vary depending on the conditions they find in class, especially public speaking classes. The most common reason is that students use Indonesian to process complex concepts they encounter when speaking English. Another reason that often occurs is asking for clarification from the other person speaking English, but the conversation cannot be understood. In this context, they tend to think that it will be even more incomprehensible if clarified using English.

The pedagogical implications that can be drawn from this study are as follows. For students, by understanding the reasons for using Indonesian in their English speaking skills, they can try to avoid using it so that their English speaking skills get better. As for the teacher, by understanding these reasons, the teacher can modify the English speaking skills class to reduce students' use of Indonesian in the English speaking skills class.

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